<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Boulder: Creating a Meaningful &amp; Inclusive P2 Culture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizing Group</strong></td>
<td>City of Boulder</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Boulder, CO</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Key Question/Problem</strong></td>
<td>How do we create a consistent culture of P2 that is meaningful, inclusive and creative?</td>
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<td><strong>Sample Methods</strong></td>
<td>Created an Engagement Strategic Framework supported by centralized team and liaison group. Adopted a decision-making process. Established five strategy areas to guide work throughout city. Implemented mix of service delivery and capacity building. Added online engagement platform. Developed tools, training and guides. Strengthened relationships with community partners and P2 practitioners.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Results</strong></td>
<td>Citywide knowledge of best practices; less siloed engagement; shared vocabulary; understanding of decision-making process; feedback loops; improved community satisfaction; successful and replicable inclusivity programs and guidelines</td>
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<td><strong>Impact Level</strong></td>
<td>1,400 city employees and 105,000 residents</td>
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<td><strong>Time Frame</strong></td>
<td>Nov. 2017-April 2019</td>
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<td><strong>People Engaged</strong></td>
<td>City staff and community members, notably a Public Participation Working Group with 14 residents and one City Council member</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Web Links</strong></td>
<td>Engagement Strategic Framework; Participate and Engage Website; Application Video; Be Heard Boulder; latest version of Engagement Express</td>
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Challenges/Opportunities/Rationale for Public Participation

The City of Boulder understands that public participation leads to better decisions, well-thought out policies and more resilient communities. We are fortunate to have a highly engaged citizenry. Nearly 70 percent of our community told us they attended a city-sponsored event in 2018. Public hearings frequently last three hours, and in 2017, our city council, representing 105,000 residents, received more than 15,000 emails.

We had this “public process thing” all figured out.

Or so we thought.

Our confidence began to waver in 2016, when community members started telling us – and city council – that engagement as we knew it was not working for them.

Residents said they did not feel "heard" and that decisions seemed to be already made. As we looked around, we realized our discussions were missing the perspectives of key community members, including those most likely to be impacted. Some city work groups were utilizing engagement best practices, while others had no idea where to start. And dialogue, like in many places across the country, was becoming more divisive.

Motivated to do better, the City of Boulder set out on a path to create a culture of more meaningful and inclusive engagement. This process included an 18-month, community member-driven evaluation of our engagement systems and philosophies, the adoption of an Engagement Strategic Framework in November 2017, and the creation of two centralized engagement guidance positions.

We are now starting our second year of an integrated approach to engagement, with common vocabulary, a shared set of goals, replicable processes and a system that supports continuous learning across the organization and in our community.

As we hope to demonstrate in this application, Boulder’s work – which spans departments, subject areas and a diverse set of stakeholder groups – has been heavily guided by the International Association of Public Participation’s core values, code of ethics and formalized training programs.

We humbly submit this application for Organization of the Year because we want to demonstrate that the strong foundation IAP2 offers works in a local government context. We hope our story inspires other organizations to embrace best practices, adopt an approach of continuous improvement and do their part to combat what seems to be a growing disillusionment with civic discourse and participation.

Impact of Core Values on Our Organization

Boulder’s path to more strategic engagement began with the community itself – and we were fortunate that some of our most vocal critics were aware of IAP2.

City Council responded to the increasing criticism about Boulder’s engagement processes by appointing 14 residents to analyze practices and develop suggestions. This Public Participation
Working Group met 30 times in 18 months, and in August 2017, produced a robust report with two central recommendations: implement a consistent decision-making process and change the engagement culture in Boulder. The group’s report made frequent references to IAP2, its values and some of its teachings, including choosing an appropriate level of engagement.

The city took this feedback to heart, and consistent with IAP2 core value #2, began to work toward incorporating the recommendations into a new culture and way of doing business in Boulder. In November 2017, a multi-departmental staff team presented city council with an Engagement Strategic Framework that charts a path to an integrated and sustainable approach to engagement.

A key element was a 25-member coordination committee with representatives from most city departments. This commitment at the departmental level ensures residents can expect high-quality processes, no matter what the issue. It also promotes shared learning and collaboration. Nearly 30 city employees have graduated from IAP2’s planning and techniques courses, and more than 40 additional employees have participated in two shorter, city-created training modules, gaining a better understanding of the theories and practice of effective engagement.

Boulder’s strategic framework serves as a touchstone for our organization and our community. As it says in the introduction, the document “draws upon the experiences and expertise of staff and best practices that are supported by an organization recognized globally for its commitment to meaningful engagement. That organization is the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).”

And it is holding strong. It is not unusual to hear council members, stakeholders of all kinds and staff refer to the six strategies for success, the engagement spectrum or our decision-making wheel when talking about – or evaluating – public participation in Boulder.

We invite the judging committee to review Boulder’s Engagement Strategic Framework with an eye toward the deep influence IAP2’s pillars, values and ethics have had on our work.

Evaluation against Core Values

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.

Part of the challenge we found with our old model of public process was that city staff was deeply rooted in a set of assumptions about the community’s needs and preferences. In adopting the Engagement Strategic Framework, the city re-affirmed its commitment to involving all individuals and groups that will be affected by a decision. We made detailed stakeholder analysis a common practice at the start of every engagement process in the city. For some projects, we’ve surveyed communities, especially those with stakeholders we are less familiar with, to ask how they would like to participate.
We also discovered that our community’s understanding of how our organization makes decisions ranged from non-existent and disenfranchising to highly aware, to the point of allowing them to manipulate the system. The city created a decision-making wheel that we share frequently with our community and hold our project managers to as they plan their team’s processes. It is on laminated poster-sized paper, so staff can mark it up and show where the city is in the process or what key milestones occurred in steps that have been concluded. The city has also produced a checklist to help project managers be consistent in applying the wheel.

2. Public participation includes the promise that the public’s contribution will influence the decision.

This is perhaps the area in which IAP2 has been the biggest influence. The concept that when we engage with the public, we are making a promise has become a cornerstone of Boulder’s work. We have adopted the first four levels of the IAP2 engagement spectrum and give considerable thought at each step in our decision-making process about the appropriate level. When we talk with our decision-makers, especially about the more intensive levels like involve and collaborate, we work hard to ensure they understand their role in honoring our commitment to participants.

An excerpt from a recent memo to council illustrates how this concept plays out in practice. The project manager wrote, “We recommend that subcommunity planning in Boulder operate in the collaborate space of the Boulder Engagement Spectrum. This indicates that our participation goal is to ‘partner with the public in each aspect of the process including the development of alternatives and identification of a preferred solution.’ . . . Working in the collaborative spaces makes the following promise to the public: “we will work together with you to formulate solutions and to incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.” This type of engagement requires employing multiple methods for outreach, education, communication and participation to achieve successful outcomes through a transparent and democratic process.”

3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
As mentioned in the evaluation again core value #1, city staff is gaining a clearer understanding of the needs of community members through improved stakeholder analysis. As for decision-makers, council members in Boulder have become more transparent about the challenges they face in incorporating community feedback, especially on issues that result in divergent views. For these kinds of topics, Boulder is experimenting with process subcommittees that include representation from the different decision-making bodies.

For example, for our Open Space and Mountain Parks Master Plan, staff meets monthly with two representatives from city council and two members of the Open Space Board of Trustees to seek their feedback about community engagement plans and processes. While these subcommittees require care and feeding, the payoff has been that individuals in each of the decision-making bodies are helping us ensure that engagement results in the type of input that can influence their decision. An added benefit is that participating decision-makers become more familiar with the ways staff reached out to the community and are better able to articulate and champion the process if questioned.

4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.

Of all the values, this one resonates the most with our centralized engagement team, and we’ve worked hard as a team and with colleagues across city departments to prioritize action in this area. Boulder is a largely white and relatively affluent community, but recent community survey results underscore a growing gap between those with privilege and those without. Recognizing this, the city has taken several steps to be more inclusive and break down barriers to public participation.

One of these is the focus of one of the breakout sessions at the upcoming conference. Led by Engagement Specialist Ryan Hanschen, the city has been piloting a Community Connectors program. The city recruits community members from less connected neighborhoods or demographic groups to help plan and implement outreach. Connectors are paid in recognition of the expertise they bring in the form of their relationships and lived experiences. In 2018, we utilized six connectors as part of the Mayors Challenge project, which explored transportation needs and challenges among lower income community members. Learnings were shared through a Community Connectors guide.
We have received emotional and powerful feedback from individuals who were not accustomed to being included in civic decision-making or conversations. As we set up for a council chat at one of our public housing community rooms, two residents were talking about the opportunity:

Man: “Yeah, I am headed to this chat with council. It’s pretty cool that council members are coming here.”
Woman: “They’re coming here?”
Man: “Yep.”
Woman: “Hmmm, they must really care what we think.”

After another engagement session that focused on the needs of underrepresented community members, we asked for plus-delta sticky notes about the event. This picture shows some of the feedback:

In addition to focusing on harder-to-reach communities, we have also worked to make engagement opportunities more convenient for everyone. In 2018, we launched Be Heard Boulder, a 24/7 online platform with opportunities to weigh in on diverse and dynamic projects across the city.

5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.

The city is in the early stages of understanding and embracing what it means to co-create engagement opportunities with our community. To be honest, this will require a significant culture shift. We are, however, seeing some small examples of this. In the past 12 months, we have worked to streamline and formalize the way in which we partner with organizations that are natural connectors to hard-to-reach communities. The goal is to bring these organizations in sooner so we don’t overwhelm these partners and so they can help us ensure we are meeting the needs of the people we wish to engage. Engagement Specialist Ryan Hanschen has worked with Boulder Housing Partners and the Emergency Family Assistance Association in Boulder to create partnership guides (links will take you to the respective guides). These have been shared across our organization, and we are already seeing positive results.

Another way we are working toward this value is to utilize a frequent tactic in our city, working groups, in a new way, specifically to help us think through communication and engagement. In 2018, we convened such a group around a complex topic – whether
Boulder should create its own electric utility -- and this group developed an excellent community-focused report on how the city engage around this issue moving forward.

6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

Like many government entities, we are the masters of 200-page memos. Perhaps unlike some cities, we actually have some community members who read them! Trouble is, most of our community members do not have time. We help our departments understand this and encourage them to develop more visual, quick-read materials.

Boulder’s Transportation Division has embraced this value. A good example is a one-pager they prepared as part of engagement around multi-modal improvements the city was making to a significant highway.

7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

This value gets to the heart of what our community told us in 2016: they had no idea how their input was being used. As a result, creating feedback loops, or “what we heard” documents, has become a core tenet of Boulder’s practice. We have yet to settle on a template or format that is applicable for every project, but this example, a report out from an equity summit the city held on a possible vehicle climate fee, is the best produced this year.

Conclusion

In closing, we hope we have made a compelling case for the City of Boulder being considered as IAP2’s 2019 Organization of the Year. This application has been so fun to prepare because it has given us an opportunity to reflect on how IAP2’s core values – the roots to creating an effective and sustainable public participation culture – are taking hold throughout our whole city.

While Boulder is still in the early stages of this new coordinated approach, there are already some promising signs that we are having a positive impact. In a 2016 community survey, the city received several concerning marks related to residents’ confidence in local government. We saw statistically significant improvements when the same questions were asked in 2018. Please review our 2018 progress indicators handout for more details.

What we are working toward is culture change, within our organization and ultimately throughout our community. The IAP2 foundation has been critical in helping us get started.