



invite

Citizens are often asked to weigh in on how projects should take shape, but this engagement typically takes place only after the projects have already been defined. Citizens are asked, for example, whether they prefer “option 1, 2, or 3” but do not have a say in what types of projects they actually want to see implemented. The format and timing of this engagement generally caters to a narrow portion of the population and fosters an environment in which NIMBYism can flourish. By inviting more people to constructively participate in the planning process, engagement not only becomes more inclusive, but also more effective.

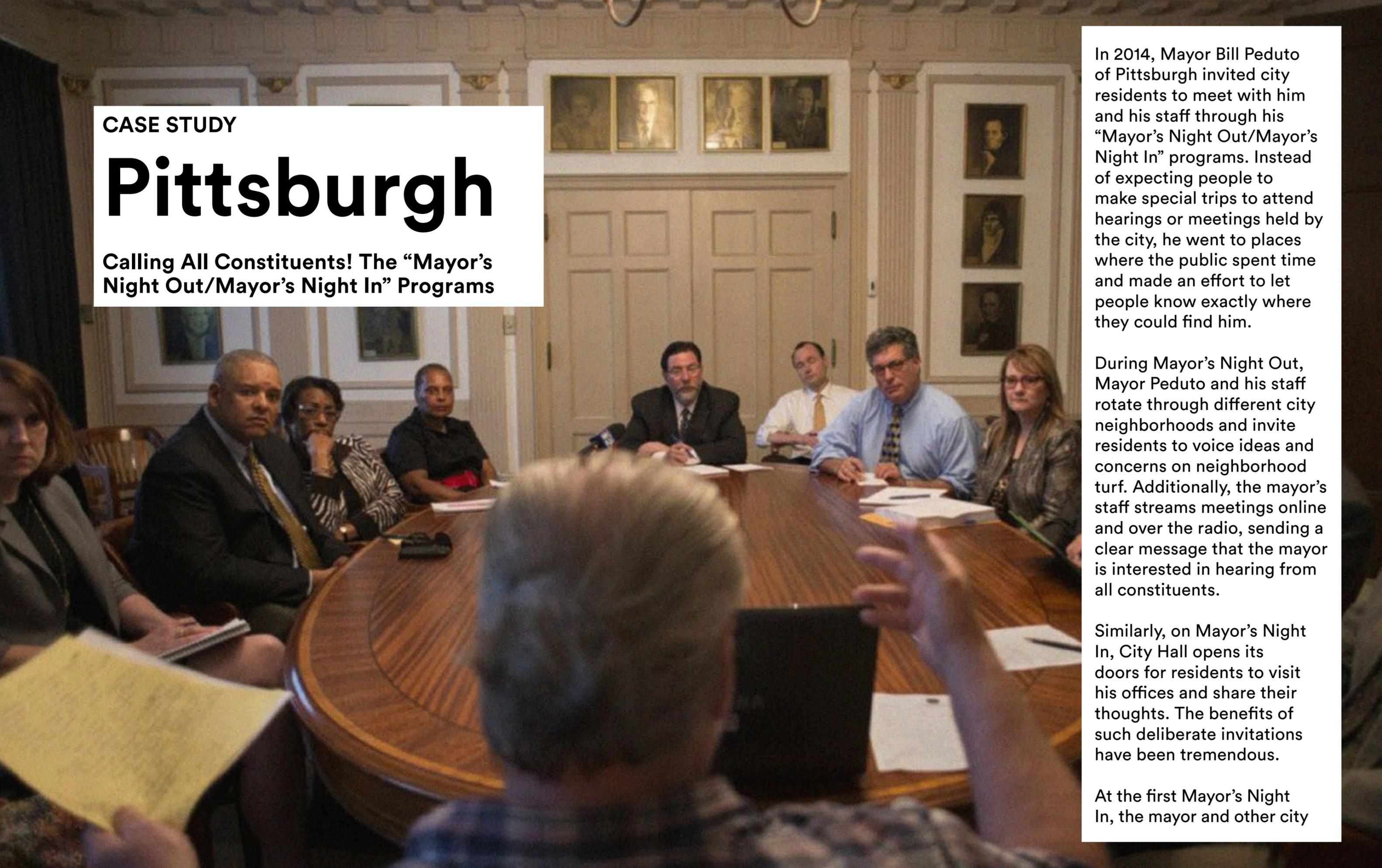
Tactics

Provide a deliberate invitation to people to participate in the process

People can sense where they are wanted. We are surrounded by signals large and small that tell us whether or not we are welcome. To foster public life, every person needs to feel that they are welcome to participate in the creation and design of public spaces and to participate in public life. Widespread awareness among constituents of how decisions are made, where meetings take place, and how to attend is crucial in drawing out feedback.

Invite participation by reducing barriers

Reducing barriers to participation is central to making people feel they are truly invited to be a part of the planning process. A park is only welcoming if it is easy to access and comfortable to spend time in. Similarly, people won't speak up if they feel that they won't be listened to. Rather than expecting citizens to come to them, city leaders must go to citizens in order to receive more diverse input. Moving public meetings directly to project sites, convening open forums on a regular basis, providing American Sign Language translators, and being flexible and open to addressing unique, neighborhood-specific agendas rather than standardized city agency priorities can all help ensure constructive insight from diverse groups.



CASE STUDY

Pittsburgh

Calling All Constituents! The “Mayor’s Night Out/Mayor’s Night In” Programs

In 2014, Mayor Bill Peduto of Pittsburgh invited city residents to meet with him and his staff through his “Mayor’s Night Out/Mayor’s Night In” programs. Instead of expecting people to make special trips to attend hearings or meetings held by the city, he went to places where the public spent time and made an effort to let people know exactly where they could find him.

During Mayor’s Night Out, Mayor Peduto and his staff rotate through different city neighborhoods and invite residents to voice ideas and concerns on neighborhood turf. Additionally, the mayor’s staff streams meetings online and over the radio, sending a clear message that the mayor is interested in hearing from all constituents.

Similarly, on Mayor’s Night In, City Hall opens its doors for residents to visit his offices and share their thoughts. The benefits of such deliberate invitations have been tremendous.

At the first Mayor’s Night In, the mayor and other city

department directors heard concerns about quality-of-life issues that residents thought should inform mayoral priorities. Previously, the nuances of these issues would get lost in City Hall meetings, in part because they weren't necessarily important to those residents who felt welcome to attend. But in this forum, residents cited concerns about shuttered neighborhood schools, a lack of jobs and educational programs, debris on local streets, and other issues that the mayor could tackle directly.

The Mayor's Night Out/Mayor's Night In events were successful in that they nurtured two-way communication and further democratized the city-making process. Ultimately, the program gave Mayor Peduto a chance to address a lack of transparency created by the previous administration. In obtaining more of the public's trust, the mayor was able to introduce his "take action" approach to governance in a more compelling and effective way.

