

A CASE STUDY OF ENGAGEROSEVILLE  
AND THE POLICY IMPACTS OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

A Thesis

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by

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Abstract  
of  
A CASE STUDY OF ENGAGEROSEVILLE  
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After the Great Recession, local governments were confronting years of slowing revenue growth and increasing expenditures. The City of Roseville was not immune to these budget deficits: growing operational and long-term costs compounded by declining tax revenue meant that the city was facing deep cuts to its public-facing services. When faced with such an immediate and politically contentious problem, city staff turned to public engagement to educate residents about the issue and to generate multiple pathways for members of the public to voice their opinions to decision-makers. Research shows such a process can increase civic-mindedness and trust if it meets certain standards.

In my case study of EngageRoseville, I compared Roseville's outreach efforts against the TIERS Public Engagement Framework. Developed by the Institute for Local Government, the Framework outlines five pillars of effective community engagement: Think, Initiate, Engage, Review, and Shift. I used publicly available records, such as committee reports, recorded public meetings, podcasts, and survey data results to review the various strategies that Roseville deployed. I also relied on interviews with city leaders

to obtain valuable perspective from the people who designed and implemented EngageRoseville.

I found that EngageRoseville adhered fairly closely to the Framework’s five pillars. City staff had a clear goal and a set of guiding principles that became the basis of every activity throughout the engagement process. They disseminated simple and informative messages to all of the city’s residents and focused on breadth of coverage by creating multiple platforms through which the public could provide input—including public meetings, short surveys, and gamification of the budget. As a result, EngageRoseville saw a high rate of participation, particularly in its online activities. Feedback from the community empowered the City Council to place a half-cent sales tax increase on the 2018 ballot. In the end, the city’s nearly year-long effort to educate residents and generate public trust paid dividends when Measure B passed with over 60 percent of the vote. Today, the results of EngageRoseville are still felt, as city leaders continue to use the information it gathered to make budgeting decisions and to reach out to the public. EngageRoseville’s success is a testament to the impact that effective public engagement can have on public policy.

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Edward Lascher, Jr., Ph.D.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

There is perhaps no governance or public agency activity more impactful than the budgeting process. This is especially true for local governments where, through the budget process, decision-makers allocate scarce resources to fund vital services and projects that significantly impact daily life. Fiscal issues can often be points of contention for both decision-makers and community members since the need for local services often exceed available resources. In fact, a survey from the Institute of Local Government (ILG) found that city and county leaders in California view fiscal issues as their greatest challenge (Marois and Amsler, 2008).

Part of the contention that surrounds budgeting decisions is due to how opaque and confusing the budgeting process can be to the public. In general, preparation of the city budget involves the development of fiscal estimates for city departments, review and approval of the budget estimates by a city council or a board, implementation of the adopted budget by the departments, and evaluation of department performance to help inform the next budget (“Public Budgets”). On the surface, there appears to be little room for public involvement in the budgeting process. This, in turn, can result in a lack of mutual understanding over what residents value most.

One way to inject greater transparency and engagement in local governments’ fiscal management is by developing innovative ways to involve the public. Theorists and practitioners of public administration widely advocate for public budgeting processes.

The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) recommends incorporating public engagement in budget development to increase government's accountability and credibility. One of the underlying assumptions behind public budgeting is that residents have a better understanding of the community's needs and could thus provide decision-makers with solutions that reflect the various political, economic, and cultural groups in the community (Guo & Neshkova, 2012).

There are various ways that local governments can facilitate public engagement in the budgeting process. For example, city officials may use public meetings, focus groups, and community forums to share information with residents. They may also use surveys to solicit feedback about the budget. Local governments may give residents greater discretion by allowing them to decide how parts of the budget will be spent through a participatory budgeting process. The type of input that decision-makers want—a broad vision, new ideas or solutions, a prioritization of existing options—will affect how they solicit that input. If the goal is to generate public will or community consensus for a new budget proposal, then the public will need to be involved before final allocations are made for the budget (Guo & Neshkova, 2012). Government leaders' support of the public's involvement will also impact how much actual influence participants have in the outcome.

In this thesis, I present a case study of public engagement by evaluating the City of Roseville's (Roseville) efforts to solicit community input as part of its budget development. This effort, called EngageRoseville, was aimed at building the fiscal year

2019-20 budget and establishing future funding priorities. The central question of this thesis is: “to what extent did Roseville’s public engagement methods motivate its residents to participate in the budgeting process, and did it result in a better budget?”

Along the way, I discuss the impetus for EngageRoseville, the challenges the city faced, and some of the lessons that staff learned. I also explore how the city’s experience with EngageRoseville may influence future decision-making and what other cities and local entities can learn from Roseville’s experience. The following pages of this introduction will provide background about Roseville’s budget, a description of the strategies the city implemented as part of EngageRoseville, and an overview of the remaining chapters of this thesis.

### **The City of Roseville’s Fiscal Management**

Like many other cities in the country, Roseville found itself making budget changes in order to maintain services in the years following the Great Recession. For example, Roseville reduced its costs by deferring millions of dollars worth of funding for capital improvements, such as street maintenance and work on public facilities. It also borrowed from reserves and reduced payments to workers’ compensation and retiree health benefits. Further, in the last 10 years, the city decreased its staffing by 30 percent, despite an almost 30 percent increase in the city’s total population within the same time frame. As a result of its fiscal management, the Roseville was able to continue funding most of its service levels while maintaining a balanced budget.

However, a changing regulatory environment and economic reality continued to add significant costs to the city's budget while decreasing its revenue. Roseville's primary sources of revenue are sales and property taxes. Because California does not tax services, cities like Roseville see a decrease in sales revenue as consumers increasingly purchase services, such as lawn care, over goods such as a lawn mower (Casey, 2018). In addition, because of the way the state distributes online sales tax to cities, Roseville loses approximately \$3-4 million a year in sales tax revenue that it would otherwise keep if those purchases were made at a register (Casey, 2018). As online shopping increases in proportion to in-store sales, this trend of decreasing sales tax revenue will likely continue for most cities.

In fiscal year 2017-18, the city's operational expenses exceeded revenues by \$2 million. The city's budget trends were similar in fiscal year 2018-19, requiring Roseville to reduce public services in order to close the budget gap. To make the city's economic situation even more unsustainable, the city's long-term liabilities and deferred payments brought its annual structural deficit to \$14 million (Casey, 2018). In order to find a solution to the budget deficit without compromising quality of life, the city needed to know how residents prioritized city-provided services.

### **EngageRoseville**

When faced with complex issues, government officials can engage the public to solve problems or generate support for contentious issues (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). This is exactly what Roseville did. The City Council directed its staff to initiate a process

to educate the community about the city's finances and get input from the public about what services they valued most in the community. In April 2017, the City Council approved the EngageRoseville effort, which evolved into a year-long long community engagement process. The goal of EngageRoseville was to ensure that city officials had a clear understanding of how residents prioritized city services, and that residents had a clear understanding of the city's fiscal constraints (Casey, 2018). The input from the community was intended to help city officials prioritize services when crafting the fiscal year 2019-20 budget.

The city utilized various tactics to advertise EngageRoseville to the public, including: a dedicated website; media coverage by television, print, and radio; social media; digital billboards, flyers and postcards handed out at community events; and direct mailers sent to 60,000 households in Roseville. The city then used several methods to educate residents and stakeholders about the city's services and solicit community input about how to prioritize its future budget. Briefly, the City of Roseville:

- *Provided information about city services:* EngageRoseville staff posted informational presentations, podcasts, and interviews with staff from various municipal departments on a dedicated website. This provided viewers with general information about what services each city department provided and an explanation of the city's budget.
- *Empaneled the Community Priorities Advisory Committee:* CPAC consisted of 20 members from community organizations, including the Roseville City School

District, the Planning Commission, and a selection of at-large community members. CPAC was tasked with making budgetary recommendations about how to prioritize the city's discretionary services—services that are not mandated by law or funded by restricted revenue sources—based on information gathered during the outreach process (“About the Community Priorities Advisory Committee”).

- *Implemented community conversations:* Roseville also used an in-person community conversation which was attended by over 120 participants, 25 city staff facilitators, and representatives from three city departments. At the end of the meeting, participants were given the opportunity to vote on ways to close the budget gap and see the outcome of those votes in real-time (“Community Conversation Results”).
- *Utilized digital platforms to solicit feedback:* The city used FlashVote to provide general information about the city's budget and to allow users to quickly rank city services in order of importance. Balancing Act was an interactive application that asked users to close the city's \$2 million gap by prioritizing and allocating the city's resources among its discretionary services (Casey, 2018).

## **Purpose**

This thesis will assess Roseville's methods for facilitating public engagement in the budgeting process. I conducted this assessment by evaluating EngageRoseville against the TIERS' “Public Engagement Framework” published by the ILG. I also



reviewed publicly available documentation about EngageRoseville, such as CPAC meeting records, survey results, and reports to the City Council.

The remainder of my thesis is as follows: first, I review some of the available literature on public engagement, particularly in budgeting, to contextualize my evaluation of EngageRoseville. In Chapter 3, I describe my methodology, outlining the TIERS Framework, the documentation I reviewed, and the questions I asked during interviews of key staff members. In Chapter 4, I discuss key findings and my overall assessment of EngageRoseville. In Chapter 5, I conclude by exploring the implications of Roseville's civic engagement efforts for other local governments.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will review some of the existing literature surrounding public engagement and, more specifically, public participation in the budgeting process. My goal is to give readers a general understanding of some of the normative theories in order to provide an academic foundation for my evaluation of Roseville's public engagement efforts. I organize the literature into three broad themes: the theories behind effective public participation; the importance of public engagement in the budgeting process; and mechanisms of engagement and participation. Because the focus of this thesis is on the City of Roseville, I contextualize most of the literature that I reviewed within the realm of local government. I aim to provide an academic and theoretical framework for public engagement that can be applied to local governments.

#### **Public Engagement Design and Effective Participation**

Public engagement is a widely used term that can encompass various concepts for bringing people together to address shared issues. According to Nabatchi and Amsler (2014), there has been a resurgence of interest among researchers and public leaders to use engagement and participation as a strategy to improve the delivery of public services and goods, generate support for political decisions, and remedy deficits in democratic processes. Increasingly, elected officials and local government leaders attempt to directly engage with the public in order to identify problems, prioritize needs, and address public issues. Nabatchi and Amsler refer to this as *direct public engagement*. The key word is

*direct*, which refers to situations in which people are personally engaged in the process—whether through a face-to-face dialogue or through active participation in online platforms—in comparison to an *indirect* engagement through representatives or intermediaries. In their study on the use of public engagement in local government, Nabatchi and Amsler focus on direct public engagement, which they define as processes—either in-person or online—that allow members of the public to voice their ideas, concerns, and needs in such a way that they are incorporated into the local government’s decision-making process (Nabatchi and Amsler, 2014). EngageRoseville, which I will review in later chapters, is a form of direct public engagement. For the purposes of this thesis, I use the shorthand term “public engagement” to refer to what Nabatchi and Amsler’s define as “direct public engagement.”

The impacts of public engagement, according to Nabatchi and Amsler (2014) are dependent on several factors: context and setting; sponsors and conveners; and process design. Context and setting include the local laws and authorities that allow public engagement to take place; the size of the locality; its political culture; and the locality’s political system. The political system includes the distribution of power, resources, and responsibilities within the system (Feldman & Quick, 2009). For example, the state may require local governments to hold public hearings after the publication of the budget, which may reduce the influence that the public can wield in the actual budget development. In other cases, governments may need to turn to voter referendums in order

to increase taxes, giving participants the final say in the approval process (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006).

Sponsors are those who fund all or part of a public engagement effort, such as government officials and public administrators, while conveners plan and lead the actual process. In traditional examples of public engagement, such as public meetings, the sponsor will also be the convener. However, the sponsor may also choose to contract with an outside expert, such as a private consultant, to act as the convener in cases where the deliberative process requires a more innovative or complex approach (Nabatchi, Gastil, Weiksner, and Leighninger, 2012). When government officials and administrators are the sponsors and/or the conveners, they help shape the conditions for empowering participants by providing information and by establishing the participation venues (Buckwalter, 2014). Government officials also drive outcomes, since they are the parties with the authority to take action on the public's input. Therefore, the outcomes of public engagement are directly impacted by the willingness of government officials to blend a more democratic process with their own administrative objectives (Buckwalter, 2014).

The design of the public engagement process includes the methodology for selecting and engaging the participants and is largely dependent on the intended goals—for instance, to provide information to the public, solicit input on a decision, or generate consensus—and the resources and technical capabilities of the sponsors and conveners. Advocates of public engagement posit that, at the individual level, it informs the public about important issues, cultivates participants' civic skills, and fosters public-spiritedness

and trust in the government. At the institutional level, advocates claim that public engagement can improve the quality of governance and policymaking by facilitating consensus, decreasing bounded rationality, and easing implementation (Nabatchi and Amsler, 2014). On the other hand, public engagement can have high transactional costs and can lead to increased frustration and perceived powerlessness when participants face exclusion, tokenism, and power inequalities (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002).

As discussed above, public engagement entails participation not only from residents, but other stakeholders representing the local government. In 2011, researchers from the University of North Carolina and the City of Charlotte conducted 40 interviews of elected officials, city staff, and a selection of residents of four cities throughout North Carolina (Berner, Amos, & Morse). Their purpose was to identify what different stakeholders considered to be effective participation in the governing process. The researchers found that the elected officials they interviewed, such as city council members, defined effectiveness as having an established mechanism in place to encourage public participation. They supported seeking public input in order to prioritize programs, projects, and community issues (Berner et al, 2011). Researchers also found that elected officials believed that competing interests were the biggest obstacle to effective public participation, since the most vocal participants are the most heard. Nevertheless, they viewed public hearings and budget workshops as the public's main participatory avenue and saw their role as moderating competing interest groups and providing expertise (Berner et al, 2011).

City staff, such as city managers, responded that effective participation requires effective citizens, which they defined as an “educated advocate” (Berner et al, 2011). For example, city staff responded that the complexity of governance is a challenge since most of the public does not have the time or the resource to review or understand policy issues or governing rules. At the same time, staff felt that it was their responsibility to help the general public understand governance and to educate the City Council on the public’s views (Berner et al, 2011). They emphasized the importance of local governments’ ability to listen to its residents and provide timely feedback in order to promote effective and sustained public participation.

For their part, members of the public ranked communication and cooperation highly in terms of what makes public participation effective. They responded that elected officials and city staff should set objectives and clearly communicate what type of input they want to gain (Berner et al, 2011). In general, the respondents expressed negative views regarding public participation. For example, some said that there were limited opportunities to opine on issues before it was presented to the City Council for a vote, while most expressed frustration at the technical language of government documents and the opacity of government decisions. Contrary to the elected officials, most citizen respondents rejected the idea that public hearings were the most effective form of engagement. They felt that traditional public meetings gave participants limited opportunity to discuss issues outside of the official agenda.

In interviewing the different stakeholder groups, researchers found common themes among all three groups. First, to be effective, public input must be followed by feedback from city staff or elected officials. That is, the input should not be symbolic only, but must initiate a demonstrable reaction from the local leaders. Secondly, effective participation is founded on positive communication and cooperation between the stakeholders. Finally, the stakeholders consistently viewed the public's role as one of advocacy on behalf of the community rather than advocacy for individual interests (Berner et al., 2011).

In a review of interactions between local residents and officials from the Los Angeles city council, Thomas Bryer (2009) found that residents were more likely to engage with the council when there was trust and shared goals and when the government officials demonstrated a willingness to listen and take feedback from the residents. This indicates that sponsors and conveners should seek to facilitate trust and shared goals when shaping the design process of public engagement.

According to researchers, one of the factors that shapes the tone of the public's engagement with government officials is whether the public's expectations of the outcomes can realistically be met. While the public should be encouraged to question bureaucratic processes, they should also be cognizant of the constraints on local government, including fiscal limitations and the speed at which the wheels of government turn. Researchers found that residents who had a greater understanding of the political system—be it the local municipality or government agency—were more likely to engage

in productive and influential dialogue with government officials (Buckwalter, 2014). Because governing processes may be complex, it is equally important for government officials to build participants' capacity by facilitating learning and sharing of information. On the other hand, in order to be effective participants, the public should be willing to learn about the process and the issues at hand (Buckwalter, 2014).

### **Public Engagement in Budgeting**

As discussed in the introductory chapter, there is perhaps no governing process that is more impactful than creating the budget. In particular, a county or city's annual budget dictates the level and type of services that are available to residents and visitors. The government's budget is also an expression of its public policy and priorities for the community, particularly in times of crisis or fiscal stress. Because of its direct link to the public's quality of life, one of the most impactful ways that residents can be involved is through participatory budgeting, which is a process in which public feedback during the budgeting process influences how funds are allocated (Zhang & Yang, 2009).

Researchers have long recognized the importance of engaging the public in the budget process. According to Ebdon, the budgeting process is a key opportunity for meaningful participation, since this is when resource allocations and policy decisions are made (2000, p. 383). Through participatory budgeting, decision makers can allocate resources to match the needs of the different communities through input from residents who possess more local knowledge (Guo & Neshkova, 2012). In addition, participation in



the budgeting process will better educate the public about the complexity of allocation decisions, as well as enable them to hold government officials accountable.

Given the various stages of the budgeting process, when should decision-makers engage the public? Guo and Neshkova (2012) argue that participation is most important during the beginning and ending stages of the budget process. Solicitation of public input when the budget is being developed can dictate whether the engagement process is ultimately effective. For example, Berner's (2004) survey of county and city managers in North Carolina found that nearly all respondents recommended involving the public early. The beginning stages of the budget development is when participants can learn about the process and the long-term fiscal issues facing their community. Uninformed participants are more likely to focus on short-term gains than address long-term issues (Beckett & King, 2002). Researchers suggest that participation is also beneficial during the evaluation stage, after the previous fiscal year's budget has had time to take effect. Participants involved in the evaluation stage can provide constructive feedback for the next budget, set expectations for how they expect agencies to perform, and hold government agencies accountable (Guo & Neshkova, 2012).

More recently, some local governments have allowed residents to vote directly on how to allocate a portion of the budget. This type of participatory budgeting began in the United States in one of Chicago's city council wards and has since expanded to several jurisdictions throughout the country. The City of Vallejo, for example, has completed six cycles of participatory budgeting (City of Vallejo Participatory Budgeting). In each cycle,

residents of Vallejo voted on how to spend revenues from a one percent sales tax increase implemented after the city's bankruptcy. This form of participatory budgeting takes public engagement a step further by ceding some decision-making power directly to the public (Godwin, 2018). When it initially piloted its program in 2012, Vallejo had just been released from bankruptcy. Participatory budgeting was one of the strategies it implemented to restore trust and improve understanding between city leaders and the community (Chapin, 2013).

During the design phase of Vallejo's first cycle, its City Council established a committee of representatives from various civic organizations in the city. This steering committee then created a rulebook that established the criteria for the type of projects that participants could propose and vote for. After the design phase, participants brainstormed projects for the city to fund in community meetings and workshops. In the next phase, selected delegates participated in the development of budget proposals. A ballot was then created with the proposed budget proposals and voted on by the residents (Godwin, 2018).

To evaluate Vallejo's initial participatory budgeting effort, Chapin analyzed the city's participatory budgeting rulebook against the Center for Collaborative Policy's "Collaborative Public Involvement Framework" (2013). The framework stressed five key steps to ensure that public participation is truly collaborative: assessment, organization, information sharing, effective dialogue, and follow up. Despite some areas where the city could improve, such as a lack of concrete performance measures, he found that Vallejo

followed many of the characteristics of authentic public participation and that participants were happy and engaged during the process (Chapin 2013). While Vallejo's method of engaging its residents is different from Roseville's, I take a similar approach by assessing its public engagement efforts against a best practices framework.

### **Mechanisms of Participation**

The literature on public participation indicates that government type, process design, and the mechanisms of participation are critical elements (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006). Local governments that were headed by a council-manager model have increasingly become focused on facilitating public engagement and participation. Ebdon (2002) also found that cities headed by a council-manager were more likely to combine formal budget-participation methods, such as public budget meetings, with other methods such as public surveys. In order to be successful, government officials and members of the public must be equally committed to facilitating and participating in dialogue. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the legal requirements that a local government must abide by can also either facilitate or hinder public participation. In addition, researchers found that the size and heterogeneity of the population may also be important factors, as participation was found to be more common in larger, more heterogeneous communities (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006).

Important elements to consider include the timing of public participation, the methodology for selecting participants, and the forms that participation and outreach will take (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006). As discussed previously, participants will have more

influence during earlier stages of the budget development process before allocation decisions are made than if the government solicited their feedback after the budget had already been developed. Ebdon and Franklin (2006) also point out that there is often disconnect between the services that the public wants and how much they are willing to pay for it, a factor that should be considered when determining how to educate the public. Additionally, researchers suggest that selection methodologies that purposely seek participants with a wide range of perspectives will be better received by the public than a methodology that limits access or appears to cater to a specific political agenda. Therefore, the participation process should be designed in such a way as to provide access to as much of the public as possible (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006).

Public engagement in budgeting can take many forms. One way that I discussed above is through direct voting on how to allocate a portion of the budget. While more local governments are experimenting with this process, it is usually on limited terms, with the participants voting on only a small portion of the budget. More widely used are mechanisms to disseminate information to the public and solicit feedback during key points in the budget process. These can involve public hearings and meetings, focus groups, public surveys, budget simulations, advisory committees, and public outreach during the development process. With the increasing use of technology in local government, conveners of public engagement are also relying on online tools to disseminate information to more people.

The amount of information that participants learn and the degree of involvement can vary with each strategy. For example, public meetings and hearings are generally a low-cost strategy and, if managed effectively, can facilitate two-way dialogue between the participants and government officials. On the other hand, most studies show that meetings historically have low public attendance (Ebdon, 2002). During a study of public engagement in Wichita, an elected official noted that attendance will be higher when there is a sense that things are not going right, but that otherwise, the budget is generally not on the public's radar (Ebdon and Franklin, 2004). Surveys reveal more about true preferences than a public meeting, but poorly designed questions can lead to biased or misleading answers. In addition, the flow of information is one-way only, from the participants to the government officials but not the other way around. On the other hand, budget simulations provide more information to the public and allow participants to better understand allocation tradeoffs, but are also more time-consuming and resource-intensive (Ebdon & Franklin, 2004 and Guo & Neshkova, 2012). In order to strengthen the participation process, government officials can combine multiple strategies and deploy them at different points of the budget process. For instance, Berner (2003) found that public meetings and hearings usually occurred at the end of the budget process, while surveys or focus groups tended to take place during the beginning and middle stages of the process.

Local governments are also utilizing technology and social media to reach as many people as possible. Online dialogues and other web-based approaches are a form of

social media exchange that enable participants to share and comment on ideas and to vote online. Online strategies have several advantages over more traditional engagement mechanisms, such as public meetings. They are generally more cost-effective because information can be sent all at once to a pre-determined population. As a result, online dialogue is more inclusive and can thus potentially provide richer data to government officials. They are also less time-consuming to plan and do not require participants to travel to a specific location at a specific date. In short, online tools allow government officials to engage a larger and more diverse group of people because they are more accessible, easy to use, and extend government reach much further than traditional mechanisms of engagement (Leary, Malgeri, & Reardon, 2012).

While local governments can benefit from public engagement in many ways, one of the challenges for local officials and public administrators is that there is no standardized set of best practices or rules for them to follow when implementing public engagement efforts. As the above literature demonstrates, there are numerous factors that they can consider and strategies they can pursue to make public engagement effective and authentic. To assist local governments with planning and executing public engagement efforts, ILG developed a set of practices, the TIERS framework, that incorporates many of the theories I discuss above. The TIERS framework instructs local governments to approach public engagement in five sequential steps:

- **Think:** This step requires the local government to conduct a self-assessment and think about how it wants to approach public engagement, including considering the resources that are available in the community.
- **Initiate:** In this step, the local government furthers the design process by drafting the details of the public engagement approach, choosing what methods they will use, forming an outreach plan, and determining how the laws and local politics will affect the engagement process. Like the think stage, the initiate stage reflects the need for the local government to design a robust process before beginning its engagement efforts.
- **Engage:** The local government will then engage the public by implementing the outreach plan and executing the process that it developed in the previous two steps. During this time, the conveners and facilitators should continue to assess the process to understand and adapt to any issues that occur.
- **Review:** At the completion of its public engagement efforts, the local government should review the outcomes to assess what aspects of its processes were effective and what could be improved.
- **Shift:** Finally, the local government should consider how to permanently incorporate what it learned from the experience into its internal and external policies.

The TIERS framework is intended to provide local governments and agencies with a roadmap for how to effectively engage the public. In the following chapters, I will

discuss how Roseville used a combination of in-person and online strategies to facilitate and encourage public participation in its budget development and compare it against the five-step TIERS process.

### **Further Research**

One of the gaps in the literature about public engagement is its impact on how well government runs. While there is an abundance of research on how public participation creates a more robust and representative democracy, there is much less research on the long-term impact of public engagement on governing processes. For example, while the literature assesses what elements comprise effective public engagement, it generally does not evaluate whether public participation in the deliberative process leads to better governing decisions. Given that some of the mechanisms of public engagement and participation are time-consuming and resource-intensive, additional research on the costs and benefits of public engagement, from the viewpoint of various stakeholders, could be highly useful to local governments. In the following chapters, I attempt to explore some of these questions in the context of EngageRoseville, and determine whether it should serve as a model for how other local governments can successfully facilitate public engagement and increase participation.



## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Methodology for Evaluating EngageRoseville**

In this chapter, I discuss the methods that I use to evaluate the success of EngageRoseville as a public engagement effort. My study is qualitative in nature, and relies on publicly available reports and video recordings regarding Roseville's planning and implementation of EngageRoseville, as well as interviews with key staff who were involved in the process.

As discussed in the Introduction, EngageRoseville was an 18-month effort from 2017 to 2018 to involve local community members, businesses, and other stakeholders who are affected by the services that the city provides. Roseville used various methods to involve the public, which are documented in reports and recommendations to the city council, podcasts and videos posted on the city's website, recorded meetings of the community advisory committee, and the public results of budget surveys and online budget prioritization exercises. I reviewed these records to describe the various ways that city officials implemented EngageRoseville, assess what information the city provided to the public, and ultimately determine how their efforts impacted the budget process.

To supplement the findings from public records, I interviewed Megan MacPherson, who is the Deputy City Manager of Roseville and Brian Jacobson, the city's Public Information Officer, to develop a better understanding of why the city council decided to involve the public in the budget process, what challenges staff encountered during the process, and their thoughts on how the process impacted the final budget. Both

interviewees were instrumental in developing, organizing, and executing EngageRoseville. They provided valuable insight on why the city's public outreach effort was instigated and how it was expanded and adapted throughout the process.

As a framework for my assessment, I rely on the Institute for Local Government's "TIERS Framework for Practical Public Engagement at the Local Level", and compare it to how Roseville facilitated public participation in the development of the city's fiscal year 2019-20 budget. In the following pages, I list the questions that I asked in my interview with the assistant city manager and other city officials who organized and helped to implement EngageRoseville, as well as describe the reasoning behind the questions I chose. I also discuss the five pillars of the TIERS Framework in depth and how they informed my assessment of EngageRoseville.

### **Development of Interview Questions**

Although Roseville provided an abundance of information to the public about how EngageRoseville worked and its ultimate outcomes, I wanted to supplement this with the perspective of city staff in order to strengthen my analysis. Specifically, I hoped to understand why the city decided to implement EngageRoseville when it did and determine what lessons other local governments can take away from Roseville's experience. The first set of questions is designed to provide more information about the circumstances that led to EngageRoseville and what the city hoped to accomplish through its efforts. The questions I asked were as follows:

- Why did the City of Roseville decide to engage the public in its budgeting process for 2019-20? What did the city hope to accomplish?

- Did Roseville conduct any self-assessment of its existing public engagement resources and capacity prior to developing EngageRoseville?
- What was Roseville's process for engaging the public in government operations prior to EngageRoseville?
- How did the city determine the components of the public engagement process, such as who would facilitate and the combination of methods it would use to reach out to the public?
- What challenges did city staff anticipate? Were any of them unique to Roseville?
- Were there any local laws or rules that you had to consider?

In the second set of questions, I wanted to get city staff's perspective on the process itself, including discussing any issues that arose and feedback they received from participants. I also wanted to get a better understanding of participants' feedback about the overall process. The questions that I asked related to these were:

- What were some of the challenges or limitations that you encountered as part of EngageRoseville? Were they what you had anticipated?
- How much effort, resources, and time did the city put into EngageRoseville?
- Was the actual level of participation from the public in the surveys, Balancing Act, and Community Conversations more or less than you had anticipated?
- Which of the strategies that Roseville employed was most informative or impactful for the city's budget?
- Did the city have to make any changes or adjustments to its approach during the process?

The last set of questions is intended to ask city staff to reflect on their experience and discuss the lessons and takeaways that staff learned. I also

- Did staff follow up with participants after the process to solicit their feedback? If so, what feedback did you receive? For example, from members of city departments or from the public?
- What do you think worked well, and what would you change about the process?
- Has the EngageRoseville affected the city's own internal policies and procedures? If so, can you elaborate?
- Are there plans to incorporate EngageRoseville into the regular budgeting process?

I also interviewed Dion Louthan, who was the Director of the Parks, Recreation, and Libraries department during EngageRoseville. In interviewing Mr. Louthan, I focused on his experience of the engagement process as a participant and collaborator. The questions I asked were as follows:

- Can you describe your role in EngageRoseville?
- How did your department and the city work together to plan your involvement?
- What aspects of the process were you involved in--for example, community conversation, informational videos, surveys, or a combination of these?
- How did the parks and recreation department conduct public outreach to EngageRoseville?
- What issues were the parks and recreation department facing at the time of EngageRoseville? What did you want to communicate to the public?

- Do you think that EngageRoseville enabled you to communicate your message effectively?
- As a participant, what do you think worked well in EngageRoseville? Is there anything that you think could have been improved or implemented differently?
- What feedback did you receive from the public about the process?
- What were some of your takeaways from EngageRoseville? Either regarding the residents that you interacted with or regarding the process?
- Has the experience impacted the way that the Parks and Recreation Department conducts public engagement? If so, how?

### **TIERS Public Engagement Framework**

The interviews with city staff and participants supplemented the publicly available records and meeting recordings that I reviewed, creating a more complete and nuanced picture of EngageRoseville and what participants took away from the process. I then analyzed this process against the Institute for Local Government's TIERS Framework.

As discussed in the previous chapter, ILG developed the TIERS Framework as a guideline of best practices to support local governments in planning and implementing their own public engagement efforts. By conducting a statewide survey of local elected officials and staff, ILG found that most respondents did not believe that they had adequate resources or expertise to effectively engage their constituents. In response, ILG developed TIERS to provide a step-by-step guide for any local government to plan and implement effective public engagement, regardless of the size of the local government, its

financial resources, or the scope of its public engagement goals. “TIERS” stands for the five pillars that lead to effective public engagement: Think, Initiate, Engage, Review, and Shift (TIERS Public Engagement Framework).

### *Think*

As a first step, ILG encourages local officials to contemplate the various components and factors that will make up their proposed public engagement process, such as how long the process will last, the targeted population that local officials will reach out to, the level of input they want from the public, components of in-person engagement, and who in the local government will lead the process. Local governments should then consider what approach they will take given their existing policies and practices regarding public engagement. As part of the Think process, local officials and city staff should identify and begin reaching out to the various stakeholder groups and organizations in the community.

### *Initiate*

During this stage, local officials will draft and formalize the details of their public engagement approach. They will choose a combination of strategies to implement, ranging from large, in-person townhall meetings, smaller focus groups, to digital efforts such as blogs, online surveys, and interactive community platforms. Building on the list of stakeholders they identified in the Think stage, local officials will then decide how they will communicate with these groups given their available resources. ILG suggests options such as in-person community outreach, email blasts and press releases, and social media outreach. Finally, at this stage local officials and city staff should be aware of

federal, state, and local laws that they are required to adhere to and any political context that may impact the process, such as an upcoming election.

### *Engage*

When implementing their outreach efforts, local officials and staff must ensure that their intended populations are authentically represented—that is, that they will have a legitimate role in the process. They must then execute the public engagement approach that they designed in the earlier steps. As one of the most critical steps in this stage, local officials should regularly check in with community leaders to understand and respond to any challenges that occur during the implementation process.

### *Review*

After the conclusion of its public engagement efforts, local officials and staff should look back and evaluate what worked and what could be improved in a future approach. For example, they should determine whether additional training is needed in order for staff to effectively facilitate meetings or whether a consultant should be brought on-board to assist with digital outreach efforts.

### *Shift*

ILG encourages local officials and staff to consider changes that will facilitate effective public engagement in the future. For example, the agency can commit to training staff in public engagement policy and communication strategies. It can reach out to consultants who can provide assistance in developing future public engagement plans. The local government can continue to shift its relationship with the public by encouraging communication with community members even after the end of the official

public engagement effort. Finally, it is at this last stage of the TIERS Framework that local officials should consider policy or procedural changes to affirm their commitment to public engagement in the government process.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology and the qualitative metrics that I used to evaluate EngageRoseville. My goal is to supplement documentation about the process with the perspective of the city leaders who made it happen. In the following chapter, I will evaluate the emerging picture against the TIERS Framework to determine the effectiveness of Roseville's efforts.



## Chapter 4

### ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will evaluate EngageRoseville against the TIERS Framework. As discussed in Chapter 3, my knowledge of EngageRoseville comes first from publicly available documentation, including staff reports, meeting materials, recommendations to the City Council, survey results, podcasts, and videos that city departments prepared for the public. Through interviews with key city leaders who developed, implemented, and participated in EngageRoseville, I obtained valuable perspective about the process beyond what could be learned from reviewing public documentation. The chapter will be divided into five sections, corresponding with each of the five steps of the TIERS Framework for public engagement: Think, Initiate, Engage, Review, and Shift. The first and second sections address how the City of Roseville planned and developed EngageRoseville. In the third section, I analyze the various methods that Roseville used to educate residents about the city's budget and solicit input for how the city could close its budget gap. In the fourth section, I discuss what Roseville learned from the process and any feedback it received from the public. Finally, I discuss whether EngageRoseville has permanently impacted how the city approaches public engagement.

#### **Think**

As I described in the Introduction, EngageRoseville emerged from the need to have a conversation about the city's budget. A combination of factors, including deferred maintenance and capital improvement costs, a growing population that relied on city

services, and the city's long-term liabilities steadily increased Roseville's expenditures. Meanwhile, revenue from sales tax decreased as consumers increasingly shopped online instead of at brick-and-mortar businesses within the city (Casey, 2018). As a result, the city needed to reduce service levels in key departments to achieve a balanced General Fund budget and to fund its long-term liabilities. According to Roseville's Public Information Officer, Brian Jacobson, the City Council recognized that the budget situation needed to be brought to the public's attention because it was considering major cuts to some of its public-facing services (personal communication, May 22, 2020).

This beginning phase of what would become EngageRoseville correlates with the Think phase of the TIERS Framework. The Framework suggests that as a first step, local governments and agencies should complete a self-assessment of their public engagement capacity, consider how they want to approach public engagement, and contemplate the community landscape that they need to reach out to. Prior to EngageRoseville, the city used traditional methods of engaging its citizens, such as City Council meetings, social media outreach, online newsletters, public presentations, and meetings between city leaders and community groups. The communication between the city and the public was largely one-way and was not as robust or intentional as EngageRoseville became (M. MacPherson, personal communication, May 15, 2020). Although Roseville had conducted public engagement efforts in the past, its current budgetary situation required city leaders to communicate with residents more intentionally. In order to have an effective discussion with residents about how to meet the city's budget goals, the city

first needed to educate its residents about the city's finances and how budget cuts would impact some of the services that residents had come to expect. In addition, Roseville had access to wider platforms through social media and online outreach than it had ten years prior, which its staff were eager to utilize.

Based on my conversations with city staff, EngageRoseville was the result of a deliberate effort to educate the community about the city's finances, increase awareness of the city's services, and gather input on community priorities—and to do so in a manner that facilitated as much public involvement as possible (M. MacPherson, personal communication, May 15, 2020). Although Roseville's prior public engagement efforts and processes informed what would become EngageRoseville, the city did not follow a specific template or official plan. Due to budget constraints, the city also could not afford to hire staff to focus specifically on public engagement, although it did hire an expert consultant during certain phases of EngageRoseville (B. Jacobson, personal communication, May 22, 2015).

Instead, the City Council relied on the expertise and the experience of its own executive staff to develop a communication plan that would lead to a comprehensive and meaningful public engagement effort. The team that would develop and implement EngageRoseville were all experts in communicating with the public. It included leaders from the city's Public Affairs and Communications Department, the City Manager's Office, the Communications Team, and the Finance Department ("EngageRoseville Lets Citizens Align Service Levels"). The team's goal was to equip every resident of the city

with the basic information needed to participate in a meaningful discussion about the budget and to provide broad opportunities for each resident to provide input. The current Deputy City Manager of Roseville, Megan MacPherson, was particularly instrumental in pushing for EngageRoseville to be more expansive and deliberate than previous public engagement efforts, having been influenced by the work of the Davenport Institute for Civic Engagement at Pepperdine University and the work of ILG (M. MacPherson, personal communication, May 15, 2020). Specifically, Roseville brought on Sarah Rubin, who was the Public Engagement Program Director at ILG at the time, as a consultant to assist in planning and designing EngageRoseville and to provide expert facilitation and advice throughout the process. Staff also read case studies and research on best practices in budgeting outreach, participated in community engagement workshops, and in courses with the ILG and the Davenport Institute (“EngageRoseville”).

The city’s communication plan focused on simple guiding principles: engage everyone; educate; listen; and simplify the message (M. MacPherson & D. Kauffman, personal communication, June 23, 2020). Early in the process, the EngageRoseville team identified its target audience, which were the city’s employees, residents, businesses, community leaders, members of the media, elected officials, and other local governments in the region. Ms. Rubin directed the city towards devising both an internal and external communication strategy. Internal actors include those who work within the governance structure, such as City Council members and department heads, while external actors include nonprofits and community organizations. By identifying the internal and external

actors that could promote or hinder the process, EngageRoseville staff were better prepared to either stimulate support or soften opposition. By learning from what the city had done in the past, leveraging its resources to develop a more robust public engagement effort, setting goals, and identifying its target audience, Roseville demonstrated that it put a significant amount of thought into the type of outreach that would best achieve the city's goals.

### **Initiate**

In the Initiate phase, ILG recommends that local governments develop an outreach plan, choose the various activities and strategies it will use to engage the public, and consider any internal challenges, laws, or regulations that it may have to address. Early on, city staff recognized that comprehensive outreach would require effective marketing, visibility, and branding. It effectively marketed the engagement effort through a recognizable logo, a tagline, and a robust online presence that the public could turn to for information and resources (“EngageRoseville”).

Initially, the City Council began its outreach with the formation of the Community Priorities Advisory Committee (CPAC), a 20-member committee made up of volunteers from various community organizations and at-large members. The City Council appointed CPAC to ensure participation from community members in discussions about City-provided service levels. The organizations represented by each CPAC member are detailed in **Appendix A**. CPAC met regularly to discuss the General Fund budget and educate committee members about city-provided services. CPAC would

ultimately make recommendations to the City Council about service-level priorities (“EngageRoseville”). In the past, citizens’ commissions similar to CPAC had been utilized to involve the public in citywide decisions, such as the development of the downtown area. However, staff recognized that in order to get public approval of significant changes to public-facing services, residents would need to have more input than representation on a committee (B. Jacobson, personal communication, May 22, 2020). Key staff such as the current Ms. MacPherson and Mr. Jacobson convinced the City Council to embark on a broad, transparent outreach effort to educate and solicit input from as many of the city’s residents and visiting population as possible (“EngageRoseville”).

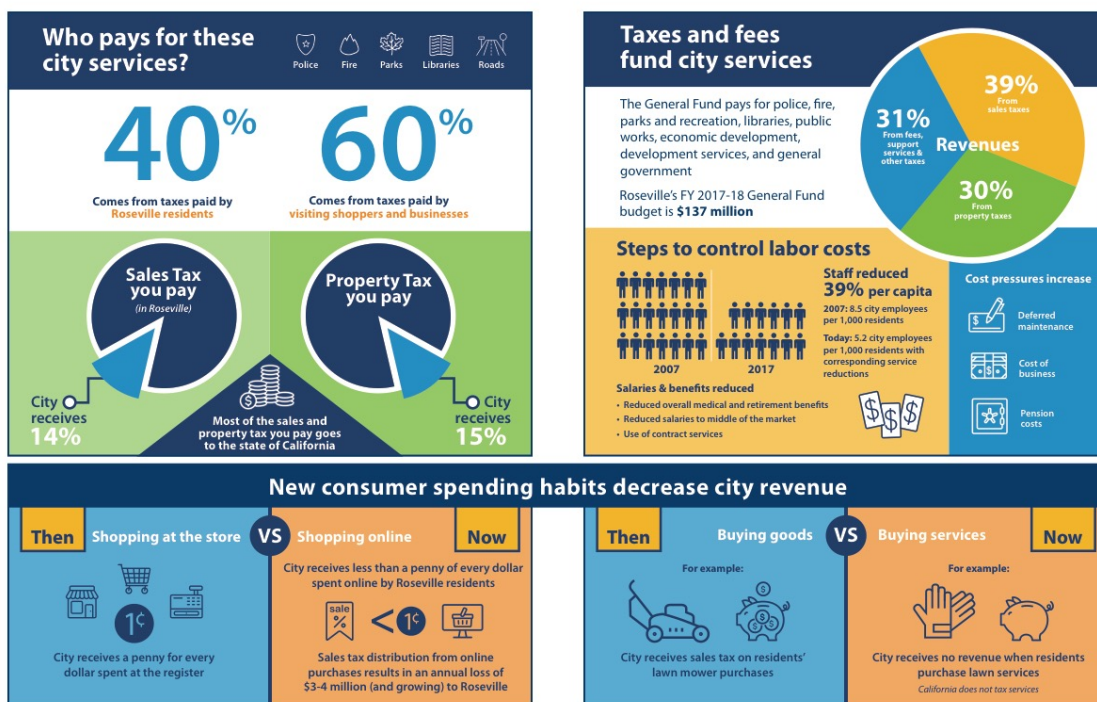
In a time of government distrust, Roseville’s first challenge was how to synthesize complex issues into key messages and communicate those messages to the public. Some of the key messages were that Roseville was still confronting the impacts of the Great Recession; that changes in consumer habits led to decreased revenue; that the majority of tax revenue goes to the State rather than the city; and that Roseville had been making reductions in staff, salaries, benefits, and services for years (M. MacPherson, personal communication, June 23, 2020). The city also needed to educate its residents about how the city could address the gap between revenues and expenditures. Staff had to convey budget information in a manner that was simple, informative, and engaging. To do this, the city created two direct-mail flyers that were sent to each of Roseville’s 59,000 households. The first, mailed in February 2018, described the budget issues that the city

was facing, what caused them, and what actions the city had already taken to mitigate the deficit (“Budget gaps persist; forecast to widen”). The city used charts and graphics to explain what the General Fund paid for, illustrate the steady decrease in tax revenues, and depict how the city had responded over time. As seen in **Figure 1** below, Roseville was able to present a significant amount of background information about its budget through the use of simple, but carefully constructed graphics. In its initial flyers, Roseville also provided information about the coming outreach efforts, such as information on how to attend the Community Conversation discussion, and links to FlashVote and Balancing Act. By keeping its messaging direct and simple and by sending that message to all of the city’s residents, the city provided necessary background information and set the stage for future public outreach. Later in the process, the city would also use printed mailers to provide information about Measure B, an additional half-cent sales tax to increase the city’s revenues.

The team in charge of EngageRoseville also reached out early to the heads of the city departments that would be affected by cuts to the General Fund budget. The director of the Parks, Recreation, and Libraries department at the time described how city staff involved the departments early to discuss the principles of EngageRoseville and worked with them to develop the roles each department would play in the outreach. This would include presentations to CPAC, informative podcasts to the community, and participation in the Community Conversation (D. Louthan, personal communication, June 15, 2020).

Although Roseville did not follow an official framework or plan when it embarked on EngageRoseville, city staff identified simple guiding principles and a clear goal. As a first step to educating the public, the city embarked on a carefully developed information campaign by disseminating background materials and preparing the way for a robust dialogue between the city and the public. Roseville also took early steps to involve the departments that would be impacted by budget cuts. In doing so, the city demonstrated initiative and careful planning as it embarked on EngageRoseville.

**Figure 1. Infographic About City Budget Mailed to Roseville Residents**



Source: EngageRoseville mailer



## **Engage**

Roseville implemented multiple activities and strategies to engage the public. The primary goal of its multi-faceted approach was to provide as many avenues for participation to as many people as possible. In addition to mailers sent to all of the city's households, Roseville also implemented the following in-person and online outreach tactics:

### *CPAC*

Beginning in July 2017, CPAC met twice a month for nine months to review the General Fund budget and to make service-level recommendations for the General Fund departments that were facing service-level cuts. These included the Police Department; the Fire Department; the Development Services; Public Works; and Parks, Recreation, and Libraries. During each meeting, staff from the departments would provide materials and present information about their services and operational costs (“EngageRoseville”). The presentations and educational materials were posted on the EngageRoseville website, while the meetings were recorded and streamed live on YouTube and on the city's website. In order to encourage attendance and participation from different parts of the community, the CPAC meetings were held in different locations throughout the city. Each meeting included public commentary and were generally attended by about 15 members of the public and viewed by twice that amount through the YouTube live broadcast (M. Macpherson, email, July 6, 2020). Roseville estimates that throughout the engagement process, there were over 2,200 viewings—both live or on-demand—of the

recorded CPAC meetings. Ultimately, the discussions would result in a set of budget recommendations to the City Council at the conclusion of the public outreach phase (“EngageRoseville”).

#### *Podcasts and Interviews*

To educate the public, the city relied on informational videos and podcasts to present information. It developed a series of podcasts—called Roseville Connection—that discussed various topics related to the city’s General Fund budget and services. The departments worked with the EngageRoseville team to develop digestible messages that could be presented in a conversational and accessible format (“EngageRoseville”). Roseville Connection included interviews with the City Manager to explain the budget, the Chief Financial Officer to give an overview of Roseville’s fiscal issues, and interviews with each of the General Fund departments. Each podcast was released a week prior to the CPAC meeting that pertained to the podcast’s topic, thereby providing background information to potential CPAC participants (“EngageRoseville”). Because the EngageRoseville team recognized that members of the public may not want to listen to an entire podcast, they simplified the messages even further into short highlight videos. These highlight videos were shared on social media with the purpose of expanding the potential audience. Roseville estimates that the podcast series was downloaded over 1,600 times, while the highlight videos generated more than 2,100 views (“EngageRoseville”).

### *Community Conversation*

In addition to educating the public, the EngageRoseville team sought multiple ways to solicit input about services from the community. In February 2018, the city held a community discussion about service priorities, called Community Conversation, that was open to all of the public and was facilitated by Ms. Rubin. Community Conversation provided an opportunity for an in-person discussion between members of the public and representatives from the Police Department; the Fire Department; and Parks, Recreation, and Libraries. Participants were provided with informational materials about each General Fund department, while departmental representatives gave presentations about their respective services. In order to discourage individuals from dominating the discussion, the room was organized into several round tables that were designed to seat a small group of five to six people (M. MacPherson, personal communication, May 15, 2020). Prior to the event, Ms. Rubin trained the city staff in facilitation skills and assigned them to each table to moderate the discussion, answer questions, and take notes. Meanwhile, subject-matter experts from the city departments circulated the room to answer questions and provide additional information. Participants were given the opportunity to provide input through a survey after each discussion, with the results of the survey being displayed to the audience in real time (“EngageRoseville”).

The Community Conversation provided an opportunity for members of the public to have a two-way discussion about Roseville’s budget. It also encouraged the public’s trust and familiarity with the city by putting a face to its staff. Because the event was

moderated by a professional facilitator, Ms. Rubin, she ensured that the event ran smoothly by keeping presenters to their time limits and ensuring that discussions were on-topic, inclusive, and well informed by the subject-matter experts. By conducting surveys during the event and displaying the results live, participants could see how the rest of the community responded to the discussions (S. Rubin, personal communication, July 24, 2020).

### *Flash Vote*

Roseville also made extensive use of electronic outreach. The city conducted short electronic surveys through FlashVote, an online community tool, to solicit the public's feedback regarding the services provided by the five General Fund departments ("EngageRoseville"). FlashVote was a short, 2-3 minute survey that asked participants to choose the three services from each General Fund department that was most important to them. It also asked respondents about their knowledge of the city's budget gap, what additional information they would like to know in order to provide helpful input to the city, and to rank which methods they would most likely use to provide input ("FlashVote results"). The goal of FlashVote was to provide an opportunity for participation that was short, quick, and easy to complete. By giving the public options such as FlashVote, Roseville ensured that even residents who did not have the time to listen to a podcast series, attend a public meeting, or participate in the lengthier Balancing Act would have the opportunity to provide their feedback. The city estimates that FlashVote had over 2,500 participants and generated over 10,000 data points ("EngageRoseville").

### *Balancing Act*

The premise of Balancing Act is that in order to convey complex information and build trust, it is more effective to show than tell. Developed by a public policy consulting firm, Balancing Act is an adaptable, online interactive tool used to simulate budgets. Roseville implemented Balancing Act in order to give users a chance to modify and adjust the General Fund budget for themselves. Launched on March 8, 2018, the simulation took approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete and was open to any member of the public (“EngageRoseville lets residents align service levels with revenue”). Roseville added a unique twist to the simulation’s design: when users start the simulation, they are immediately presented with an unbalanced budget and a deficit of \$2 million. The user is tasked with balancing the budget, but may not increase taxes to close the budget gap, since this is not an option that Roseville could take without voter approval. This meant that the user’s only option is to reduce funding to some city services in order to close the deficit (“EngageRoseville lets residents align service levels with revenue”). The simulation also enabled users to provide feedback and send questions to city staff.

Two weeks after its launch, Balancing Act had been viewed by nearly 1,300 people and received nearly 330 submissions (“EngageRoseville”). Because Roseville waited to launch Balancing Act until the latter part of the engagement effort, residents were already well-informed about the city’s fiscal issues by the time they were asked to balance the budget. The results showed that the majority of respondents did not want

more reductions in service levels, which opened the door to a discussion about how the city could raise revenue instead of cutting services (“EngageRoseville lets residents align service levels with revenue”).

The strength of the EngageRoseville process lies in the city’s strategic effort to provide a broad path to participation. As a result, members of the public had an opportunity to provide input regardless of their time, resources, or location. Throughout the Engage phase, Roseville used multiple methods to present information about the city’s finances, the cost of providing essential services, and options to close the budget gap—which included reducing services or increasing tax revenue. The wide variety of activities that Roseville implemented during the Engage phase attest to the city’s commitment to broad and inclusive public engagement.

### **Review**

After the implementation phase, TIERS recommends that local governments look back and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their engagement efforts. In doing so, they can understand what parts of the process worked, and in what areas staff need further training. According to staff, Roseville did not solicit formal feedback from participants about the engagement process because the response from the public was sufficient indication of their approval. For example, Roseville had two and half times more than the national participation rate for Balancing Act (“EngageRoseville”). During the Community Conversation, the participants gave the city a standing ovation at the

conclusion of the event, expressing their approval and appreciation for the city's leadership role (M. MacPherson, personal communication, May 15, 2020).

In addition, one of the major outcomes of EngageRoseville was the passage of Measure B on the November 2018 ballot. In using public funds to present information about Measure B during EngageRoseville, the city had to ensure that it did not advocate in favor of the half-cent sales tax increase. Instead, it was the public's own disfavor towards reducing services that encouraged residents to consider other options to address the budget gap. The city provided information about Measure B through mailers, shown in **Figure 2**, and educated residents about the tax measure. However, it was the broader conversation about the city budget and public services that ultimately led residents to vote for the sales tax increase (M. MacPherson, personal communication, May 15, 2020).

Finally, EngageRoseville was recognized through several accolades. It was given the 2019 Award for Excellence by the Government Finance Officers' Association and won CAPIO's 2019 Best-In-Show Award as an example of exemplary communications research, design, and planning. EngageRoseville was also recognized by the Center for Digital Government for its innovative use of technology and was presented with the Continuous Improvement of Public Services Award by Granicus for making significant improvements to enhance citizen experience.

The one area in which the city could have done more was to formally review its engagement efforts by soliciting participants' opinions on EngageRoseville. For example, city staff could have polled residents at the conclusion of EngageRoseville, asking

questions such as why the resident chose to participate, what activities they participated in, and asking for feedback on what activities the residents thought were most and least effective. By doing so, the city could have collected data to help strengthen and streamline future engagement efforts.

**Figure 2. Flyer About Measure B Mailed to Roseville Residents**

**MEASURE B**  
Protecting Roseville's Public Safety, Roads, and Essential Services Measure

**Open House Information Sessions**  
6-8 p.m.  
Open to the public. Drop in anytime.

**Monday October 15**  
Riley Library

**Tuesday October 16**  
Washburn Community Center

**8 FACTS ABOUT MEASURE B**

- After a year of community input, the Roseville City Council unanimously voted to place Measure B on the November ballot.
- Measure B would provide \$16 million to \$18 million annually in needed funds to help prevent further cuts to Roseville's essential services.
- Essential services protected include public safety, fire protection, emergency response times, street and public works, libraries, parks and recreation.
- All of the revenue generated from Measure B is legally required to stay in Roseville and can't be taken by the State.
- It requires strict accountability requirements, allows oversight, and independent financial audits.
- 80% of the City's sales tax revenue comes from citizens and businesses.
- A typical household in Roseville would pay about \$3,000 more in sales tax. A \$100 purchase would cost 10 cents more.
- The outcome of the vote on Measure B does not change the City's legal obligation to pay pension costs.

**8 FACTS ABOUT THE CITY'S FINANCES**

- The City has been making budget cuts for the past 10 years that haven't been as noticeable to the public — new budget cuts will become increasingly noticeable.
- Without new revenue sources, the City will be forced to reduce services further to fit within available funding.
- Changes in consumer spending habits, such as the growth of online shopping, are slowing the city's sales tax revenue.
- We're in the shift to helping services like waste recycling and lawn care that resulted in 2016 and have more to go.
- The City's reduced staffing by 20% per capita since 2007 and made significant cuts to salaries and benefits.
- The City's reduced pension benefits for new hires more than 5 years ago.
- Roseville receives just one cent of the 5.25 cents per dollar paid in sales tax. The rest goes to the state and county.
- Roseville receives only 10% of the overall property tax paid by homeowners. The rest goes to the state, county, and school districts.

For more information about Measure B, the budget, and the community's priorities visit:  
[Roseville.ca.us/MeasureB](http://Roseville.ca.us/MeasureB)

Source: Measure B mailer

### Shift

Finally, TIERS recommends that local governments consider making changes to their organization to further encourage and facilitate public engagement. According to the Ms. MacPherson, the success of EngageRoseville created more openness and receptivity



to public engagement among the city's leadership (personal communication, May 15, 2020). It also increased expectation from residents that the city would continue to engage in public outreach (B. Jacobson, personal communication, June 15, 2020). Although the outreach portion of EngageRoseville ended in 2018, the city continues to implement and report on the outcome of Measure B. Roseville started collecting additional sales tax funds on April 1, 2019 and is allocating those funds in accordance with residents' feedback (M. MacPherson, personal communication, July 6, 2020). In addition, Roseville continues to practice some of the tools it used in EngageRoseville—such as FlashVote, direct mailers, and community conversations—to engage residents on a variety of topics. For example, the city used FlashVote, to find out what residents were most concerned with regarding COVID-19 and its COVID-19 community support and resource campaign, WeAreRoseville, was directly inspired by EngageRoseville. Finally, the data gathered from the engagement process continues to inform the city's budgeting priorities (M. MacPherson, personal communication, May 15, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Overall, Roseville adhered to most of the principles of the TIERS Framework, even though it did not use the framework itself as a guide for developing EngageRoseville. During the planning phase, city staff identified a clear goal and a set of principles to guide the process. Staff then initiated a broad and comprehensive outreach plan in order to achieve the city's goal, adhering to its guiding principles to provide as many opportunities as possible to engage the public. One area where Roseville can

improve is in soliciting feedback from participants about the engagement process itself. Nevertheless, the positive results of EngageRoseville—widespread community participation, appreciation for the city’s efforts, and a majority consensus at the polls to increase revenue—is evidence of a well-executed public engagement effort. The city’s continued use of data from EngageRoseville to make budgetary decisions and its utilization of public engagement to bring the community together is also a testament to the city’s success.

## Chapter 5

### KEY TAKEAWAYS AND CONCLUSION

In 2017, the City of Roseville was facing a dilemma. Years of economic downturn, increasing expenditures due to population growth, and decreasing sales tax revenue left the city with an ongoing General Fund deficit of approximately \$14 million a year. To cut down on costs and meet the budget gap, the city had, over time, reduced its staffing levels by nearly a third, but was facing the prospect of reducing services even further. Before making a decision that could significantly impact the quality of life of its residents, the city needed to explain the problem to the public.

Clear, effective communication is one of the most difficult aspects of public policy, especially over issues that are complex, technical, and contentious. Creating a budget and establishing public service levels is probably the most important act of governance, as well as the most complex. Before Roseville could have a meaningful dialogue with its residents about solutions, it first had to articulate the problem. EngageRoseville was born of the initiative, efforts, and creativity of Roseville's leadership. It was a highly successful public engagement effort that won several awards and resulted in the City Council putting a sales tax increase on the November 2018 ballot. EngageRoseville's impact on policy was underscored when a majority of voters passed the sales tax increase to address the revenue imbalance rather than allow further service reductions. Roseville's experience provides several key lessons and takeaways for other local governments and entities who want to engage the public on a large scale.

## Key Findings for Local Governments

- *Keep messaging simple*
  - One of the strongest aspects of EngageRoseville was its commitment to educating residents about the city’s budget and service levels. It did so by simplifying technical budget issues into clear messages: for example, changes in consumer spending habits decreased tax revenue, while the majority of the city’s tax revenues are paid to the State. The city packaged these messages into colorful and easy-to-understand mailers, using graphics and charts to explain complex information. When engaging the public in policy dialogue, local governments should focus on clear, simple messaging.
- *Multiple avenues of communication can increase participation and broaden outreach*
  - EngageRoseville succeeded because residents participated in the process, empowering the City Council to make decisions based on a significant amount of community input. Early in the development process, staff established guiding principles, one of which was “engage everyone” (M. MacPherson & D. Kauffman, email, June 23, 2020). Throughout 2018, staff utilized multiple and varied forms of outreach to ensure that anyone who wanted to participate could do so, regardless of their location or level

of time commitment. Local governments can learn from this by identifying their intended audience early and maximizing outreach efforts to their target population.

- *Self-monitor throughout the process*
  - Staff regularly checked in with each other throughout the process to ensure that EngageRoseville continued to operate based on its guiding principles (M. MacPherson, personal conversation, May 15, 2020). Local governments should be prepared to self-monitor their outreach efforts and adapt their strategies to any challenges that occur.
  
- *The information gathered from public engagement can be worth the time and effort*
  - The success of EngageRoseville was the product of a collaborative and concerted effort from multiple levels of city government. The city did not have the resources to hire a dedicated team to focus on public engagement, so it relied on the hard work and expertise of leaders from the Public Affairs and Communications Department, the City Manager's Office, the Communications Team, the Finance Department, its General Fund Departments, and the expert facilitation of Ms. Rubin. From the start of the CPAC meeting to the ballot vote on Measure B, EngageRoseville required city staff to dedicate time and effort on top of their regular responsibilities. Their time and hard work resulted in valuable data that

Roseville continues to utilize to this day. While public engagement can require a significant investment in time and resources, the information that local governments gather can be useful for years to come.

- *Transparency in public engagement can increase trust in government*
  - Staff ensured that EngageRoseville was as transparent as possible by involving as many participants and city representatives as they could. One of the most significant indicators of EngageRoseville's success is the increased trust between the public and the city government. From 2017 to 2019, trust in Roseville's government increased by two percent, whereas trust in government decreased in surrounding cities (M. MacPherson & D. Kauffman, email, June 23, 2020). Promoting trust in local governance is one of the most important benefits of public engagement.

### **Area for Improvement**

Despite not utilizing the TIERS Framework as a guide to implementing EngageRoseville, the city adhered to much of the spirit and intent of the Framework. One area where the city could have improved is in its review of the process after the outreach phase of EngageRoseville had concluded. Although participants expressed their appreciation for the city's efforts at various stages, EngageRoseville was very time and labor-intensive due to the many stakeholders involved. A formal feedback process at the conclusion of the engagement stage may have identified ways to streamline future public

engagement efforts by identifying which strategies residents found to be the most informative or beneficial.

### **Constraints**

Despite the key findings and takeaways, there were a few constraints that hindered my case study. For example, since I conducted my review in 2020, I was unable to participate in any of the outreach efforts, since they occurred in 2018. Although Roseville posted video recordings of the meetings online, being able to witness the discussions and speak to residents directly may have added valuable observations to my analysis. In addition, because I did not have the time or resources to interview or survey residents who participated in EngageRoseville, my analysis is missing the perspective from the general public. Any future studies of public engagement efforts should look at the direct impact on the public outside of policy concerns. For example, additional studies should analyze how local governments can tailor outreach strategies to achieve specific goals, and review the types of activities that are most likely to generate public participation and enthusiasm.

### **Conclusion**

EngageRoseville is a compelling example of the impact of public engagement. The city succeeded in informing its residents about a complex problem through simple messaging and painstaking outreach. Robust community discussions, basic surveying, and innovative gamification of the budget motivated the majority of voters to opt to increase taxes on themselves to close the budget gap. Roseville demonstrated how

thoughtful and comprehensive public engagement can increase trust in governance and facilitate consensus among participants. The benefits of EngageRoseville continue to be felt in the form of long-term fiscal planning based on community input, a stable budget, and ongoing community outreach as the city grapples with new uncertainty. Roseville's success can serve as a model for how other local governments and agencies can engage the people they serve in a meaningful and impactful way.



**Appendix A: Roseville Organizations Represented by Community Priorities  
Advisory Committee**

<b>Appointed Community Members</b>	<b>Member Name</b>
Planning Commission	Krista Bernasconi
Parks and Recreation Commission	Roy Sterns
Transportation Commission	David Nelson
Chamber of Commerce	Jared Thomas
California Building Industry Association	John Tallman
Roseville Joint Union High School District	Julie Hirota
Roseville City School District	Derk Garcia
<b>Appointed At-Large Members</b>	Ellaison Carroll
	Pete Constant
	Stephanie Dement
	Kristine Dohner
	Jack Ellison
	Valerie Gross
	Kathryn Kitchell
	Michael Laperche, Sr.
	Marcus Lo Duca
	Tracy Mendonsa
	Jason Probst
	Elaine Webb
	Randall Wilson

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