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The Dialogue between Local Government & the Community



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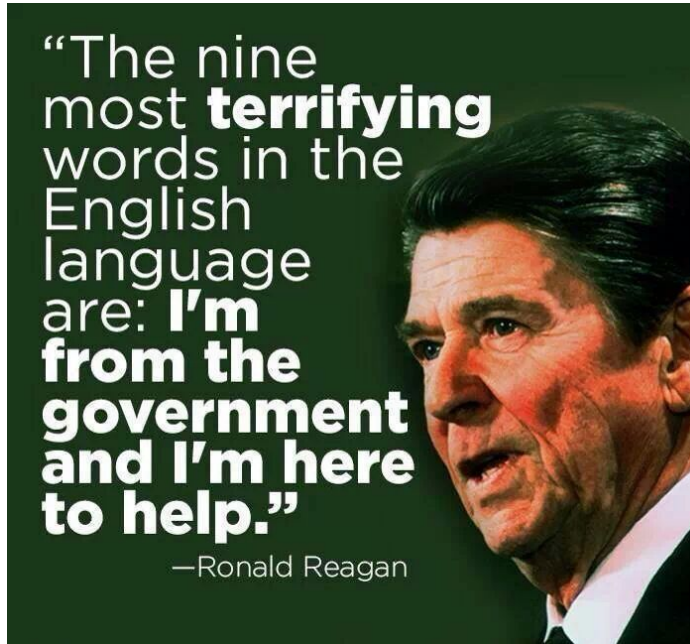


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Government Has a Bad Rap



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**What word comes to mind when
you think about communicating
with local government?**



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Road Map

- Temperature Check-Trust in Local Government
- Public Engagement Today
- Building credibility and Relationships
- **Break**
- The Foundations of Dialogue
- Types of Dialogue
- Bringing It All Together



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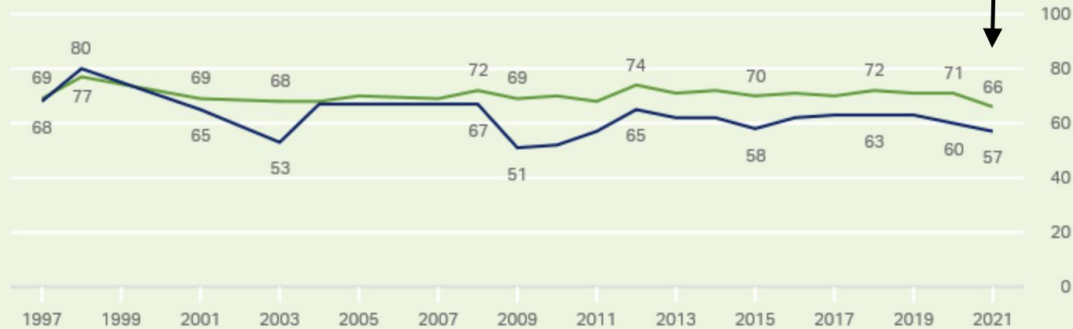
Trust in government drops

Trust in Local and State Governments' Handling of Problems

How much trust and confidence do you have in the [local/state] government where you live when it comes to handling [local/state] problems -- a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or none at all?

% A great deal/fair amount

— Local government — State government



Data from 1972-1976 not shown

GALLUP



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Edelman Trust Barometer 2023

Social fabric weakens amid deepening divisions

- Business is the only institution seen as competent and ethical.
- Fifty-three percent of respondents globally say that their countries are more divided today than in the past.
- CEOs are obligated to improve economic optimism and hold divisive forces accountable.
- Trust in government at all-time low.

Source: <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2023/trust-barometer>



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Distrust Breeds Polarization

Distrust breeds polarization

Very few would help, live near, or work with someone who disagreed with their point of view:

Only **30%**

would help them if they were in need.

Only **20%**

would be willing to live in the same neighborhood.

Only **20%**

would be willing to have them as a coworker.

Source: <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2023/trust-barometer>



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Dialogue: From Edict to Engagement

- **Paternalistic** → We know what's best for you. We'll tell you what you need
- **Vending machine government** → We're here to give you whatever you request. Order up!
- **Co-creators** → How do we work together and listen to each other to create the best path forward



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Public Engagement Today

A Look at California



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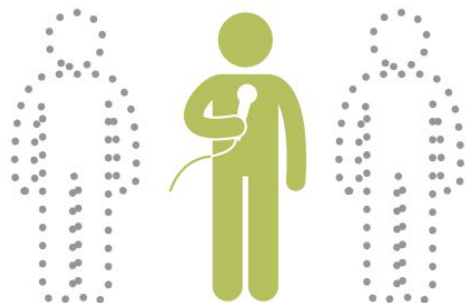


Public Engagement in California

OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

Public meetings often **do not** meet the needs of residents or local officials.

Public comment agendas are **dominated by narrow interests and negative remarks**



Large segments of the public are missing, especially low-income populations, immigrants and young people

Many **desire** broad-based public participation and stronger collaboration.



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Public Engagement in California

..... TAKING ACTION FOR STRONGER PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Local officials and their institutions can gain from:

- Partnering with community-based organizations
- Hiring and training staff to increase public engagement skills
- Networking with colleagues who have effective practices
- Evaluating local efforts



Civic leaders and their organizations can gain from:

- Partnering with local officials
- Hiring and training staff to increase public engagement skills
- Networking and sharing resources with other organizations
- Evaluating local efforts



Funders can make a difference by supporting:

- Partnerships between public officials and local organizations
- Trainings and technical assistance
- Experiments, including use of online engagement tools
- Research, evaluation and knowledge sharing



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The Foundations of Public Engagement



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**It's critical at this point in time
to engage in effective dialogue
with local government**



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Realtors Play a Key Role

- Market the community
- First impression of the community
- Ear to the ground in neighborhoods
- Build community
- Trusted source of information



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Credibility & Relationship Building

The Role of Dialogue



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*“Communication leads to community,
that is, to understanding, intimacy,
and mutual valuing. - Rollo May*



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Ways to Boost your Credibility

- Understand that these are people, not avatars.
- Know who has jurisdiction so you start at the right place.
- Consistently show up at events, meetings, fundraisers.
- Invite electeds or staff to business/neighborhood meetings.



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Ways to Boost your Credibility

Use same dynamics as you do for interpersonal relationships:

- Balance positives and negatives
 - Thank them when you think they've done a good job
 - Voice criticisms
- Self-regulate/use emotional intelligence



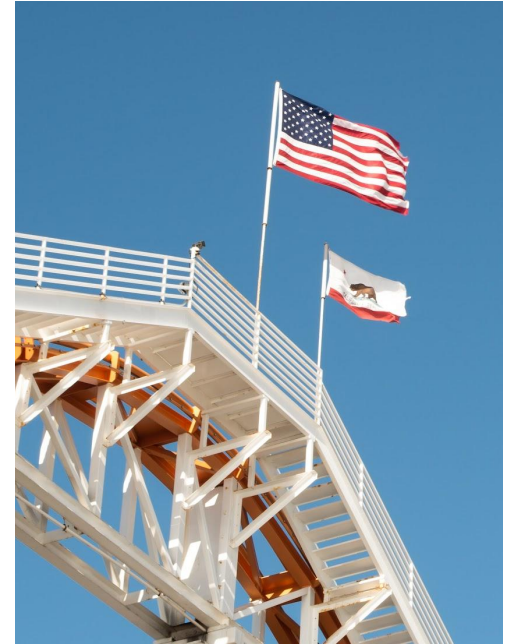
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Distractions in dialogue can cause a Sudden Loss of Credibility

- **Arrogance:** “In my expert opinion”
- **Condescendence:** “When you get a little older, you’ll have a much better understanding”/ “If you were accountable to the bottom line, you’d understand...”
- **Political:** “We all know that everyone thinks...”
- **Insulting:** “You have no idea...” “It’s obvious you don’t care about...”
- **Power play:** “You deserve to be recalled..”



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CA's Local Government Structure

Who's in charge of what



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Overview of California



58 Counties



482 Incorporated Cities



121 Charter Cities
(authority over municipal affairs)

361 General Law Cities
(bound by state's general law)



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City Governments

- Water
- Infrastructure
- Housing
- Development
- Police
- Fire
- Parks and Recreation



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Special Districts

- Over 3,000 special districts across California
- Provide specialized services in areas like:
 - Water
 - Sewage
 - Fire Protection
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Ports
 - Electricity
 - Schools



ALPINE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT



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Why Does it Matter?

- Understanding the roles of local government is key because: It can get complicated when you want your input to matter
 - “Defund the police” Taking police funding (city) to fund mental health (county)
 - Telling City Council you have a complaint about the way something was handled in a public school
 - A development in an unincorporated section of the county near a new housing development in the city



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Midway Q & A



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The Foundations of Dialogue

Understanding & Building Trust



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The Foundations of Dialogue



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Understand the Basics

- Various funding, agencies, laws can limit options
 - Buckets of funding - redevelopment, unrestricted, grants, utilities
 - Land use parameters
 - Laws and regulations
 - General Plan
 - Development agreements
 - Zoning
 - “Historic” buildings
 - Crosswalks and speed bumps
 - Pensions
 - The Brown Act



Ways to Gain Understanding

- Citizen academies
- Leadership [Your town's name] sponsored by local chamber
- Community forum/town hall
- Public workshops to solicit feedback (public notice required by law, usually on website) gun safety regulations



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Ways to Gain Understanding

- Serving on board or commission (contact City Clerk)
- Participate in neighborhood associations (different from HOAs)
- Read the law (municipal code)
- Read contracts
- Ask staff

Drop in the chat ones you have participated in



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What Doesn't Build Trust

- Writing uninformed or misinformed opinions or rants on social media or websites
- Unconstructive tirades against staff or elected officials (constructive ones are different)
- Bringing in superfluous or unrelated topics—airing all of your grievances at once and having them all addressed is not possible



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Dialogue: Types & Uses

Multiple Ways to Connect



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Different Types of Dialogue

Official

Unofficial

Constructive

Counterproductive



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Dialogue is Different Based on the Individual's Role in Local Gov

Elected Official

- Listens
- Has latitude to express individual opinion
- *Caution when it involves Brown Act, indicating a vote on social media before vote is called, for example

Staff

- Listens
- Provides range of options based on legalities and practicalities.
- Has subject-matter expertise but not a vote



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Official Public Dialogue

Our definition:

- Part of the official public record available at the Clerk's office, such as:
 - Comments spoken at an official government meeting (City Council, County Board of Supervisors)
 - Comments provided in conjunction with official process (EIR)

Level of candidness in response:

- Low
- Non-existent if it's not on the agenda



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Unofficial Public Dialogue

Our definition:

- Happens in less formal settings, such as
 - Chamber meetings
 - Neighborhood meetings
 - Community coffees
 - Neighborhood events like ribbon cuttings

Level of candidness in response:

- Varies depending on previous experience with each other
- Could be higher if trust is there



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Hybrid Dialogue

1. E-mail, text message
2. Social media posts and comments
3. Community forums



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Which ways are you most likely to engage with local government?

- Public meeting
- Social media
- Email
- Chamber meetings

Real estate industry meetings

Informal settings/events

Name another way you engage



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Constructive Dialogue

- **Respectful most of all**
- **Understanding of the facts**
- **Provides insight to another perspective**
- **Solution-oriented**



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Why Is This Important?

Bringing It All Together

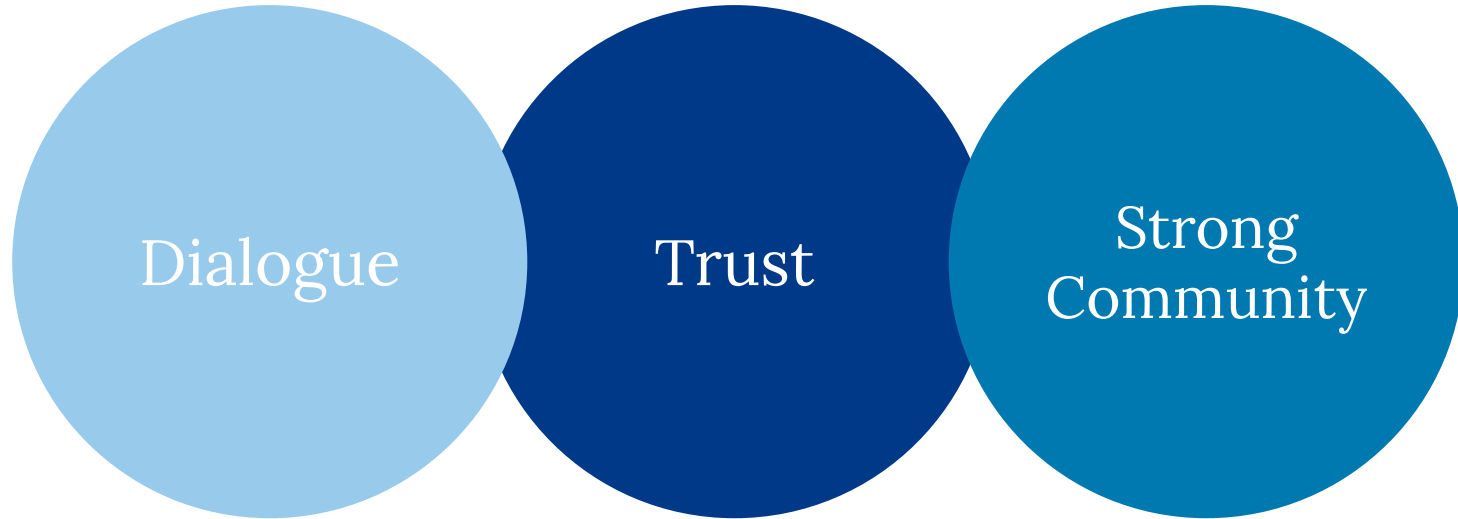


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It Is All Connected



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Thank You! Any questions?

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