



Participation, Leadership and Civic Engagement

Report to the County Board, December 2012



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Arlington Civic Federation
Arlington Committee of 100
Arlington Community Foundation
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Overview – What is PLACE?

Arlington has a long tradition of government-community dialogue and collaboration, known as “The Arlington Way.” Launched by the County Board in January 2012, PLACE (Participation, Leadership and Civic Engagement) seeks to update The Arlington Way for the 21st century by engaging all community voices – residents, businesses, civic organizations, commissions, Board and staff – to achieve County’s vision.

This report, put together by the PLACE working group of residents and staff, details all that PLACE has accomplished this year, and includes recommendations for next steps. Some of the tools and approaches PLACE has developed are already finding their way into decision-making and policy processes in Arlington. More people are being involved, at earlier stages of each process. More voices are being heard in more ways.

At the heart of this report is a document entitled, “Framework for Civic Relationships.” This Framework lays the groundwork for strengthening and nurturing the vibrant civic culture Arlington needs to meet serious community challenges. The Framework has already been discussed in a number of forums throughout the County, a process that will continue in the coming months.

In January 2012, Arlington County Board Chair Mary Hynes, with the support of her colleagues on the County Board, set as goals for PLACE:

- **Expand participation** in important County decision-making processes.
- **Train** both interested members of the public and staff in those processes.
- **Improve** the quality of County government’s processes and set realistic expectations for broader participation in our decision-making.

County Manager Barbara Donnellan is a full partner with the County Board in PLACE. As the County’s chief executive officer, Donnellan focused on civic engagement as one of her top priorities in 2012. She introduced intensive training for County executive leadership and staff and committed to developing criteria for including civic engagement in staff performance reviews where appropriate. Donnellan made clear that robust, effective, constructive public participation was an expectation for County staff.

In March, 2012, PLACE officially launched with a two-day Open House in collaboration with more than two-dozen business, non-profit and organization partners. The Open House was attended by more than 300 individuals and community organizations, non-profits and other community groups. Attendees put themselves on an actual three-dimensional map of Arlington and, through the discussion, began to forge new connections, discussing how civic engagement in Arlington currently works and brainstorming ideas for broadening our practices to make them more inclusive and effective. Many ideas for improving the quality of civic engagement and decision-making in our community were generated and posted on the County website.

Vision

Arlington will be a diverse and inclusive world-class urban community with secure, attractive residential and commercial neighborhoods where people unite to form a caring, learning, participating, sustainable community in which each person is important.

A group of County staff and Arlington residents has worked together through the year to incorporate the ideas generated during the PLACE Open House – and collected through conversations with literally hundreds of community members at the Arlington County Fair, in civic association and other civic group meetings, in workshops and interviews – into concrete actions. This report details the 2012 accomplishments of PLACE and identifies next steps. While we have taken important steps in implementing the goals set out in January, PLACE – by its very nature – is ongoing. Consistently achieving a diversity of Arlington voices in influencing important government decisions will continue to require dedicated efforts from government and community members.

PLACE Builds on the The Arlington Way

Summary of Previous Reports on The Arlington Way

Three important reports since 2000 have outlined some of the challenges as well as the ongoing promise of The Arlington Way. Each of these reports notes that while Arlington has a long and positive history of citizen engagement, The Arlington Way is not without challenges and does not always meet the needs of Arlingtonians for full, effective and transparent civic engagement. A brief overview of the key findings of these three reports is provided below, and full copies of the reports are posted at the PLACE website (www.arlingtonplace.us).

Creating The Arlington E-Way: Enhancing & Improving Community Engagement, 2010

This eight-page document was prepared by Arlington Economic Development as an application for the IBM Smarter Cities Challenge. The first 2.5 pages discuss background and challenges for The Arlington Way. A key excerpt is provided below.

At its core, Arlington's community engagement process faces three main problems:

1. Providing information, which is often detailed and complex, in an accessible, timely, accurate, comprehensible and readily available format.
2. Effectively engaging a wider, more diverse and more representative group of residents and organizations who are able to express their opinions and participate in community-wide discussions in a more efficient and responsible format.
3. Providing effective and credible leadership within the public dialog process, so that staff can assist political leaders in responsible policy formation and decision making based on reliable and credible data.

Arlington's Changing Story: Civic Engagement in Arlington County, Virginia, 2003

This extensive report by Melinda Patrician and Palma Strand describes the methodology, findings, and recommendations based on in-depth conversations with over 100 citizens about the way public life is conducted in Arlington. The report identifies three touchstones to civic engagement:

1. Building a **civic community** requires opportunities for citizens to discuss and deliberate in order to identify or to create shared community values;
2. **Inreach**—reaching into institutions and working to bring awareness of the larger community to the work there as well as to expand the base of community members within those institutions—reflects the belief that meaningful civic engagement happens in many different contexts and institutions and is the obligation of everyone, not just county leaders and employees; and
3. **Democratic governance** rests on the conviction that civic engagement is about real power in public decision-making.

The report then presents four recommendation steps:

- **Step One:** Small group conversations of county leaders and staff and active and “underengaged” citizens, building to annual Civic Leadership Institute for Arlington to develop shared values around the ideas of governance and decision-making. Support with a community newsletter and a collaborative civic group to serve as a guiding force.
- **Step Two:** Civic development training for county staff and citizens; mapping, inviting, preparing and mentoring of “underengaged” citizens; and enhanced communication with the broader community.

- **Step Three:** Civic Conversations to set up a process of discussion and deliberation that uses small settings combined with the annual Civic Institute to develop action plans and civic capacity as those plans are implemented.
- **Step Four:** Evaluation to include questions on civic engagement built into County processes. These include: 360° evaluation of county processes, in which all advisory and deliberative citizen bodies evaluate their own work; objective indicators, through which processes can be measured by an established set of criteria; and Community Indicators developed by citizens to measure some of the less tangible community goals and results of civic engagement. The final evaluative recommendation is an annual Citizen Deliberation Council, a jury-like body of randomly selected citizens who are convened for the sole purpose of serving as a gauge of the well-being of the community.

Mapping The Arlington Way: Understanding the System of Participation in Arlington County, 2000

This research project by Abbott Bailey was based on interviews of 20 key stakeholders in Arlington and sought to understand and describe how The Arlington Way is actually being implemented. A key excerpt on the challenges is provided below.

The Arlington Way is certainly a model for citizen participation. Yet the model in practice is not without its flaws. The Arlington Way is also a bundle of shortcomings: Government by a Few, the Elephantine System, and System Chaos.

- *Government by a Few* refers to the lack of full representation ...underrepresented groups include racial and ethnic minorities; relative newcomers; younger, single or married without children, and renting or living in condominiums; the business community; poorer residents; parents with small children; and individuals living in South Arlington. On the other hand, there are a number of groups and individuals which have a significant impact on civic affairs.
- *The Elephantine System* points to decision processes that take too long, often without definitive results. The Arlington Way requires an unnecessary amount of time and input from its participants, rendering it very cumbersome.
- *System Chaos* is present because considerable confusion exists over leadership, roles and authority in the process. This confusion occurs on two levels: between county staff and commission members; and between the County Board and commission members. The roles of the county staff and commission members are not clearly delineated, resulting in ambiguous relationships sometimes fraught with conflict between the two parties.

PLACE Sought Broad Community Feedback on Civic Processes

The PLACE working group organized many community, intra-staff and community-staff encounters over 2012. In every case, our goal was to better understand what the attendees valued about how government and the community work together and where frustrations exist in those interactions and processes.

The tree graphic on the next page summarizes the types of feedback events we held in 2012. Consistent agreement around community values emerged from the conversations. And, the “Themes” boxes synthesize the many overlapping comments we received about ways to improve the way we work together – the community, the County Board, and the staff. Without a doubt, our conversations affirmed that the challenges identified in previous reports persist and are the cause of ongoing community and staff frustration and confusion.

Our community work affirms we must work across three dimensions – increasing **Participation** across all sectors of our community, enhancing our **Leadership** capacity – among staff and community leaders, and attending to how our **Civic Engagement** processes are structured to ensure they are fair, transparent and respectful of diverse voices – if we wish to revitalize the active collaboration between the community and the government. Our activities across the dimensions to date are summarized below.

Enhancing Participation

A number of steps have been taken to begin building broader participation in Arlington’s civic life. We have launched PLACE Space and developed a Welcome Kit. In addition, the County Board has held 40 Open Door Mondays at fire stations and rec centers, bringing Board members and community members together in an informal setting to discuss issues. We have also attended the meetings of a large number of civic associations and other civic groups over the course of the year. (See Appendix B for details on these items.)

Building Leadership Capacity

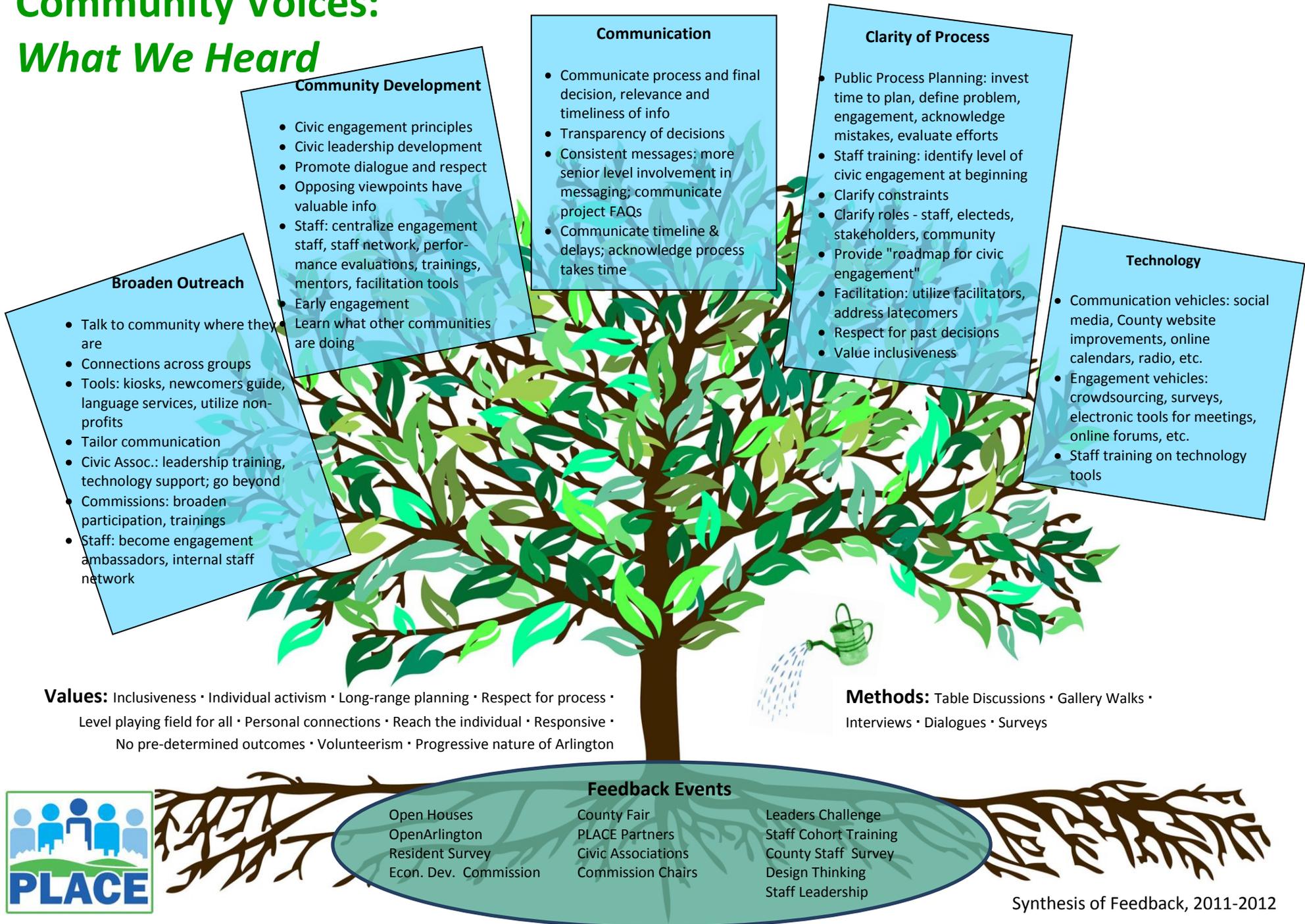
County Manager Barbara Donnellan announced civic engagement was one of her top organizational priorities for 2012 as an essential component of the Board’s PLACE initiative. The PLACE working group identified key areas where there was a need to provide greater support to County staff as they engage with the community. In particular, attention has been paid to bolstering internal civic engagement infrastructure, developing new online tools as well as face-to-face tools to gather community perspectives and ideas, and making changes to better support staff involved in civic engagement. (See Appendix B for details.)

As the year has progressed, community members have begun suggesting the expansion of Neighborhood College or other forums to incorporate aspects of the staff training into new courses for interested community members. Further work on this will occur in 2013.

Refining Civic Engagement Practice

As a first step, community leaders and staff have begun to develop an After Action Report system (read more in this report). In the coming months, this template will be used to debrief two recent policy processes – adoption of the Columbia Pike Neighborhoods Plan and revision of the County’s Sign Ordinance. The template and the debrief process will be refined following those two pilot applications. Additional work in this area is outlined in the next steps section of this report.

Community Voices: What We Heard



Next Steps

In 2012

Throughout our work, the lack of a shared definition of The Arlington Way and a lack of clarity about the roles played by civic engagement participants – community members, commissioners, staff, board members, organizations and businesses – have been challenging.

To enhance PLACE, the working group developed a document called “Framework for Civic Relationships” that defines how the community, Board and staff work together. We believe the framework – ultimately approved by the Board – will ensure we develop and embrace a common vocabulary and set of expectations to guide future community-government collaboration.

To that end, the working group proposes that the Board take the following actions:

1. Accept for discussion purposes ...
 - a. A mission statement for PLACE: *Voices Joined to Achieve Arlington County’s Vision*
 - b. “A Framework for Civic Relationships”... and invite the community to provide comments on these documents by March 1 . The PLACE working group will develop a distribution system and provide both online and face-to-face opportunities for community members to provide comments.
2. Endorse the International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) *Spectrum for Public Participation* included in this report as a guiding tool that can be tailored for planning civic engagement activities in Arlington.

In 2013, the PLACE working group recommends the following:

Commitment refers to our common support for genuine input and effective process. 2013 activities will include:

- Use community input to make appropriate changes and refinements, and propose a final Civic Engagement Framework for action by the County Board.
- Evaluate County Board and County Manager office procedures to better align them to the Framework.
- Establish an ongoing workgroup of community and staff to guide the development and implementation of ongoing PLACE activities.

Clarity requires that we establish clear and transparent goals and direction. 2013 activities will include:

- Implement the use of the IAP2 Spectrum in all planning and communication of civic engagement processes.
- Evaluate the development of an Arlington-specific Spectrum.
- Develop metrics to track progress on PLACE goals and the overall effectiveness of civic engagement in the County.

Connections recognizes the diversity of our community and the desire to engage all voices in our work. 2013 activities will include:

- Create a thorough and replicable process to evaluate the range of community voices that are important to each civic engagement interaction, and ensure that all sectors of the community are provided access.
- Evaluate, develop, and make available a broad range of participation tools and techniques to ensure that county activities establish and encourage the dialogue and interaction needed to ensure positive outcomes.

Communication helps us to ensure we listen and engage in dialogue to deepen our understanding of the entire community. 2013 activities will include:

- Continue to build PLACE Space as a true virtual town square.
- Evaluate, develop, and make available a broad range of communication tools and techniques to ensure that all stakeholders have access to the information they need to understand and participate.
- Directly engage the community in identifying and achieving increasingly effective communication practices.

Civility underscores our desire to ensure that mutual respect supports all interaction.

- Establish common ground rules consistent with the Civic Engagement Framework to help guide all public interaction.
- Work at all levels to continually model the behavior we expect from each other.

Capacity reflects our ongoing belief in continuous learning. 2013 activities will include:

- Review existing training throughout the community and update it using Arlington's Civic Engagement Framework.
- Develop new leadership capacity opportunities for both staff and community members (e.g., expanded Neighborhood College offerings).
- Enhance and update the orientation provided by the County for commission chairs and members, including exposure to the Civic Engagement Framework and IAP2 Spectrum.
- Use the IAP2 Spectrum as one foundation to guide the design or redesign of significant County processes.
- Continue to train County staff in effective civic engagement. Expand the offerings to include more staff and management.

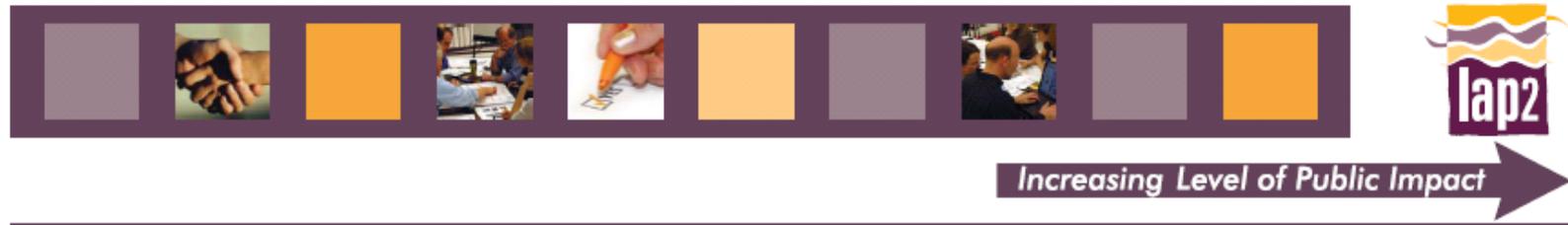


Framework for Civic Relationships

Voices Joined to Achieve Arlington's Vision

	COMMUNITY	STAFF	BOARD
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are a caring community We seek and stay informed about issues that affect the whole community We get involved We take initiative in problem solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We value the community input We actively seek community input to our projects and decisions We design processes that provide the activities and time needed for meaningful engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We nurture the partnership between community & gov't. We believe that good ideas can come from anyone We support processes to make better decisions
Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We identify opportunities to improve Arlington, and provide input into decision processes We strive to build consensus around possible solutions to issues and concerns We define consensus as outcomes that most participants can live with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We specify at the start of a process the opportunities for public input and influence We provide transparency on decision making processes We give feedback on how we considered community input We respect and report diverse viewpoints We define consensus as outcomes that most can live with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We strive for clarity of everyone's roles and responsibilities We provide opportunity to identify values, facts and policies that underpin issues We define consensus as outcomes most participants can live with
Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We reach out to new residents and other parts of the community We seek to include and engage all residents We share information via a variety of forums We initiate and organize meetings/forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We design processes that engage and provide access to all interested parts of the community We speak many languages We engage people from their point of view We initiate and organize meetings and forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We ensure that all voices in our community have the chance to participate and be heard
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We voice our opinions and listen to each other We advocate for policies, resources and programs to improve the community We generate new ideas to solve and/or address concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We listen to our community We provide the information needed for meaningful engagement We advocate for policies, resources to improve community We generate new ideas to solve and/or address concerns We support latest technology and more traditional formats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We clearly communicate our decisions and rationale We listen to all concerns
Civility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We respect and value all participants' ideas and opinions We value all participants' time and are respectful of timelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We value and respect people's time We design and facilitate process based on civil dialogue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We do not shy away from conflict, but respectfully discuss our differences
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We contribute our talents, skills, energy & time We build on our existing community resources and assets (non financial) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We contribute our skills and ideas We provide staff with training needed for civic engagement We measure our success in transparent ways We learn from each process and refine our approaches We help people join our processes at any point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We assure access to the resources and educational opportunities needed for everyone to participate

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum



	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fact sheets ■ Web sites ■ Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Public comment ■ Focus groups ■ Surveys ■ Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Workshops ■ Deliberative polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Citizen advisory Committees ■ Consensus-building ■ Participatory decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Citizen juries ■ Ballots ■ Delegated decision

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IAP2 – the International Association for Public Participation – is the preeminent international organization advancing the practice of public participation. “Public participation” means to involve those who are affected by a decision in the decision-making process. It promotes sustainable decisions by providing participants with the information needed to be involved in a meaningful way, and it communicates to participants how their input affects the decision.

IAP2's “Spectrum of Public Participation” (shown here) was designed to assist with selecting the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. (More at www.iap2.org.) PLACE participants have used the spectrum as a foundation for discussing ways to enhance civic engagement and plan to tailor it to meet particular Arlington needs, while adhering to the goals of the spectrum.

PLACE Conclusion: The *Way* Forward

Arlington's civic infrastructure is rooted in the belief that good ideas can come from anywhere; that collaboration among residents, businesses, civic organizations and County government typically leads to better results than any one working alone; and that strategic decisions are more likely to stand the test of time when developed through robust, creative, respectful civic conversations.

This belief, known for more than 60 years as the "Arlington Way," has been an essential building block in Arlington's long-term success and attractiveness to a diversity of newcomers. It has served the community uncommonly well, helping us address problems and take advantage of opportunities. And it has always been a work in progress, open to evaluation and improvement. As long-time community activist Melinda Patrician has observed about community process: "Don't get your back up if you have to back up."

How do we allow for change and diversity of opinion in public process and preserve and honor what we know of the character of our community? The formula is simple enough: the more community members invest in the life of their community – through personal networks, adherence to behavioral norms and engagement that is sustained by mutual trust – the richer and the more productive the community and the greater the likelihood of representative democracy. Participation can be both formal and informal, is voluntary and includes everything from voting, attending County Board hearings and serving on a Board-appointed commission to becoming a Master Gardener, cooking for neighborhood block parties, commenting on a civic association listserv, swiping credit cards at the Friends of the Library book sale, entering a prized jar of pickles in the County fair and joining parent-child play groups.

The challenge for local government is to ensure the right people are having the right conversations at the right time. Our hope is that with a reinvigorated "Arlington Way" recalibrated to our changing times, we can continue to bring out the best in one another.

In our year-long effort, PLACE engaged with real people about real issues. And from these conversations, real plans emerged to help us determine how we can best work together in support of a shared social fabric that can only be sustained by mutual trust, meaningful participation and inclusion.

As leaders and participants in civic life, we know open collaborative processes are more likely to bring all the voices that matter into important community discussions that result in better decisions for all. We believe that PLACE – Participation, Leadership and Civic Engagement – is vital to achieving that goal.

Appendix A – PLACE Activity Timeline

PLACE Working Group Formed, January/February – Joint staff and citizen group that helps to guide and assess PLACE (www.arlingtonplace.us).

Open Door Mondays, all year – County Board members hold open sessions to discuss issues important to the community.

PLACE Open House Workshops, March – Five sessions to discuss purpose of PLACE and receive feedback on what is working and where we can improve civic engagement in Arlington.

Arlington County Staff Training, all year – Staff from departments throughout the County take extensive training in designing and implementing meaningful citizen engagement.

Arlington County Senior Staff and Board Conversations, June – Several meetings of senior staff and a Board retreat have been devoted in part to discussion on how to improve civic engagement.

Arlington County Fair, August – Interviews with Arlingtonians to discuss how they engage in their communities.

PLACE Space, launched in September – Online tool to connect Arlington community and provide opportunity to share, discuss, and engage in Arlington life.

Community Interviews, October – Interviews with stakeholders from throughout the County to identify ideas and principles for expanding civic engagement to reach all Arlingtonians.

Online Feedback, March and October – Online questions to stakeholders to identify ideas and principles for expanding civic engagement to reach all Arlingtonians.

PLACE Roadshows, October-November – Meet with PLACE Partners, Commissions, Civic Associations and other groups to provide background, discuss principles and receive input on principles for civic engagement in Arlington.

Arlington Welcome Kit, launches in November – Provides quick access to information needed for new County residents.

Staff Survey: Civic Engagement, November

Presentation of PLACE Report to Board, December 11

Appendix B – PLACE Accomplishments

After Action Reviews (AARs)

Best Practice for continually improving Arlington County processes

What is It?

An *After Action Review* (AAR) is a structured review or debrief process by the participants and those responsible for a project for analyzing *what* happened, *why* it happened, and *how* it can be done better. It is a tool that allows teams to assess their performance on an ongoing basis and learn from project successes and failures – which, if documented properly, can lead to organizational learning.



Why Conduct AARs?

AARs will allow Arlington to look back on a complex community process, and better understand why the project succeeded or failed. The true value is in identifying and documenting these successes and failures in a brief AAR report that can serve as a reference for future teams working on similar projects – who will benefit from the lessons learned by those before them. Given the frequency of complex

“How can we do it better next time?”

3 Elements of the AAR

- Plan the AAR*
- Conduct the AAR*
- Report the AAR*

projects undertaken in Arlington - especially those with significant public participation - there are significant learning opportunities available if we make AAR completion a regular part of such projects in Arlington.

How to Conduct AARs?

A draft checklist has been developed and will be vetted by the community. Modeled after

examples being used in other U.S. localities elsewhere. We hope to make the checklist flexible enough to be tailored and used across departments.

When to Conduct AARs?

For Arlington, strong candidates for AARs include park or sector planning, significant ordinance revisions and other projects involving the public broadly. The AAR should be conducted at the end of the process, but for lengthy processes, concise, interim AARs could also be conducted.

Pilot Projects

Two recently completed projects with extensive community involvement – Columbia Pike Neighborhoods Plan and the Sign Ordinance Update – will be treated as pilot AAR projects, with the results informing refinements to be incorporated into a final AAR checklist template for other projects.

Arlington County Welcome Kit

A retro tool redesigned to bring new residents of Arlington County into civic engagement

In several PLACE conversations, numerous residents suggested that having an easy-to-use list of relevant government and non-government resources would have eased their assimilation into Arlington. One proposed solution was the distribution by Arlington County of a “Welcome Kit.” It would include a history of Arlington County, an overview of how our government works, and how individuals could get involved in civic life. Such a kit, it was suggested, would encourage new residents to engage with their government and their community.



What is it?

The Arlington County Welcome Kit comes in two formats, an Online Portal and a six page, self-printable Booklet. Both formats are available in Spanish translation.

The Online Portal resides on Arlington County’s website and is organized into three life stages; “Sign-up for Government Services,” “Set-up Your New Home,” and “Settle Into Your Community.” Each stage offers links to government and non-government resources that will help ease the transition of the new resident into Arlington County.



The Arlington County Welcome Kit Booklet is a six page, 8.5”x11” PDF that can be printed on any color or black & white printer. The booklet divides new resident information into six sections; Overview of Arlington County, New Resident Checklist, Settling-in Services, County Organization Chart, Important Phone Numbers, and the Arlington County Map. The Booklet provides an overview of each County Department and promotes Arlington County’s new online community portal, Arlington PLACE Space.

How will it be distributed?

The PLACE working group will be distributing links for both Arlington County Welcome Kit formats to area realtors, property management companies, civic associations, and other groups that support the settling-in of new residents. Internally, the PLACE working group will work with the Communications Liaison in each County Department and the Constitutional Office to help integrate the usage of the Arlington County Welcome Kit into all front line units who serve as “first-time” entry points for new residents.

Civic Engagement Cohort Certificate Program

Active capacity building for staff most engaged with the community

What is it?

This intensive seven-day program is designed to prepare employees to be skilled facilitators of civic engagement practices and processes. The program develops a cadre of developed community engagement practitioners who are able to:

- Plan an approach for engaging the community in a constructive and ethical process that values diversity.
- Understand the dynamics of the board, staff, and community and how they impact the work.
- Integrate and support the core concepts of the County Board Chair's "Place" initiative.
- Know the stakeholders and how they are affected by the work to be done.
- Execute a thoughtful (systemic) communications plan.
- Facilitate a well planned meeting, or series of meetings, necessary to achieve the desired outcomes.
- Adapt a plan, sometimes at the last minute, to the size and mood of the audience -manage conflict and at times the incivility of the crowd.



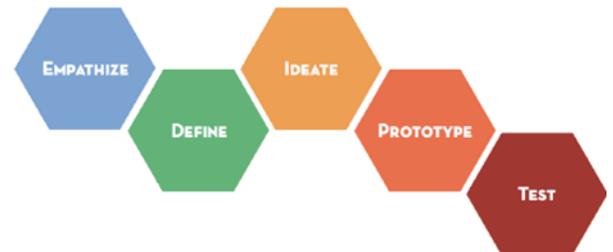
*Since 2011 over
90 people have
been trained in
four cohorts of the
program*

Design Thinking

An engagement tool designed to tease out community needs

What is it?

Developed by Stanford University, Design Thinking is a fully immersive method of problem solving that is centered on the person the solution is meant to serve. Best learned by doing, Design Thinking involves a series of five steps: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test. It has been effective in addressing complex ambiguous problems ranging from the development of new products and services to entire processes and strategies for private and public organizations.



Why Design Thinking?

Design Thinking is a tool that gives us the ability to better understand a problem from the user perspective. The traditional tools such as surveys and polls are designed from the problem solver's perspective whereas Design Thinking focuses learning about the problem from the user's perspective. It focuses on the user's needs, wants and interactions with the design challenge.

This collaborative process allows the solutions developed to be more comprehensive and tailored to the user.

The beauty of design thinking is that it shifts the emphasis from the designers' perception of the problem to the clients' real needs and desires

How is it used?

Design thinking is a high touch methodology and a useful approach for identifying ways to improve community engagement. It starts with empathetic interviews and observations to gather information from the consumer. The interviews lead to development of the user profile(s). This process can be

Case Study – Using Design Thinking

The Library used the Design thinking process to find out how to increase teen patronage of the Library services. As result of the empathetic interviews the design team learned that the teens were often hungry after school and because food was not allowed in the teen room at the library, they would go to the local Mall's food court or cafe to hang out after school. So the Library explored ways to make the Teen room a more welcoming place for teens. The Library changed their rules to allow snacks in the teen rooms and teen use of the library increased as a result.

transformative to the designers' understanding of the problem and leads to new insights that inform the ideation and prototypes phases of the design thinking. One of the principles of design thinking is to prototype often and early, thereby gaining new insight as the prototypes are shared with potential users of the product or service. This is an iterative process the can drive development and the ultimate fine-tuning of a final product or solutions.

Expanding County Government's Civic Engagement Capacity

Intentional focus across the workforce

What Occurred?

The PLACE working group, along with many Arlington County staff, helped to design and build a new civic engagement infrastructure to bolster community involvement and support County staff in the process. The outcomes of those staff efforts are outlined below.

What are the Specifics?

- **Performance Management Initiative (July 1, 2012)** – With the start of the FY13 fiscal year, the County Manager directed her department directors and CMO staff to “incorporate civic engagement into employee’s key work expectations where appropriate.”
- **Online Employee Chat (July 26, 2012)** – Barbara Donnellan spoke with County employees about the PLACE efforts and the importance of effective civic discourse.
- **Supervisor’s Guide to Workplace Violence Prevention (August 2012)** – The Risk Management and Employee Relations staff updated the guide to outline procedures on how to protect themselves against violence in their worksites, including when they are working out in the community.
- **PLACE Space (September 2012)** – The new online community created by PLACE Space gives County staff new ways to engage with community members.
- **Community of Practice and Learning (September 2012)** – The Training and OD staff in Human Resources built upon the civic engagement (CE) training program offered to County staff by creating ongoing learning opportunities for staff. The graduates of the CE training as well as anyone else who is interested are invited to participate in regular learning opportunities in the form of online tools, webinars, dialogues, and training opportunities. These include the After Action Report dialogue, PLACE Space webinar, and the upcoming celebration of the Year of Civic Engagement. Additionally, an online community is beginning to emerge on AC Source/AC Share, the internal intranet portal accessible to County employees.
- **County Survey on Civic Engagement (November 2012)** – The Manager asked County staff to participate in a survey that seeks to understand what works well about the way Arlington County government engages the community today and what could be improved.

Open Arlington – www.openarlington.us

New technology portal fosters online community conversation



What is it?

Open Arlington provides residents with a virtual voice in Arlington Government on specific topics. Users can read what others are saying about topics specific to Arlington County Government and then post their own statements. Topics may be broad or focus on specific government projects, policies, or initiatives.

When users sign up, they're asked for their name and home address. This confidential information is only used to identify statements from residents in and near Arlington County – so that users know which statements are from local residents.

Background

Arlington County began piloting this tool in spring 2012, as a way to expand online engagement between government and residents and support the PLACE initiative. (APS first used the same tool in December 2011.) Open Arlington is run by **Peak Democracy**, a non-partisan company whose mission is to broaden civic engagement and build public trust in government. This product is used by dozens of local governments across the nation.

Topics We've Run So Far

- Towers Park Design Poll
- CIP Priorities
- Newcomers to Arlington
- Big Walnut Park Options
- Urban Ag Priorities
- Civic Engagement Ideas

Overall: 1,530 visits
350 participants



Case Study – Towers Park

The Department of Parks & Recreation decided which design to use for Towers Park, based on input from 46 *Open Arlington* participants. Answers were also tallied based on how far away respondents lived from the park.

Key Attributes

- Topics typically chosen by County staff – focused on specific project or program; multiple topics can run concurrently
- Different question types available (open-ended, polls, ranking)
- No anonymous statements; a user can choose what is publicly displayed ... but to register and use the site, users must include their name & address
- 1 statement per resident; bullies can't take over
- Statement monitored by third-party provider, Peak Democracy, for bad behavior/inappropriate use
- Removes many barriers to public participation (time limits, fear of public speaking, travel/parking, accessibility)
- Accessible via mobile device

PLACE Space

Share, Connect and Engage in a Virtual Town Square

What is it?

PLACE Space is a virtual town square, a place for sharing ideas, making connections, and engaging with the community. PLACE Space is designed to be a community-driven network, though County staff and elected officials can also join and contribute relevant expertise and knowledge.

Why PLACE Space?

The idea of an on-line networking site arose from community conversations during the March PLACE kick-off Open Houses. Participants asked for a community directory so they could know who existed in Arlington, and a way to continue connecting with other organizations and civic leaders after the meetings ended.

How is it used?

While most social networks connect people to a universe of friends and family, PLACE Space connects people to Arlington — to the people, businesses and organizations that make the County a community. Conversations about traffic, cycling, plumbers and local restaurants have been balanced by civic-minded discussions on energy conservation, small business, and education.



*“It’s not a social network ...
it’s a local network”*

Case Study –

Small Business Saturday

In September PLACE Space member Shana Wilkes proposed a community initiative to support Arlington small businesses during the holiday shopping season. Shana’s conversation sparked 21 replies from the community, and her “Small Business Saturday” became reality. One highlight of the day was President Obama’s visit to an Arlington bookstore.

How does it work?

Anyone can view PLACE Space online. To participate in conversations or join a circle of interest, users need to take a few seconds to create a simple profile. The site also offers a community calendar, a directory of Arlington organizations and individuals, and a map where members can “pin” their location.

Nearly 1,000 members

75 organizations

52 community circles

120 calendar events