

UPPP 275: Community Engagement

Spring 2021 / Fridays 9:30am-12:20pm

Instructor: Nancy Mejía, MPH, MSW

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This course aims to provide students of Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) and Master of Public Policy (MPP) with a practitioner's insight into community engagement. With that said, the course is designed to provide students an opportunity for interactive and hands-on learning by bringing community approaches and community experts to the classroom, and by encouraging student participation in existing local community engagement efforts through a service learning project. This will be a very active course, with the goal that students understand the importance of community engagement in urban planning and policy-making processes and develop an awareness of what it takes to do it effectively, without tokenizing communities. Students will have the opportunity to meet practitioners conducting community engagement in various sectors and get exposed to "being the engaged" and "being the engager". The instructor will also model community engagement practices throughout the sessions and weave in skills and exercises used in the community. We will review, analyze, and critique real-life community engagement efforts in a variety of scenarios, including: land use planning, transportation planning, community development, city budget planning, housing policy, and immigration policy.



Topics covered will include:

- Core concepts in community engagement
- Community engagement as a core practice for inclusionary and equitable planning
- A historical analysis of community engagement practices in communities of color: the good, the bad, and the very ugly
- Review real-life case studies of diverse approaches to community engagement in planning and public policy efforts
- Defining "community" in your community engagement effort
- Community-centered approaches: challenging old paradigms and bringing the "experts" to the center
 - Community-driven planning
 - Community-participatory action research
 - Community-led organizing
 - Grassroots policy advocacy
- Meet and hear from practitioners in nonprofit, government, and the private sector about the how-tos, benefits, and challenges of community engagement in their fields



- Meet and hear from “community” members about their experience being engaged in city planning and their own efforts to engage others
- Let’s plan: Understand the core components of developing a community engagement plan and practice developing your own. Final plan will be scored and judged by a panel of community members and practitioners.

Service-Learning Project

There is no better way to learn than by doing and no better way to engage than by engaging. As part of the course, students will get to practice conducting and experiencing community engagement with local community groups and organizations in the fields of housing justice policy, community driven planning and development, and active transportation planning and policy. While the COVID-19 pandemic has impeded in-person methods of community engagement, the need to engage has not dissipated, and is more crucial than ever to ensure equitable planning and policy-making. Students will hear presentations from practitioners that include insights and challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, and will be asked to dedicate 20 hours throughout the course supporting in research, planning, developing, and carrying out community engagement efforts through remote and virtual methods. As part of their final project, students will conduct a presentation that showcases their experience and highlights lessons learned.



Instructor Bio



Nancy Mejía has over 15 years of experience engaging urban, underserved communities of color in direct service, research, and policy initiatives. She joined Latino Health Access in 2011, and as the Director of Community Engagement and Advocacy manages and provides strategic direction to its civic engagement, leadership development, and policy efforts working towards health equity and building power among immigrant, underrepresented communities in Orange County. She has led and co-led an array of community engagement efforts alongside community residents, community organizers, urban planners, and government officials to develop plans and policies to improve access to affordable and dignified housing, open space, equitable community development, and safe active transportation. Nancy is a founding member of the THRIVE Santa Ana Community Land Trust and Santa Ana Active Streets Coalition. In 2018, she co-organized the first ever Thrive Conference, which brought together over 200 urban planning practitioners, community-based groups, academics, and government officials to showcase models of community-driven development in action. She was previously the Deputy Director of the City University of New York Institute for Health Equity, where she led initiatives to bridge the gap between academia and community-based organizations to eliminate health disparities. Nancy holds a Master of Public Health and a Master of Science in Social Work from Columbia University. She obtained a B.A. in Sociology and in Latin American Studies at UCLA. Nancy was born in El Salvador, and came to the U.S. when she was 6 by way of the Bronx, NY. She has moved over 20 times since then, first out of necessity, eventually out of curiosity. Growing up in a working-class immigrant household nurtured her conviction for social justice.