

# Building More Inclusive Boards & Committees

Immigrant Participation in Government Decision-making

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## Abstract

Local government agencies engage the public in decision-making to increase their understanding of local issues, make better decisions, and build trust along the way. One common tactic for sustained engagement are “citizen” advisory boards and committees. This research is a part of a broader effort, led by Professor José W. Meléndez, to inventory a cross-section of these boards and committees in Oregon to better understand the current state of representation. The research team documented the incorporation of immigrants in local and state government boards and interviewed nearly 50 first- and second-generation immigrants. The research addresses three questions: 1) What are the different levels of board decision-making available across the state? 2) What is the state of immigrant representation within these roles? And 3) What barriers do immigrants face in accessing decision-making roles? My research targets three types of boards that influence decision-making across the state. Immigrant participants represent a variety of local and statewide groups across 1) school district boards, which serve as governing bodies with broad decision-making authority; 2) budget committees, which are statutory and work directly with local elected officials; and 3) transportation advisory bodies with more limited influence. Through the analysis of 15 interviews across these three types of bodies, I answer a final research question: how can government institutions expand and support the inclusion of immigrants in decision-making roles? This report shares findings and suggested strategies to increase inclusiveness on government boards and committees.

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## Executive Summary

Government agencies engage the public in decision-making, through mechanisms like a citizen advisory body, to increase their understanding of issues, make better decisions, and build trust. Ultimately, we have moved on as the public sector from whether we should engage to how and how much. Traditional approaches to public engagement may allow planners and policymakers to justify decisions and improve understanding, but they rarely provide residents with meaningful opportunities to influence outcomes. Public involvement should go further than commenting and providing feedback, but instead strive to achieve mutual benefit – for the government agency and residents who participate. Mutual benefit requires engagement opportunities that both build trust and increase social capital for participants. This is especially true for immigrants who look to civic institutions to build cultural citizenship.

My research is a part of a broader effort, led by Professor José W. Meléndez, to inventory a cross-section of boards to better understand the state of representation of first- and second-generation immigrants in local government decision-making. This research will culminate in the civic engagement chapter of the *Understanding the Immigrant Experience in Oregon Report*, produced by the Labor and Education Research Center at the University of Oregon. Within this research, we focus on one example of civic engagement – boards and committees, often called citizen advisory boards. These bodies represent a strategy used to facilitate sustained public engagement, creating semi-permanent groups of residents, experts, and elected officials. These bodies influence and shape local policymaking in both advisory and decision-making roles on essential issues that affect our communities. We consider how immigrants are currently participating in government roles, as well as pathways to more influential public service. This larger research project addresses three questions: 1) What are the different levels of board decision-making available across the state? 2) What is the state of immigrant representation within these roles? and, 3) What barriers do immigrants face in accessing decision-making roles? Through the analysis of interview transcripts across three types of boards, I look to answer a final research question: how can government institutions expand and support the inclusion of immigrants in decision-making roles?

The research design began with a statewide inventory of relevant commissions, committees, and boards – as well as the individuals who identify as foreign-born or second-generation immigrants serving on these boards. At the time of publication, the project team had conducted 47 interviews. These interviews focused on the participants' experiences joining the board, serving on the board, and their own personal and professional backgrounds. For my research project, I selected 15 interviews across three types of boards on which to focus. This diversity of topic and decision-making authority in particular provides contrast between the boards. Included are 1) school district boards, which are governing bodies with broad decision-making authority; 2) budget committees, which are statutory and work directly with local elected officials; and 3) transportation advisory bodies which have more limited influence. I analyzed the transcripts using a qualitative analytical framework that included discourse analysis and concept mapping to identify themes and patterns. Findings from the immigrant participant interviews are organized into three phases: getting onto the board, designing the board itself, and achieving mutual benefit through board service.

- **Getting onto the Board:** For local and state government agencies who seek more representative boards, the recruitment process is an essential starting point. We asked the immigrant participants to share their experiences navigating the board nomination, application, and

recruitment processes. Many discussed their motivation for pursuing public service and how it influenced their path to the board. Findings within this stage included:

- Personal values are more influential motivating factors than professional experience;
  - Networks and agency staff are essential to “de-mystify” the concept of public service;
  - Immigrant participants addressed socio-economic obstacles prior to board service;
  - Improved racial diversity is a result of intentional decision-making by agency leadership.
- **Designing the Board:** Board administrators and public agencies make dozens of “design decisions” when developing the structure, workplan, and meeting procedures for each board. We asked participants to reflect on the various processes within the board and how they impact the service experience. Findings within this stage included:
    - Orientation serves as an important opportunity to understand board culture and purpose;
    - Rigid and formal board culture emerges from a focus on procedures over relationships;
    - Board meetings prioritize decision-making over deliberation.
  - **Achieving Mutual Benefit:** The choice to serve on a local or statewide board is not a fully selfless act. Participants choose to serve in order to influence decision-making, advocate for an issue, increase their own skill sets, or expand their professional networks. We asked immigrant participants to reflect on the purpose of their board and how that related to their perceived influence. Findings within this stage included:
    - Purpose and role are clearer for boards with authority and influence;
    - Board service provides learning on policymaking and important career development opportunities.

In order to achieve inclusiveness of immigrants, and more broadly other underrepresented groups, in local government decision-making, I argue that institutions must advance a two-pronged approach. A strategy of inclusion in citizen advisory and decision-making bodies will consider: 1) *presence* - who is represented and invited to participate; and 2) *equality of voice* - whether traditionally underrepresented groups are encouraged to contribute and have influence within the established process (Smith, 2009). I present the following recommendations for government agencies seeking to develop inclusive government boards and committees by achieving both presence and equality of voice.

- **Presence:** This first factor is especially important for citizen advisory bodies that serve as a “gateway” to future, often more influential, public service roles. Recommendations for government boards looking to achieve presence include:
  - Adopting a policy prioritizing recruitment of diverse individuals onto boards
  - Conduct a stakeholder analysis that informs a recruitment plan.
  - Focus on recruiting candidates who care about the issues.
  - Partner with local leadership development programs.
- **Equality of Voice:** This second factor is essential for establishing mutual benefit for both participants and the sponsor institution. Recommendations for government boards looking to achieve equality of voice include:
  - Provide accommodations that address the socio-economic barriers to service.
  - Engage in annual strategic planning where members develop clear purpose, goals, and outcomes for the board.
  - Reconsider meeting procedures to encourage more informal meetings.
  - Empower board members to build meeting agendas.

These strategies are smart ways for government agencies to prioritize representation and voice within decision-making. Citizen advisory boards are an important form of public involvement and serve as an essential way for immigrants to build their own capital and cultural citizenship. This can only happen when they include a diversity of community members and allow for true influence.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

Government agencies engage the public in decision-making to increase their understanding of issues that impact community members, making better decisions and building trust through the process. Many agencies have made the shift from “should” they involve the community in decision-making to “how and how much” involvement (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). In Oregon, a state-mandated planning system requires local governments to engage community members at all stages of neighborhood and community planning. Oregon Statewide Planning Goal 1 states communities are to “develop a citizen involvement program that ensures the opportunity for citizens to be involved in all phases of the planning process” (Dept. of Land Conservation and Development, n.d.). Most jurisdictions interpret this as providing community engagement opportunities such as design charrettes, open houses, surveys, and public meetings to comment on and contribute to planning projects. These traditional approaches may allow planners and policymakers to justify decisions and serve to improve their understanding of a local issue, but they rarely provide residents with concrete opportunities to influence outcomes and impact decision-making (Karner & Marcantonio, 2018). In order to achieve mutual benefit for both government institutions and participants, the engagement opportunity must provide an opportunity to build trust, improve understanding of government processes, and increase social capital and leadership skills for participants (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). This is especially true for immigrants who look to civic institutions to build cultural citizenship and capital (Ong, 1996). Even in a state with institutionalized engagement, public officials often fail to address the varying quality of engagement and diversity of participants. This leads to a failure to achieve mutual benefit for residents and affected groups who may not have experience within government decision-making processes and a limited understanding of policymaking processes (Mandarano, 2015).

The public engagement literature mostly focuses on participatory practices; less attention has been paid to highly inclusive practices that work to achieve this mutual benefit for governments and participants. As defined by Feldman and Quick (2011), participatory practices are those that seek to “increase public support, oriented primarily to the content of programs and policies.” In contrast, practices of inclusion are those that “continuously create a community involved in coproducing processes, policies, and programs for defining and addressing public issues” (2011). Within this research, we focus on one example of inclusionary public engagement – citizen boards and committees. These bodies represent a strategy used by many institutions to facilitate sustained public engagement, creating semi-permanent groups of lay-residents, experts representing community-based organizations, elected officials, and powerful local interests. These bodies influence, inform, and shape local policymaking in both advisory and decision-making roles on essential issues that affect local jurisdictions.

Citizen advisory boards often intersect and overlap with traditional government boards, the governing bodies for many public resources that serve as a widely accepted form of plural government in the United States (Mitchell, 1995). Government boards are often created by local or state statute and range widely in composition, process design, and function. Similarly, they use different strategies to achieve representation of those residents they are appointed to serve, ranging from trustee representation that is non-political and grounded in the vague idea of “the public good,” to more symbolic representation that lends legitimacy but little substance to the work of professional staff (1995). Without a singular

model of representation, these boards take many shapes within local jurisdictions, creating a spectrum of legitimacy and influence. Citizen advisory board participants are often looked to as symbolic representatives of their various identity groups – politically, socio-economically, geographically, and demographically. They advise and guide local government staff on issues ranging from bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to police oversight to housing policy. Representatives to these bodies, while public officials in their own right, are typically not elected. Instead, they serve as volunteers, appointed by city and county government officials. Few local governments set requirements on representation or demonstrated lived or expert knowledge – anyone with interest or extra time on their hands can apply. To achieve inclusive public engagement through advisory and decision-making boards, these bodies must represent the community members most affected by their decisions. This is especially true given that people of color, immigrants, individuals who primarily speak another language, and other underrepresented groups provide diverse perspectives, but are not adequately represented at all levels of government (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011), including these voluntary forms of sustained engagement.

To develop a legitimate democratic process, government institutions must achieve inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgement, and transparency (Smith, 2009). As defined by Smith, inclusiveness is achieving equality within political participation through both presence and voice in the process, a concept we will build upon in this research. The next feature, popular control, is achieved through the ability of participants to influence decision-making, and importantly, the process of decision-making. Considered judgement requires that participants have the opportunity to build their own understanding of an issue, both through deliberation with other participants, as well as more technical knowledge shared in the process. Finally, transparency is achieved when the democratic process is open and available to the broader community (2009). These four features must be built into the design of the process in order to achieve mutual benefit for both government agencies and participants. When agencies fail to achieve these four features, community members lose trust in both the process and outcomes. In a recent example, the 4J School District, serving parts of Eugene, Oregon, drew criticism in the community for its all-white school board in a district where one in seven students identifies as Latino or Hispanic. Already the 4J Board lacks inclusiveness – people of color are not represented, nor do they have voice within district decision-making. In August 2019, the Board voted to fill a vacancy with a former white male board member who was voted out of office in the previous election. This move undermined popular control, with a small group of powerful decision-makers putting back into office an individual who had previously been rejected by voters. Teachers and residents in the district criticized the lack of racial diversity, as the Board chose not to fill the position with a qualified Latina woman who was in the top three finalists (Register Guard). These important stakeholders could not achieve considered judgement through deliberation about the qualifications of the candidates. Without discussion, the decision lacked transparency and undermined community trust.

The decision in Eugene is one example of many Oregon government boards that encounter a tension in how they represent the broader community. In the case of the 4J School District, the board members relied on “trustee representation” that trusts members to make decisions for the general public good (Mitchell, 1995), without achieving representation that reflects the demographic diversity of the community they serve. In 2018, a Sightline Institute report analyzed racial diversity on 60 elected bodies in Oregon – 20 cities, 20 counties, and 20 school boards. Seven of the 20 studied had zero city councilors of color. Even in racially diverse Woodburn and Umatilla, only one councilor in each city is a person of color. When looking at counties, 18 of 20 in the study did not have any people of color as commissioners. The report found that school boards (and schools themselves) were more racially diverse than either city or county elected officials, yet still Milton-Freewater and Salem-Keizer have all-white school boards in very racially diverse communities (2018). In the case of 4J School District in

Eugene, the Board had an opportunity to improve representation through an appointment, a different process than a typical election where all-white candidates may be the norm. While demographic diversity data is more available for elected positions across the state, no comparable assessment of local government boards and committees has been attempted.

Often in discussions of diversity within government institutions, there is a focus on race and ethnicity, gender, age, or other demographics broadly. Research points to the importance of traditionally underrepresented groups, whether people of color, women and gender non-conforming individuals, people with disabilities, and others achieving both representation and influence within public processes and decision-making. In this research, we focus on one group of traditionally underrepresented residents – immigrants. Immigrants are a diverse group in themselves, and the participants in this research reflect a diversity of country of origin, race and ethnicity, gender, and language proficiency. These intersecting identities may point to more access and privilege, such as an English-speaking, white male immigrant, or more marginalization, such as a Spanish-speaking, Latino, female immigrant. We broadly look to immigrants as one example of an underrepresented group in public decision-making but recognize the need for nuance in efforts to engage with and represent various groups. Immigrants serve as a particularly illustrative research group as they rely on civic society to construct an understanding of norms and establish their own cultural citizenship (Ong, 1996). Cultural citizenship is the important process of negotiating with the practices and beliefs that establish a sense of belonging within civil society. For immigrants, this includes both an internal process of ‘self-making’ as well as shaping external relationships with civil society (1996). Additionally, immigrants face obstacles to traditional public engagement, often grounded in the design of the participatory environment such as language or expectations of normative behavior (Meléndez & Parker, 2019).

My research is a part of a broader effort, led by Professor José W. Meléndez, to inventory a cross-section of boards and committees to better understand the current state of representation of immigrants in Oregon. The research team documented the incorporation of immigrants in local and state government boards and interviewed 47 first- and second-generation immigrants by the time of this publication. The research addresses three questions: 1) what are the different levels of board decision-making available across the state? 2) What is the state of immigrant representation within these roles? And 3) what barriers do immigrants face in accessing decision-making roles?

My research targets three types of boards that influence decision-making across the state. Immigrant participants represent a variety of local and statewide groups across 1) school district boards, which serve as governing bodies with broad decision-making authority; 2) budget committees, which are statutory and work directly with local elected officials; and 3) transportation advisory bodies with more limited influence. Through the analysis of 15 interviews across these three types of bodies, I seek to answer a final research question: how can government institutions expand and support the inclusion of immigrants in decision-making roles? This report shares findings and suggested strategies to increase inclusiveness on boards and committees. The findings provide guidance to local governments in creating pathways for more diverse participation and implementing effective governance strategies. Recommended strategies focus on the importance of moving from diverse participation to inclusion practices (as defined by Feldman & Quick, 2011) within the boards and committees, as well as strategies to design decision-making processes that value and elevate a diversity of voices.



## Chapter 2. Literature Review

Government boards are a long-established mechanism within U.S. governance that provide groups of citizens the opportunity to represent the public good more effectively than politically driven elected officials or staff administrators (Mitchell, 1995). Local governments now widely accept the premise that the public should be involved in governance, shifting the debate to how best to engage community members and how deeply to engage them (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). The involvement of residents in governance takes many forms – boards and commissions grounded established in statute, long-term engagement in more advisory capacities, and short-term engagement on specific projects. Not only should governments engage the public in decision-making at all of these levels, those involved should be socially, demographically, and politically representative of the broader community. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) states a core belief to “ensur[e] that local governments and the association reflect the diversity of the communities we serve” (ICMA, 2011). Additionally, diverse groups are more effective problem solvers, and more representative governments make residents feel more welcome, build trust in processes and systems, and encourage further civic engagement (Smith, 2019). While both researchers and practitioners agree on the benefits of diverse and direct public engagement, many have found that traditional methods of engagement are less than effective. Typical public engagement methods don’t satisfy the public that they are being heard and don’t significantly impact decision-making by local officials (Innes & Booher, 2004). Significant research exists on more effective strategies to engage the public in local decision-making, as well as the importance of engaging diverse groups, especially traditionally underrepresented populations. Similarly, there is extensive research as to the benefits of a representative bureaucracy that ensures the professionals carrying out plans and projects actively represent their diverse identities. The research presented here exists at the intersection of these two areas – how to best achieve diverse representation in bureaucratic decision-making through an inclusive, deliberative, and long-term public engagement strategy such as a citizen advisory or government board.

### *2.1. Defining Inclusive Public Engagement*

First, it is important to define public engagement for the purposes of this research. Practitioners and scholars alike use a variety of terms, often confusing the meaning or intent of various strategies (Hafer & Ran, 2016; Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). Nabatchi & Amsler define direct public engagement as “in-person and online processes that allow members of the public (i.e., those not holding office or administrative positions in government) in a county, city, town, village, or municipal authority to personally and actively exercise voice such that their ideas, concerns, needs, interests, and values are incorporated into governmental decision-making” (2014, p. 655). The long history of public engagement illuminates a disconnect between such participation and true influence in decision-making. While traditional participatory engagement practices look to build community support for specific policies and programs, Feldman & Quick define a different approach, inclusive practices that focus on achieving mutual benefit for both governments and participants (2011). Scholars point to the failure of administrators to create inclusive spaces where affected and underrepresented communities can not only influence decisions, but shape process and policy through sustained engagement (Feldman & Quick, 2011; Karner & Marcantonio, 2018). Inclusive public engagement practices are a continuous process of co-production, through which participants not only respond to projects and proposals but are invited to define the problem and potential solutions through long-term deliberation. As a “high inclusion” public involvement tactic, the strength of a citizen advisory board is the opportunity to participate in deep deliberation to reach well-rounded decisions (Feldman & Quick, 2011).

In his analysis on democratic innovations, Smith describes a tension between democratic decision-making and deliberation. Deliberation is often conducted between residents in places of civic society. Conversely, decision-making typically takes place within our government institutions. These two important mechanisms of democracy take place both within different spheres and on different timelines, as thoughtful deliberation may not fit within the bounds of an efficient decision. Smith argues that deliberation prior to a decision creates a more legitimate and reflective process by embedding decision-making within participatory institutions (2009). Such a democratic innovation, in this case a well-designed citizen advisory process, will strive to achieve four democratic goods: inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgement, and transparency. Inclusiveness considers both who is present and invited to participate, and whether marginalized groups have an equal voice and influence in the process (2009). Increasing presence over traditionally underrepresented groups relies on incentive structures that invite and encourage participation. These structures are specific to the selection mechanism, whether it is open to all or a more restricted process (2009). Smith argues that equality of voice is achieved through two important mechanisms. First, critical mass – a traditionally underrepresented social group must have enough participation to improve deliberation and build enough confidence to meaningfully contribute to decision-making. Second, the sponsor institution must invest in an effective model of group facilitation that ensures all voices within the group are heard (2009). While Smith mostly focuses his analysis on state or regional democratic innovations, they also have relevance on more localized democratic processes. In line with Smith’s definition of inclusive democratic processes, our definition of direct public engagement must be expanded to require sustained engagement and deliberation between participants. As Smith outlines, an inclusive democratic innovation, such as citizen advisory boards, requires that for the presence of traditionally underrepresented groups to have equality of voice within decision-making, an intentional structure needs to be provided to support their abilities to serve to create and influence policy (Hafer & Ran, 2016; Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014).

## *2.2. Effective Design of Public Engagement*

When community members are centered within an issue and have substantial influence alongside technical experts within government, participation efforts are seen as more authentic and worth their time (Hafer & Ran, 2016; Innes & Booher, 2004). The use of advisory boards to influence local decision-making, when designed with purpose, can fall into this form of authentic direct engagement. In order to achieve some level of authenticity, public engagement requires iterative design that responds to the specific goals of both the sponsor institution and participants in mind, rather than a template process used within every situation (Bryson et al, 2013). Popularly used by practitioners is the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation, which details five stages with associated tools and techniques, based on the goals of the engagement effort. As the spectrum progresses, so does the impact that citizen participants have on the final decision. Most citizen advisory bodies fall into the “Collaborate” stage, in which the stated participation goal is “to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.” It is essential that participants understand the purpose of the engagement process, or are even allowed to co-produce its purpose, as well as the influence they will have. This understanding lends the process legitimacy and builds immediate trust within the board. Collective co-production between participants and the sponsoring institution is reinforced by the self-efficacy of participants. Co-production provides participants with a sense that they make a difference through their voluntary participation in engagement activities (Bovaird et al, 2016). Self-efficacy is a key indicator in residents’ interest in serving on boards or other forms of engagement (2016). The co-production of

influence and outcomes are the first “design decisions” made by both the sponsor institution, typically the local government agency convening the board, and participants.

Design decisions are those decisions around form and function that shape the environment in which community members participate (Meléndez & Martinez-Cosio, 2019). Within a collaborative tactic like citizen advisory boards, design decisions strongly influence the authenticity and effectiveness of the process. These decisions include group size, recruitment strategies, connection of the board to policymaking, recurrence and duration of meetings, and the focus of action (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). Design decisions regarding recruitment strategies are essential to ensuring the board is representative. Typically, this recruitment takes the form of voluntary self-selection, targeted recruitment based on different diversity indicators or demographics, or incentive-based approaches. Most local governments fall back on voluntary self-selection, as it is the least resource intensive method. Individuals may self-select to participate for any number of reasons, including the intensity of their beliefs regarding the issue at hand, their existing personal and professional networks, or current levels of activism and volunteerism (2014). Expectedly, this self-selection can lead to strong bias in who participates – those who fall strongly on one side of an issue, or those who do not adequately represent the community along socio-economic or demographic lines. To avoid the immediate presence of bias that comes from self-selection, sponsor institutions should engage in stakeholder analysis early, a critical step in ensuring marginalized voices are present and moving away from the typical voices found in public processes (Bryson et al, 2013).

Improving the breadth and diversity of participants is where most local governments have been comfortable in focusing their efforts. However, this work is only effective when the engagement process is designed to make best use of a diversity of voices through inclusive engagement practices (Bryson et al, 2013; Quick & Feldman, 2011). As opposed to more traditional participatory practices, inclusive practices involve the community in the production and development of processes and solutions. Participants are invited to define the problem and iteratively respond, which is even more productive with a diverse set of perspectives (Feldman & Quick, 2011). Individuals from underrepresented groups may often choose not to participate in public engagement efforts because they focus on participatory practices that ultimately make people feel excluded or disconnected from decision-making. While these efforts may achieve institutional goals of diverse input and participation, they often fail to meaningfully incorporate this input due to power dynamics at the decision-making level. Meaningful outcomes rely on the engagement of affected residents in the early stages of identifying and prioritizing their needs, not just providing input on pre-identified projects (Karner & Marcantonio, 2018).

Research has shown (2018) that outcomes of public engagement efforts reflect those who create and shape them; therefore, it is critical to incorporate diverse perspectives throughout the entire decision-making process, from design through implementation. In order to accomplish this, sponsor institutions must manage power dynamics throughout the process, ranging from the type of information and knowledge that is valued (such as expert knowledge over lived experience), how members are able to solicit and share feedback, and who decides what is on the agenda. An inclusive engagement process allows participants to be involved at all levels, including shaping the style of discussion and dialogue, coproducing a proactive agenda, and determining a shared process for decision-making (Bryson et al, 2013). All of these decisions are grounded in process design. They shape how participants engage in deliberation and who carries influence within the board environment. Agenda-setting and information sharing are starting points, but design decisions such as language, argument structure, and timing may impact whose ideas are heard (Meléndez & Parker, 2018). Appropriately designed spaces may also contribute to capacity building efforts and encourage more accountability from decision-makers.

### *2.3. Benefits of Inclusive Public Engagement*

The public is often left dissatisfied with public engagement efforts because the benefits of participating fall short of the costs involved, such as time commitment, travel costs, self-education required, etc. (Karner & Marcantonio, 2018). One challenge for citizen advisory boards is that they pose an even more resource intensive opportunity than these traditional tactics - for both sponsor institutions and those who choose to participate. As such, there must be significant benefit to participating, most often influence on decision-making, professional development, or access to new networks and knowledge. In an assessment of different engagement strategies, Feldman and Quick categorized a local citizen budget advisory board as a “low participation and high inclusion” tactic. While there were relatively few citizen participants compared to other tactics such as a survey or open house, a board is able to achieve deeper deliberation and better-informed decisions. The board structure engages “multiple ways of knowing,” showing a value for both technical and lived knowledge and asking all members to influence process.

While a citizen advisory board may be inherently “inclusive” due to its long-term engagement and opportunities for deliberation, that does not guarantee those participating are representative. By limiting the number of participants, it is even more important that the few people who do participate are more diverse and represent a broader cross-section of the community. When designed with both representation and voice in mind, as Smith (2009) defines inclusiveness, citizen boards can serve to build relationships among members, and the broader community is more satisfied with the process in terms of legitimacy and clear outcomes (Feldman & Quick, 2011). Such inclusive processes have benefits not just for the institution seeking engagement, but also for the individuals involved and the community more broadly. The institution benefits from improved policies and governance, more public support for policy options, and easier implementation or achievement of consensus. At the individual level, participants build civic skills, more trust and engagement in civic-processes and politics, and increased empathy and tolerance. Similarly, across the community there is increased capacity and social capital, as well as more leaders who are committed to solving shared problems (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014).

### *2.4. Diversity in Local Government*

In recent years, the public sector has recognized the importance of increasing representation of its workforce in order to improve transparency, trust in government, and perceived legitimacy of programs (Ricucci & Van Ryzin, 2016; Smith, 2019). Most institutions cite the need to respond to community demographic changes, building a positive public image, or legislative mandates as key reasons to improve diversity (Rangarajan & Black, 2007). Diversity and inclusion efforts within local governments typically fall into three categories: 1) increasing the demographic diversity of those working in the agency; 2) improving outreach to underrepresented groups to improve service delivery; and 3) training to improve cultural competency and work towards better integration of a diverse workforce (Nishishiba, 2012). The theory of representative bureaucracy suggests that passive representation, which simply put is a more diverse workforce, is the first step to implementing policies that better serve and reflect the needs of underrepresented community groups. With a workforce that mirrors the demographics of the community in place, diverse bureaucrats can take actions to advance policy decision-making, achieving active representation (Ricucci & Van Ryzin, 2016; Bradbury & Kellough, 2008). While many government agencies have made concerted efforts to improve diversity within the bureaucratic ranks, it often fails to reach the highest levels of decision-making or robust organizational change (Ricucci & Van Ryzin, 2016). There are significant barriers to such changes, including the structural (systems grounded in meritocracy, outreach and recruitment mechanisms), cultural (reluctance to embrace new ideas, aversion to risk, and existing networks), and semantic (definition of diversity, ambiguity in the goals of a

diversity initiative). With all those potential barriers, existing organizational culture has been found to be the single most prominent barrier to improving diversity in the workplace (Rangarajan & Black, 2007). When the leaders of an organization do not represent diverse perspectives or identities, they instill a dominant culture within the organization that is replicated within hiring practices and the networks they function within.

Much of the existing research on diversity within government bureaucracy has focused on race and ethnicity and gender as key forms of diverse representation. Immigrants serve as another underrepresented group that crosses race, gender, and class but carries its own unique implications as a form of diversity in civil society. Ong (1996) discusses the importance of developing cultural citizenship for immigrants in particular, emphasizing that civil institutions and social groups are an especially important platform within which immigrants become “cultural citizens.” In the United States, the fragmented government structure and reliance on community-based organizations and volunteer bodies means normative behaviors and identity are often developed in these spaces (1996). Part of this normative framework that can be problematic for those from less privileged communities is that in the U.S., we see citizens as falling on either two ends of a spectrum, those who take advantage of the welfare state or those who can “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” Without venturing down the endless limits of the paradigm through which immigrants are viewed through, civic involvement and service is a way for new citizens to signal they are on the latter end of that spectrum – building their own capital and giving back to society (1996). A key factor in developing social capital, for immigrants and other traditionally underrepresented groups, is the importance of building network ties. Both enhanced network ties and mentorship relationships play an important role in career advancement and ensuring equal opportunity for women and racial minority groups (Bozeman & Feeney, 2009). Mentorship relationships help to instill knowledge of institutions and norms (2009) in a way that may be uniquely important for immigrant groups.

Immigrants also face unique barriers to many direct forms of public involvement due to the design of the participatory environment. Meléndez & Parker assert that public meetings can be intimidating for those who predominantly speak a language other than English (2019). These individuals may need more time to develop and share their perspectives, resulting in some level of exclusion from the process. Design decisions, including language of materials, available ways to provide input, or expectations of behavior lead to limitations in engagement by many immigrant participants (2019). This research points to the importance of designing government boards that serve as learning environments where immigrants can fully participate, develop cultural citizenship, and build their own social capital. For non-white immigrants, this also means negotiating with a dominant culture unique to the U.S. that often requires minority groups to justify their success through socio-economic status and a “bootstraps” mentality. Within this research we consider the experiences of both white and non-white immigrant participants but must recognize that the experience of adapting to existing cultural norms requires a different display of capital and self-reliance for non-white immigrants. This difference, as well as the unique benefits of developing cultural citizenship, social capital, and strong network ties within civil service roles, must be considered in developing more inclusive boards.

## *2.5. From Diversity to Inclusion*

Rather than relying solely on policies and accommodations to increase diversity, leadership must also implement inclusive organizational behaviors that influence cultural change, allowing for diverse groups to influence decision-making (Sabharwal, 2014). Much of the success of local government diversity efforts is based on the will of leadership, whether a city manager or city council, as well as existing

organizational culture and community will (Smith, 2009). Success is also grounded in leadership's ability to articulate diversity, creating a clear difference between legal or affirmative action requirements, and responding to community climate or frustrations (Nishishiba, 2012). Strategies are similar to those of traditional organizational change efforts, including strategic planning, vision and mission building, employee influence, and management accountability (Rangarajan & Black, 2007; Sabharwal, 2014).

This transition from simply improving diversity within an institution to creating an inclusive environment that values and recognizes diverse perspectives is similar to the transition from passive to active representation within bureaucracy. Passive representation can present a "ladder of opportunity" for people of color and women, a sign of career mobility and stature (Ricucci and Van Ryzin, 2016). More representative local government agencies function more effectively, and have improved accountability, citizen trust, and reach further towards social equity. To achieve active representation, these diverse bureaucrats must have the influence and ability to act on their values through decision- and policymaking. Individuals must demonstrate a willingness to take on a "minority representative role" and see themselves as an advocate for those community members who share certain identities. Shared race, gender, political ideology, and education are all considered demographic and social experiences that can strongly influence a bureaucrat's attitude in policy decisions (Bradbury and Kellough, 2008). Similarly, diverse participants within a citizen advisory board must have access to this same "ladder of opportunity" in order to act upon their lived experiences and identities. To achieve inclusiveness in citizen advisory boards, we must achieve both passive and active representation, ensuring diverse participants have voice and influence within decision-making.

### Chapter 3. Research Design & Methodology

This the larger research project followed a multi-phased cross-sectional study design (Singleton & Straits, 2010) to document the role of immigrants in influencing government decision-making. The research design incorporates various methods, including online research, inventories of boards and individuals, and semi-structured interviews. Beginning in August 2019, a research team led by Professor José Meléndez designed a one-year project which will culminate in the civic engagement chapter of the *Understanding the Immigrant Experience in Oregon Report*. The report is a project of the Labor and Education Research Center at University of Oregon. The study of civic engagement will consider how immigrants are currently participating in government roles, as well as pathways to more influential public service. It will build on existing research that considers the political integration of immigrants and the barriers that many marginalized communities face in accessing and influencing government decision-making bodies.

Between August and November 2019, the project team inventoried local and state government boards and committees, and the leaders who occupy these roles, to answer two research questions: 1) what are the different levels of board decision-making available across the state?; 2) what is the state of immigrant representation within these roles? In addition to answering these questions, the inventory process allowed the project team to identify first- and second-generation immigrants serving on the various bodies. Beginning in November 2019, the project team coordinated with government staff and conducted outreach directly to immigrants serving in these roles. Team members conducted interviews through April 2020 in order to address a third research question: what barriers do immigrants face in accessing decision-making roles? This broader research project is ongoing and will continue gathering and analyzing data through the spring and summer of 2020.

My research for this paper then identified three types of bodies on which to focus a multiple case study analysis (Yin, 2009): statutory budget committees, advisory transportation committees, and elected school boards. I selected fifteen interviews conducted between November 2019 and March 2020 within these three types in order to answer a final research question: how can institutions expand and support the meaningful inclusion of immigrants in government decision-making?

**Figure 1. Summary of Research Questions and Research Design Methods**

Project	Research Question	Research Design
Understanding the Immigrant Experience in Oregon	What are the different levels of board decision-making available across the state?	Online Research & Inventory
	What is the state of immigrant representation within these roles?	Online Research & Questionnaire
	What barriers do immigrants face in accessing decision-making roles?	Interviews
Professional Project	How can institutions expand and support the meaningful inclusion of immigrants in government decision-making?	Interviews

3.1. Inventories

Research began with an assessment of the landscape of immigrant engagement in government decision-making through two distinct inventories. The first served as a statewide inventory of relevant commissions, committees, and boards – referred to as the “board inventory” – considering geography, type of jurisdiction, topical focus, availability of information, and importantly, decision-making authority. The second is an inventory of individuals who identify as foreign-born or second-generation immigrants currently serving on an inventoried board – referred to as the “member inventory.”

3.1a. Board & Authority Inventory

The board inventory focused on 21 Oregon counties where foreign-born individuals represent at least 4% of the total population according to 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Within each county, researchers identified up to two incorporated cities or towns where the foreign-born population is most highly concentrated based on demographic mapping available in Social Explorer. This expanded the inventory to 54 total geographies, including all major cities and regions of the state, representing the diversity of Oregon communities from Portland to Irrigon. A full list of included geographies is available as Appendix A. In addition to city and county jurisdictions, the research team considered statewide boards and committees, as well as special district governing bodies.

The research team began by operationalizing the structure and definitions used within the inventory. This process required developing an understanding of the information available through jurisdictional websites, potential discrepancies in coding data for each board, and the most relevant topical focus’. Through this process, the team identified five jurisdictional tiers (Special District, City, County, Regional, and State), and ten topical categories (Budget, Education, Health & Human Services, Housing, Library, Planning and Zoning, Race, Equity, and Human Rights, Parks and Recreation, Safety and Policing, and Transportation) to include. Figure 2 details the types of boards included in the inventory by topical category. Researchers sought to create a comprehensive inventory, representative of many types of boards, but limit the scope to make data collection feasible. In operationalizing the types of board categories included, the research team considered which would be more important to immigrants and other marginalized groups. The research team thus focused on basic needs as opposed to infrastructure, for example including public health and service coordination, but not hospital facilities boards. Researchers also eliminated very specific budget committees, such as the budget committee for a local library, and committees made up of only elected officials. These categories were defined and operationalized as researchers compared findings across different jurisdictions and topic areas.

**Figure 2. Types of Bodies Included**

Topical Category	Included	Not Included
<b>Budget</b>	Agency/Department-specific Audit Jurisdiction-wide	Compensation Loans & Equity Specific Infrastructure
<b>Education</b>	School Boards (Elected) Higher Education Boards	
<b>Health &amp; Human Services</b>	Access to Food Alcohol & Drug Planning Aging Developmental Disabilities	Ambulance/911 Services DUI Taskforce Food Safety Hospital Facilities



	Health Services Marijuana Mental & Behavioral Health Homelessness Public Health Veterans Services	
<b>Housing</b>	Affordable Housing Housing Authority	Classification Historic Preservation
<b>Library</b>	City or county-managed Special District (Elected)	Budget
<b>Planning &amp; Zoning</b>	Planning Commission Downtown Development Citizen Advisory or Public Involvement Land Use Development Property Tax Appeals Urban Renewal	County Fair Economic Development Public Works and related (sewer, code appeals, etc.)
<b>Race, Equity &amp; Human Rights</b>	Global/Immigrant Inclusion Human Rights Youth Commissions	Civic Leadership Academies
<b>Parks &amp; Recreation</b>	City or county-managed Special District (Elected)	Budget Beautification Environmental Preservation
<b>Safety &amp; Policing</b>	Local Public Safety Coordination	Budget Court facilities
<b>Transportation</b>	Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure Funding (STIF) Public Transit Vision Zero	Airports Neighborhood-Specific Roads

During the testing of data collection for the board inventory, researchers found decision-making authority varied by community and topic. Most jurisdictions differentiate between boards, committees, and commissions, but there was little consistency between the described decision-making authority of each body and the name used. The research team developed five categories to describe the authority and purpose of each body, including Agency Advisory, Council Advisory, Governing, Statutory, and Project-Specific Advisory, further described in Figure 3. Some jurisdictions provided clear explanation as to the authority and purpose of the body on the website. For example, the City of Woodburn states that the “planning commission is an advisory body to the City Council regarding Type IV and V land use / planning / zoning applications ... also the decision-making body for Type III land use ... applications” (City of Woodburn). In this case, the Planning Commission serves in both an advisory and statutory role and was therefore categorized as Statutory.

<b>Figure 3. Authority Categorization</b>		
<b>Authority</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>Agency Advisory</b>	Provides advice to a specific city department about policy decisions related to a specific issue area the agency oversees.	Library Advisory Board, Housing Advisory Commission, Cannabis Oversight Policy Team
<b>Council Advisory</b>	Provide policy guidance directly to the Mayor/City Council/County Commission on a general issue area.	Human Rights Advisory Commission, Transportation Subcommittee, 50+ Advisory Board

<b>Governing</b>	Legal decision-making body.	School Boards, Special District Boards
<b>Statutory</b>	Established by Oregon Revised Statute. Consistent across the state.	Planning Commission, Budget Committee
<b>Regulatory</b>	Legal decision-making body.	Construction Appeals
<b>Project-Specific Advisory</b>	Provide guidance for a specific (potentially short term or ad hoc) project. Often related to plan updates.	Urban Renewal Advisory Committee, Visioning Advisory Committee, Citywide Transportation Advisory Committee

Finally, researchers captured the availability of information available on the jurisdiction’s website for members for each board, including: no information at all, names only, names and photos, names and biographies, and names, biographies, and photos. Additionally, the inventory includes a main point of contact for the board, often a staff liaison or clerk, and a direct web link to the board or member description. For those boards with names, photos, and biographies available, researchers began to capture basic demographic data about the board members themselves. This data included whether they presented as white or non-white and male or female. For both, an unknown or non-binary category was included.

### 3.1b. Member Inventory

Researchers captured the total number of members on each board and how many self-identified as a first-generation or second-generation immigrant. A first-generation immigrant is an individual who migrated from another country, including refugees and asylum seekers, regardless of age, status, or time in the country. A second-generation immigrant is an individual who is the child of one or more first-generation immigrants. Researchers relied first on self-identification through the biography available through the board website. Individuals who did not self-identify through publicly available data but met certain indicators were flagged for further online research. These indicators included reference to their parents as migrant farm workers, a professional background that included work on immigration issues, attending university in another country, etc. For individuals flagged as needing additional verification, researchers used a three-stage inter-coder reliability process to review public websites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, personal websites, and news articles. Researchers sought self-identification as either a first- or second-generation immigrant, to be confirmed by the additional coders. In some cases, additional online research ruled out the individual for inclusion in the study. In other cases, researchers determined further verification was needed to either include or rule out the individual by following up with the main point of contact for the board.

Once an individual was verified as either a first- or second-generation immigrant, either through self-identification or follow-up with the board key contact, each individual was added to a separate inventory. This inventory captured country of origin, contact information, and notes on their personal identification. In many cases, individuals identified as a first-generation immigrant in their biography, but noted they were born in the United States and their parents had immigrated from another country. Researchers made note of these discrepancies, but identified the individual based on the above stated definitions.

### 3.2. Immigrant Interview Participants

Using the individual inventory, the research team conducted interviews with the identified individuals beginning in November 2019. Potential immigrant interview participants were contacted directly if possible, or through the staff point of contact identified during the inventory process. The interview was divided into three sections: personal and professional experience, joining the board, and serving on the board. These interviews illuminated what opportunities and barriers immigrants face in accessing and maintaining these roles, and how local government institutions can better facilitate access and influence. A complete interview protocol is available as Appendix B. Each interview lasted between 45-60-minutes and was conducted over the phone by a research team member, recorded, and later transcribed. For the purposes of my research project, I selected 15 of these interviews across three clusters on which to focus: education, transportation, and budget. This diversity of topic and decision-making authority in particular provides contrast between the boards to understand how the influence of participants might relate to their board authority. Each of these clusters is made up of four to six interviews across a variety of geographies, including rural, urban, and statewide boards and committees. Within each cluster is a mix of both first- and second-generation immigrants, as well as a diversity of countries of origin. Each cluster is distinct based on the type of authority and purpose, as well as the topical category. Cluster characteristics are further defined in Figure 4, and a complete list of interviews included is available as Appendix C.

**Figure 4. Cluster Characteristics**

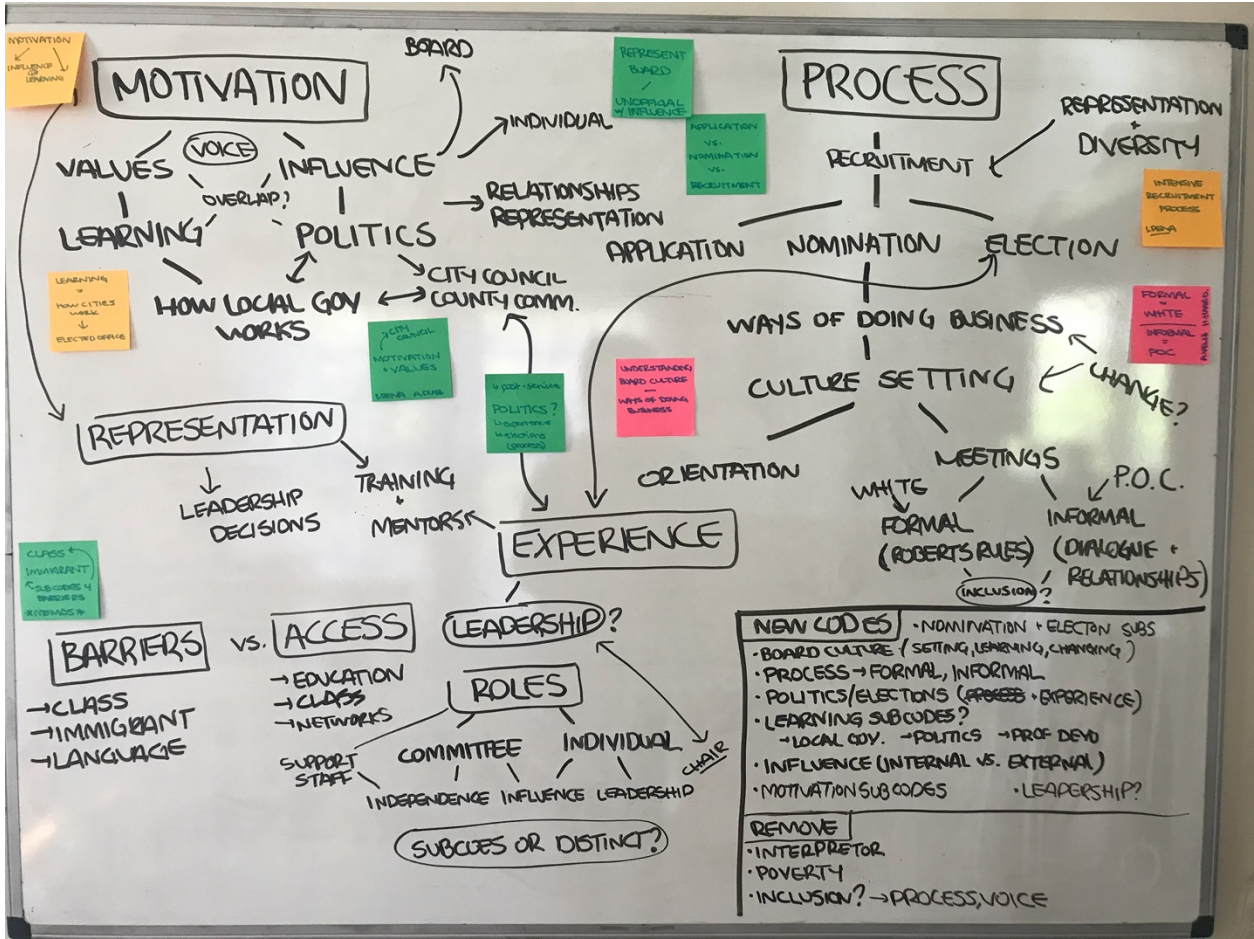
Cluster	Bodies Included	Authority Type	Geographies
<b>Education (4)</b>	Local school boards State Board of Education	Governing	Corvallis Salem Statewide
<b>Transportation (5)</b>	Local transportation/transit advisory boards Local bicycle and pedestrian committees Oregon Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee	Council Advisory	Eugene Portland Salem Statewide
<b>Budget (6)</b>	Local budget committees Local citizens budget advisory committee	Statutory	Cascade Locks Gresham Hillsboro Monmouth Multnomah County West Linn

### 3.3. Coding

Prior to analysis, research team members reviewed each interview for accuracy. Each interview was first transcribed using Otter, an online service with artificial intelligence capabilities, and later reviewed by a research assistant. Once the 15 interview transcripts were identified, they were imported into NVivo qualitative analysis software. Once in NVivo, I began a qualitative analysis using discourse analysis methods (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2011). A coding guide outlined different constructs, their definition, and how they may be operationalized as a code in the interview transcript. An initial coding guide was developed through inductive reasoning, considering first the interview guide itself, as well as anticipated themes and outcomes of the research. During a first round of coding, informal memos captured potential new codes, connections between different constructs, and opportunities to add sub-codes. Memos were then used to complete a concept mapping exercise that

indicated connections between constructs, missing ideas, and emergent themes. Conceptualizing helped to represent phenomena within the data and create “broader patterns of meaning” within analysis (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). Concept mapping in progress is depicted in Figure 5. Using the findings of the concept mapping, I developed a second version of the coding guide with new codes and adapted operationalizations, available as Appendix D. This updated guide was used to conduct a second round of coding on all 15 interviews.

Figure 5. Concept Mapping for Interview Coding



As illustrated in Figure 5, the concept mapping process illuminated connections and patterns between codes. For example, the first round of coding separated the standard processes within boards (including recruitment, nomination, orientation, etc.) Through concept mapping, it became apparent the important connection between these processes and culture setting, establishing precedents for how meetings are conducted and the varying levels of formality within these settings. This series of connections illuminated a gap in the original coding guide and to the development of a new code, board culture, to be used when interview participants spoke of “existing or evolving group norms, values, and processes that shape the board’s work and the interactions between board members.” A qualitative analytical approach using discourse analysis is the appropriate method to look at the emerging layers of meaning. A broad and diverse set of variables allowed a close analysis of participants’ own words to understand contradictions between the goals of public participation and actual practices by government agencies, as well as the values, attitudes, and beliefs that inform the decision to serve.

## Chapter 4. Interview Findings

The research team asked each immigrant participant to reflect on the process of joining the board, their experience serving on the board, and general information on their personal and professional backgrounds. In particular, we asked how the board could be more accessible, especially for traditionally underrepresented communities such as immigrants. Additionally, immigrant participants shared opportunities and challenges they experienced during their service, sometimes related to their personal identity but often pointing to broader issues in the board structure. Findings were organized into three main stages: 1) Getting onto the Board; 2) Designing the Board; and 3) Achieving Mutual Benefit.

### 4.1. Getting onto the Board

For local and state government agencies who seek more representative boards and commissions, the recruitment process is an essential starting point. Immigrant participants shared their experiences navigating the board nomination, application, and recruitment processes. Many discussed their motivation for pursuing public service opportunities and how it influenced their path to the board. They also emphasized the process of navigating bureaucratic systems and observed what worked well about the process and how it could be improved to be more accessible to other community members. Within this stage, four findings emerged:

- Personal values are more influential motivating factors than professional experience;
- Networks and agency ambassadors are essential to “de-mystify” the concept of public service;
- Immigrant participants addressed socio-economic obstacles prior to board service;
- Improved racial diversity is a result of intentional decision-making by agency leadership.

#### 4.1a. Personal values are a more influential motivating factor than professional experience.

The immigrant participants were traditionally qualified based on academic and professional experience. Thirteen out of the 15 individuals (87%) had some sort of advanced degree, compared to just 13% of U.S. adults in 2018 (U.S. Census Bureau). They often cited professional experience as a motivating factor because of acquired technical skills such as financial management. Even with impressive qualifications, personal identity and values tended to be greater motivating factors in choosing a board service opportunity. Nine of the immigrant participants (60%) referenced their personal values as a part of the motivation to join the board. These values included broad ideals such as equity in education and climate change mitigation, as well as more localized motivations of community pride and civic duty. This finding on how participants often do not separate themselves from their values and ideologies aligns with what the literature on representation finds is a common practice on government boards (Mitchell, 1995).

A commonly referenced personal value was an ethic of service. Many immigrant participants noted previous public service as a formative experience in their own leadership development and understanding of policymaking, motivating their current service. Nine immigrant participants (60%) referenced serving on another local government board and 11 (73%) referenced service with a community-based organization. Two immigrant participants described some of their value-based motivations as follows:

*“I’ve always been a very strong advocate of education and equity in education, especially for immigrant kids, children. And so, my family is highly involved, has been highly involved in education, there’s -- several of us serve as educators in the state of Oregon ... So, when I*

*received this phone call, I was surprised as I said before, but I was also very intrigued and thought, well, here's an opportunity for me to put my money where my mouth is ... and do something about the things that I think are important."*

**State Board of Education Member**

*"Well, I'm an activist. I mean, I'm [not] very patient. I want it done now. So, so really, it was, you know, I thought this is too slow. I'm very concerned about climate change ... I wanted to understand ... what are the hang ups here, why does it take so darn long to get what seem like very small things done. And part of it is just the way that government works. I mean, government is very ponderous. It's like, Titanic."*

**Julie Daniel, Eugene Active Transportation Committee**

As described above, immigrant participants saw board service as a direct opportunity to learn how to successfully advocate on policy issues related to their values within government systems. A connection to service ethic was most prominent for those serving on budget committees, which immigrant participants saw as a direct way to influence city or county priorities. They described a direct relationship between investment decisions and action on their own values. These committees pose a unique opportunity to better understand city operations, connect directly with city councilors, and serve as a pathway for service on other, often more influential, boards. Several immigrant participants not serving on a budget committee but cited that it was a part of their near-future goals. One immigrant participant of a governing board referenced prior service on a budget committee as influential experience, while others noted their current service was intended to prepare for a future city council campaign. As participants shared:

*"For me, I think it was an avenue for getting into political office. Up until the 2016 election, I think with the election of our President Trump, I was very upset with not having a voice and this was one of opportunities for me to give back to my community. And there was a real spark ... in the County for local Latinx leaders to become elected leaders, and I believe this was a jumping off point to have that experience and that, that notoriety from my community to be able to be trusted to make those decisions on behalf of them."*

**Alexander Diaz Rios, Budget Committee Member**

*"And I also thought that the money, that the budget and the way the city spends money really is at the core of city government and everything. It's the common denominator, if you like, of what happens in city government. And so, I thought that it would be interesting to be on the Budget Advisory Committee because I would be seeing a lot of the different aspects of city government by doing that."*

**Eleri Ann Frazier, West Linn Citizens Budget Advisory Committee**

As illustrated above, serving on a budget committee seems to relate to participants' larger political and public service ambitions and values. These ambitions distinguished budget committee members from others in their clear description of this connection and motivation.

4.1b. Networks and agency ambassadors are essential to "de-mystify" the concept of public service.

Network-building is essential to learning about and choosing to serve on a government board. Most immigrant participants were directly nominated or recruited to a board position by someone in their personal or professional networks. Without that direct contact and request to serve, many noted they

did not even realize public service was an opportunity for them. Immigrant participants described various networks, ranging from previous work partnerships with city or county staff or encouragement from personal friends who serve in influential local roles, such as city councilor. Participants spoke at length about personal mentors that encouraged or influenced their path to board service, often opening up new opportunities. Highlighting how in the public sector, mentoring is an important means for career advancement and leverages the distinct role of public service in advancing equal opportunity for traditionally underrepresented groups (Bozeman & Feeney, 2009).

Networks made the difference in recruitment and nomination efforts, especially when the participant did not have traditional expertise, such as budget management. One immigrant participant went as far as saying that he was not “qualified” for his role based on technical skills, but he had close personal relationships with elected officials and local leaders that influenced his nomination to the budget committee. Immigrant participants often recognized these relationships with city councilors or previous service on a local government board as an important access point.

For others without close ties to local policymakers, a staff “ambassador” can play an important role in recruitment efforts. Ambassadors are agency staff dedicated to board recruitment efforts, most often present in larger cities or at the state level. Immigrant participants relied on these individuals to “demystify” the service opportunity, explaining the role and influence of the board, how to navigate the application process, and the benefits of service. Several immigrant participants noted the recruitment and nomination process as an important place to start in improving accessibility for other underrepresented groups. Community members are often not aware of the service opportunity nor the importance and influence of some of these boards. This was the case for both local and statewide bodies, as participants described the role of networks and ambassadors in joining:

*“I would say that, to me, if we want to make it more accessible and open it up, there probably needs to be a little bit more advertisement about it, because I didn't even know that committee existed until someone from the county reached out to me, so I don't really think that just regular people even know about it existing.”*

**Rambod Benham, Multnomah County Audit Committee**

*“Yeah, it was very simple. I filled out a form. And then they appointed me, the City Council appointed me at the next meeting, which {was done as a} business aside. They didn't, they didn't interview me. Of course, they all knew me.”*

**Bernard Seeger, Cascade Locks Budget Committee**

As described by the immigrant participants, network-building is crucial to improve the accessibility and diverse representation on government boards. Close relationships with policymakers, whether personally or professionally, serve as a pathway to service. When these relationships are not readily available, staff members can play an important role in recruitment and outreach.

#### 4.1c. Immigrant participants addressed socio-economic obstacles prior to board service.

To improve diverse representation, government agencies must first address the most common barriers to service, often related to socio-economic status. For the majority of government boards, service is volunteer, unpaid labor that comes with significant perceptions of class, education, and white-collar professional experience. Many immigrant participants overcame these obstacles prior to their service on the board, with almost all noting that they did not receive any accommodations from the sponsoring

government agency. Some felt that while there were areas for improvement, they would be costly for local government budgets. Providing childcare and meals, stipends for participants, and translation services were the most cited accommodation needs.

Currently, board members tend to be those with strong control over their own schedules – either through employer support, a senior leadership role, as a young professional, or as a retiree. The lack of accommodations leaves service as an option only to those with flexible schedules, eliminating most parents and working families. One participant with a young child noted her participation was facilitated only through the help of family members as care givers. Another parent noted the presence of these socio-economic barriers at all levels of government. She considered the expectation of unpaid labor to be a significant barrier and planned to wait on future ambitions for campaigning for city council until she had more flexibility. As two individuals shared:

*“I’m doing this, thank goodness, out of the grace of my parents who are willing to do childcare for me when I am away from my family, but as a single mom, if I didn’t have that I certainly couldn’t afford to pay childcare while I’m serving.”*

**Transit District Board Member**

*“...it’s something I’ve brought up as equity on boards as well as because it tends to be either young people who are trying to build their resumes and get some work experience and, looking to gain professional experience, or people [who] have the kinds of jobs that were flexible for them ... they’ve got enough seniority ... or they’re somewhat self-employed ... or they’re retired. So, a huge section of the population is axed out.”*

**Julie Daniel, Eugene Active Transportation Committee**

These socio-economic barriers begin at the application process and continue on through board service. Immigrant participants cited the extensive application process for many service positions as a barrier for underrepresented groups, whether due to language proficiency or time constraints. Many potential participants also face geographic access barriers connected to their socio-economic status. One immigrant participant from Portland noted the importance of having representation from the east side of the city, but late meeting times and the travel distance to downtown could eliminate those who rely on public transit. Many statewide boards rely on all-day, in-person meetings that require both travel resources and significant time away from work and family commitments. For example:

*“One interesting thing about the committee is they try to have geographical representation from different parts of the city because there are different needs, obviously, in terms of mobility. A weakness that we’ve chronically had on the committee is that we’re not able to draw from the far eastern part of town, and a lot of that is because we meet downtown. And for someone who mostly uses public transit, if she lives out in east Portland ... to try and get home by bus at 9:30 at night, is really difficult in terms of my contribution to the committee.”*

**Tiel Jackson, Portland Pedestrian Advisory Committee**

*“I think [the agency] does do a good job of paying for travel for people from other areas of the state to attend in-person ... So, it’s always, you know, in person meetings every other month, and then we think we do like one conference call in July. So that makes it challenging. And I’ve been able to make it work. And I don’t think it’s been a barrier personally, personally for me, but for others that that that could be a potential barrier for participation.”*

**State Agency Advisory Committee Member**



As immigrant participants described, long or late meetings that require personal vehicles and significant expectations of unpaid labor during both application and service serve as significant socio-economic barriers. Socio-economic obstacles effectively shut out many traditionally underrepresented groups, and the interview participants nearly universally had already overcome these challenges prior to their service. While community members are interested in these valuable, if not demanding, volunteer roles, these barriers must be addressed in order to expand access.

4.1d. Improved racial diversity is a result of intentional decision-making by agency leadership.

Non-white immigrant participants were often explicitly recruited as a part of a process to engage more diverse candidates to serve in board roles. Successful recruitment of racially diverse members often took place through interpersonal relationships, either of staff members or existing board members. In some instances, leadership within majority white boards noted their poor racial representation and sought to recruit more diverse members. Boards were more successful when the decision to recruit diverse participants was intentional, well-resourced, and empowered by agency leadership. For some agencies that meant a staff position tasked with recruiting members and ‘de-mystifying’ the process. Immigrant participants described meetings with staff who sought to cultivate and recruit new, non-white members. These staff invested time in their “ambassador” role, helping potential applications to navigate the application process. In order to make these boards more accessible to diverse groups, participants noted the importance of moving beyond “post and wait” strategies that rely on voluntary self-selection or prior access to public service. Ambassador positions treat recruitment as a clear staff responsibility. While non-white immigrant participants noted their race was a factor in recruitment, staff recruiters also looked for those who were a good fit because of topic expertise and professional experience.

Agency leadership has a significant influence in the success of diverse recruitment. Jurisdictions approached recruitment using different strategies, sometimes taking the shape of leadership development programs like the Civic Leaders Academy in Hillsboro. This program seeks out potential local leaders and provides training on civic engagement, leadership development, and connects them with local policymakers and open board positions. Of the two immigrant interview participants from Hillsboro, both participated in this program and saw it as a beneficial influence. For agencies that were successful in recruiting more racially diverse board members, immigrant participants noted to clear stated intentions by local leadership.

*“... before I joined, [they emphasized] that the board seeks greater diversity in its membership ... both of my friends who invited me to apply for the board, they told me ‘you’re a systems thinker and bring in a diverse voice that we don’t hear and we have to hear, we should hear it.’ ... a former board member, she made it very clear ‘Look around you and see how this board looks like. We have a problem in terms of representation. We’re all white.’ And that’s a very clear statement of hers that we need to diversify the backgrounds of our board members.”*

***Sami Al-AbdRabbuh, Corvallis School District Board of Directors***

*“I mean, it’s not a coincidence that the majority of the State Board of Education are people of color. It’s, that’s just because that’s being intentional, right? What’s being not intentional are all the other boards, state boards, when they don’t reflect the State of Oregon. Right?”*

***State Board of Education Member***

As these two immigrant participants describe, diverse racial representation on local government boards is the result of intentional decision-making. These recruitment strategies can take many shapes,

whether through formal programs, staff recruitment, or board leadership, but they all have in common a stated goal at the top levels of the agency.

#### 4.2. Designing the Board

Board administrators and public agencies make dozens of “design decisions” when developing the structure, workplan, and meeting procedures for each board. These decisions begin with the orientation and onboarding process and flow into how members understand and have the ability to influence the board environment, referred to as the “board culture,” and ultimately shape decision-making. Participants reflected on these various processes and what opportunities and challenges they faced during their service. Within this stage, three findings emerged:

- Orientation serves as an important opportunity to understand board culture and purpose;
- Rigid and formal board culture emerges from a focus on procedures over relationships;
- Board meetings prioritize decision-making over deliberation.

##### 4.2a. Orientation serves as an important opportunity to understand board culture and purpose.

The orientation process serves as an introduction to and grounding for understanding board culture, the purpose of the board, and decision-making capacity. Immigrant participants consistently described their board orientation as a standardized process that focuses on board protocols, governing documents and plans, meeting procedures, and legal requirements. Many desired more time invested in understanding the purpose and role of the board, so as to see the clear connection to decision-making. The focus on protocols and procedures made many individuals feel that it took months or even years before they fully understood the culture of the board or felt effective in their roles. The orientation process requires thoughtful and intentional design decisions that address any barriers that limit engagement. Immigrant participants described a steep learning curve in understanding the work of the board, often needing to sit back and observe for many meetings before they felt comfortable or equipped to contribute to conversation. This delay in understanding culture and board purpose prevents participants from engaging in deep deliberation around issues and contribute to thoughtful decision-making necessary for a “high inclusion” engagement tactic (Feldman & Quick, 2011).

Immigrant participants suggested some strategies to improve understanding and member capacity during the orientation process. These suggestions included the opportunity to observe meetings before joining, interviews with staff and current board members, and annual retreat-style meetings designed to accelerate learning. For some, the need to engage in a more intensive orientation process was related to relationship-building. Better relationships among board members contributed to a healthy and productive culture within the board. As two participants described:

*“I mean, when you're actually there, like I think the first few months are more listening. Right? Trying to figure things out on the fly, even though you understand the framework, but it's always the details that matter, right? It's always the details, and the nuances, and the culture, and how people do stuff. And I think that is a big mystery in the beginning.”*

##### **State Board of Education Member**

*“... maybe some sort of retreat or training. That happens once a year for the Budget Committee. So, people are able to understand -- get to know each other a little more. I think I've had the benefit of knowing the councilmembers a little more as, as friends, more of the*

*younger, liberal council members due to being in the same friend group as them. But I think it would be beneficial for all of us to come together and to really understand who we are.”*

**Alexander Diaz Rios, Budget Committee Member**

As noted above, relationships contribute strongly to understanding, but fail to be a significant part of the orientation and training process for new board members. Culture is often established within these relationships and contributes to more effective and productive boards.

4.2b. Rigid and formal board culture emerges from a focus on procedures over relationships.

As public bodies, government boards and committees are subject to local and state regulations for public meetings. This structure lends itself to rigid and formal meetings, which immigrant participants described consistently across both local and statewide bodies. In accordance with these procedures, government agencies often instill a culture of formality, with participants describing meetings as “formal in structure and informal in tone.” Many described meetings as heavily guided by staff and using Robert’s Rules of Order, a form of parliamentary procedure. Agendas incorporated lengthy staff updates and information sharing, with some time for discussion and questioning among members. Most immigrant participants more highly valued dialogue among members but noted the structure of a public meeting often makes it difficult to strike a balance between deliberation and procedure.

The form and function of meetings contributes heavily to board culture. The balance of relationship building with procedure was most prescient for non-white immigrant participants. Especially when there is a limited number of non-white board members, the imbalance of culture can be intimidating. Participants in this study confirmed what previous research indicates, immigrants in particular face barriers to deep engagement due to intimidating processes or the design of the participation environment (Meléndez & Parker, 2019). One immigrant participant connected the meeting formality, through a process like Robert’s Rules of Order, with a dominant culture that was not welcoming for non-white members. Another immigrant participant described slow progress moving away from a “heteronormative, white and male” perspective, but remnants of that culture blocked deeper deliberation among members. As two non-white immigrant participants shared:

*“Going back to the Robert's Rules of Order... It just seems like a very white set of rules. And I mean, for somebody who is not familiar with the way that it says parliamentary procedure, right, it just is ... culturally like that's really hard to, I mean, you kind of just have to learn by observing and going through that, and so I just wonder if Robert's Rules of Order is the best way to engage if you want a more culturally diverse board.”*

**State Agency Advisory Committee Member**

*“I'm a Latino, right? Person of color. And for me, it's all about relationships, right? Just in general. So, when this, when you when you're thrust into a formal, rigid process, that's like, okay, I mean, I get that, but that's not really ... what [I] gravitate to ... I think they need to... be more, more informal, up to whatever that means to a point to and, and really building relationships with newbies, right people like myself or other people of color.”*

**State Board of Education Member**

As described above, formal meeting processes lend themselves to a board culture that is not welcoming or comfortable. Many desired board meetings that allowed for relationship building and more dialogue

among members in order to create a normative framework that is more familiar and effective for immigrant participants.

#### 4.2c. Board meetings prioritize decision-making over deliberation.

Connected to the rigid and formal meeting procedures described in the previous finding, immigrant participants described board meetings structured to reach a decision, often sacrificing deliberation for the sake of time and progress. Immigrant participants collectively felt they could openly voice their opinions on issues, but the meeting goals and structure were set to achieve this goal. Even for advisory committees with limited decision-making power, board process tends to be focused on responding to information shared by staff and working towards a shared recommendation or position. Some described meetings too focused on education and not enough on brainstorming and discussion. Others noted the expectation that board members show up ready to make a decision, having informed themselves using provided materials during their personal time. An expectation to make a decision after processing complex information can be challenging given the constraints of the meeting structure and timelines. One participant noted an expectation of decision-making after processing complex information could be particularly challenging for non-white members or other underrepresented groups who may feel intimidated to voice a contrary opinion during meetings. As participants shared:

*“There is not a significant amount of discussion that happens during the board meetings. Because it's -- I think, assumed that we have informed ourselves about the upcoming rules that are being presented, rules or standards that are being presented. So, we received that information beforehand and when we are at the board meeting, then we are presumed to be ready to make a decision.”*

##### **State Board of Education Member**

*“I just think sometimes it's intimidating when you're the only person of color, you know, serving on a board and speaking up, and the staff are all white ... But I will say that serving on [a regional board], I'm more painfully aware of that, because most of the people who serve on the [regional board] are mayors or elected officials from the region ... And so, you have, like, old white men. And just the way the meeting is set up with, you know, you have to have a microphone, they have to turn on and speak. It's very intimidating. I know that their bylaws have ... so they work on consensus base ... so it's just what the majority viewpoint is and not the minority viewpoint. And so, like, the language that they use in the bylaws are triggering for somebody who may come from a different background, right. So, I haven't necessarily looked at [the statewide advisory board] bylaws to see if the language contains some of those words ... I think it's much more much more of an intimidating atmosphere than [statewide advisory board].”*

##### **State Agency Advisory Committee Member**

As the immigrant participants note above, government board meetings are structured to encourage decision-making without an emphasis on deliberation and voicing different, if not opposing, opinions. Interestingly, this culture was present in advisory bodies without a direct decision-making role, as well as governing bodies.

#### 4.3. Achieving Mutual Benefit

The choice to serve on a local or statewide board is not a fully selfless act. Participants choose to serve in order to influence decision-making, advocate for an issue, increase their own skill sets, or expand

their professional networks. Participants were asked to reflect on the purpose of their board and how that related to their role and influence within the institution. They described the successes of the board, as well as what they saw as their individual role in influencing the work of the board. Finally, participants shared what they saw as the benefits of service and how their experience could be improved by government agencies. Within this stage, two findings emerged:

- Purpose and role are clearer for boards with direct authority and influence;
- Service provides learning on policy systems and important career development opportunities.

#### 4.3a. Purpose and role are clearer for boards with direct authority and influence.

Each of the three types of boards included in this research had distinct decision-making authority and therefore influence. Participants of budget committees (statutory bodies) and school boards (governing bodies) were clear in their understanding of the purpose of the board, while those serving on transportation or other advisory bodies tended to be more uncertain. Budget committee members were quick to characterize their roles, often charged with reviewing information prepared by staff rather than generating new ideas. These required bodies have a standard role for most city and county governments across the state. Immigrant participants serving on these bodies often described their role as more perfunctory or a “rubber stamp,” scrutinizing and signing off on the work already completed by staff. Similarly, both local school districts and the State Board of Education have a clear mission and duties as governing bodies. Both provide high level policy guidance while relying on staff to complete due diligence and execute policies.

Defining a committee role was more challenging for advisory bodies who may have an evolving understanding of their role or few tangible projects or outcomes. Some immigrant participants, especially of these citizen advisory bodies, would like to see more influence on the government institutions they support. This desire was often linked back to a vague mission statement for the board that did not provide clear direction on purpose or deliberate outcomes. One immigrant participant noted her statewide board went through a strategic planning process, but the result was strongly directed by staff and resulted in a vague mission that echoed the work of staff. In this case, the strategic plan did not result in a clearly articulated role that was different from ongoing operational work. Similarly, when advisory boards did contribute advice around a project or topic, it was often unclear whether the advice was then implemented or articulated beyond their immediate staff contacts to decision-makers. As described by participants:

*“The role on that committee is very, it's more of a rubber stamp. Because the decisions have already been made with the council in the background, talking and having those conversations with the mayor and the city and the city manager. We're kind of just there to provide, I guess just the okay. It's just like, yeah, it's a budget, it's good let's move forward.”*

#### **Budget Committee Member**

*“I think we're still grappling as an advisory committee as to what our role is. We've gone through a strategic planning process, which was great that ... [the agency] paid for somebody to help moderate it, but ... I just felt like there was sort of leading us in a direction that they wanted to move towards. So, for example, our vision or mission is basically the [statewide] Plan. Okay, that's fine, but that's why you have staff. That's what you're supposed to do.”*

#### **State Agency Advisory Committee Member**

As illustrated by the three statements from immigrant participants, there is a clear connection between the decision-making authority of the board and their perceived role and responsibilities. Advisory boards struggle to define their purpose and goals outside of staff guidance, while statutory boards such as a budget committee have a clear purpose without much concrete influence on decision-making.

4.3b. Service provides learning on policy systems and important career development opportunities.

Government boards can offer opportunities for professional development, enticing many emerging leaders to choose to serve. Participation can help to establish important relationships for future career development and expand networks. When asked to describe the benefits of serving on a government board, immigrant participants overwhelmingly noted the opportunity to build personal and professional relationships. Many noted they met individuals with whom they would not have normally intersected, including government officials and decision-makers. Board service also afforded an understanding of government decision-making and process that would aid in future career growth or elected office. Commonly, participants cited their new understanding of local policymaking and how government bureaucracies' function. These insights were useful for advancing other projects and advocating for specific issues.

*"I think, professionally I've gained a network and a connection to government officials in the city and the county. Connections to the decision-makers in my city as well as a greater understanding of budgetary processes and how our city functions and where our priorities are as a city to really understand what our local government is doing right now and what's the movement towards the future. So, I definitely have a pulse on what's happening in the city."*

**Budget Committee Member**

*"I don't like doing things until I know I can do it well. So, I don't like jumping in and just say, yeah, I'll be fine. Yeah, chances are I'd be fine. But it would be harder than sort of prepare ahead of time. And so, so it's important for me to do the networking and the relationship building and the preparation through being familiar with the finances of Hillsboro and going to, you know, city council meetings and I know all the city councilors, etc."*

**Izabella Peña, Hillsboro Audit Committee**

As described, immigrant participants point to two primary areas of opportunity due to service on a government board – building their network and understanding policymaking. These outcomes are essential for those who may someday pursue elected office or other local leadership positions.

## Chapter 5. Discussion

In order to achieve inclusiveness of immigrants, and more broadly other underrepresented groups, in local government decision-making, I will argue that institutions must advance a two-pronged approach. A strategy of inclusion in citizen advisory and decision-making bodies will consider: 1) *presence* - who is represented and invited to participate; and 2) *equality of voice* - whether traditionally underrepresented groups are encouraged to contribute and have influence within the established process (Smith, 2009). The first factor, presence, is especially important for citizen advisory bodies that serve as a “gateway” to future, often more influential, public service roles. Presence is achieved by first addressing structural obstacles through recruitment strategies that dedicate resources to improving diverse representation. Additionally, agencies must address cultural barriers by securing buy-in from agency leadership. The second factor, equality of voice, is essential for establishing mutual benefit for both participants and the sponsor institution. Equality of voice is achieved when participants are able to contribute, even those with less experience or confidence, through the established procedures of the board. Equality of voice embedded within the board structure and norms will result in a board culture that ensures influence on decision-making, incorporates relationship building, and includes learning opportunities as key outcomes of service.

### 5.1. Presence

Citizen advisory bodies and other volunteer positions provide an entry point for future civic engagement, making thoughtful and intentional recruitment critical. Many of the immigrant participants in this research noted previous public service roles as a consideration in their current service, as well as citing future service as a motivating factor. Additionally, these boards provide a grounding in municipal operations and can help to establish relationships with policymakers. Currently, most local governments default to voluntary self-selection to fill volunteer leadership positions. Self-selection leads to poor representation of the broader community they serve (Nabatchi & Anslar, 2014). A reliance on self-selection into these “gateway” bodies will lead to inadequate diverse representation at all levels of government, including elected office. Recruitment efforts and strong networks are important for all participants but were especially prominent for non-white immigrant participants in this research. Only two of nine non-white immigrant participants (22%) noted that they had seen a general posting and chose to apply. The other seven (78%) said they were intentionally recruited or nominated to join the board. For the six white participants, only three were recruited while the other three (50%) applied through general postings. It appears through this small sample that those agencies who want to improve racial diversity are more successful when focused on direct recruitment strategies. Those who can access community leadership roles on government boards go on to serve on more boards, often gaining influence along the way. This aligns with research on representative bureaucracies, which suggests that passive representation – people of different backgrounds being present within an agency – serves as a “ladder of opportunity” for people of color and women (Ricucci & Van Ryzin, 2016). In most cases, underrepresentation persists at the top rungs of this ladder. Many individuals from minority groups who have reached these top rungs must often justify their presence within traditionally white-dominated institutions. For non-white immigrants, this often means demonstrating self-reliance and the ability to contribute to civil society and craft their own cultural citizenship (Ong, 1996).

Government boards provide an important pathway for immigrants who must establish cultural citizenship and is especially prescient for non-white immigrants. Diversity in these entry-level civic roles is connected to more successful representation in more influential decision-making roles, but efforts to recruit more diverse participants are ultimately grounded in the will of existing leadership (Smith, 2009).

This provides somewhat of a “Catch-22” for government agencies – more diversity in entry level bureaucratic positions will lead to more diversity in leadership, but current leadership directly impacts diversity efforts. Immigrant participants described the importance of staff ambassadors, often mid-level in an institution, who were dedicated to “de-mystifying” the service opportunity and providing guidance through the recruitment and application process. Resourcing these staff positions is the result of intentional decision-making by agency leadership. Successful recruitment strategies will employ dedicated staff resources to target networks of immigrants and other underrepresented populations to explain and motivate public service. As described by our research participants, this motivation will leverage personally held values and identities, rather than technical expertise and traditional professional or academic experiences. Dedicated staff resources and clearly articulated diversity goals by leadership can bolster efforts to create cultural changes within agencies and boards (Sabharwal, 2014). Ultimately, if leadership embraces improved diversity within the institution and boards, they can drive culture change, which is cited as the top barrier to diversity efforts (Rangarajan & Black, 2007).

If government agencies can overcome cultural resistance through leadership will to increasing diverse representation, those who are recruited or nominated must overcome systemic obstacles to service. These barriers include the real and perceived socio-economic requirements of voluntary participation. A citizen advisory board is highly resource intensive, both for the government agency and the members themselves (Feldman & Quick, 2011). To accommodate, board members tend to have flexible schedules, whether due to employer support, a senior white-collar job, or as a retiree. We see this trend as those who are able to volunteer to serve are more able to commit resources, in most cases unpaid time, to participation. Any public engagement effort that requires participants to dedicate time during the workday are limited to those of higher socio-economic status and significant control over their own time and labor. Generally, the participants in this study had reached a socio-economic level that opened board service opportunities to them – through their high levels of academic achievement, white-collar professional experiences, and close relationships with decision-makers. In this research, we found evidence that immigrant participants chose to serve only when they reached this socio-economic status. Without removing or reducing these barriers to “gateway” forms of public service, more influential roles, such as local elected office, are even further out of reach for immigrant participants. In addition to personal economic stability and schedule flexibility, these elected positions may require significant personal networks with similar socio-economic status who can contribute to campaign efforts. Effective strategies to overcome these barriers early on will facilitate more participation from traditionally underrepresented groups in more influential leadership roles down the road.

Even though the immigrant participants had achieved this socio-economic status, most cited their personal values as the motivating factor to serve. It appears there is a disconnect between the perceived need for highly educated and qualified people to serve in these roles, and their actual motivation for public service once this status is achieved. This disconnect may mean that underrepresented groups are less likely to self-select into “gateway” roles because of an assumed need to build social and economic status and expertise first. In order to build diverse representation on government boards, sponsor institutions must address these structural and cultural obstacles (Rangarajan & Black, 2007). As detailed by the immigrant participants, more diverse boards have overcome the structural barrier of self-selection as a form of recruitment and the perceived socio-economic requirements of public service. Moving to a more proactive recruitment strategy also requires addressing cultural barriers, which as my research documents includes leadership will to build more diverse boards.



## 5.2. Equality of Voice

Agencies who successfully address the barriers to joining government boards must also ensure that the boards are structured to allow for immigrant participants and other underrepresented groups to have voice and influence upon joining. Achieving equality voice requires a process that encourages different ways of contribution and participation, especially for those with less experience in the public realm. Additionally, the participation process requires both thoughtful facilitation of dialogue among members and sufficient participation from traditionally underrepresented groups to overcome inherent power dynamics in traditional democratic settings (Smith, 2009). As a highly time and resource intensive engagement opportunity, influence is a key factor in achieving mutual benefit and justifying time spent. As defined by the immigrant participants, benefits of serving tended to fall into two categories: building relationships with other community leaders and learning about local government processes.

We find the most significant barrier to relationship building to be board meetings steeped in formality and procedural decision-making. Immigrant participants consistently described board meetings where everyone was heard and included. They also described a tension in that meeting agendas were not built around deliberation, understanding different points of view, and the goal of democratic decision-making. Equality of voice requires meetings and other group procedures that give all participants a way to contribute, even those with less confidence or who are intimidated by the process (Smith, 2009). Government boards encounter serious obstacles in achieving such an environment as they are limited by the traditional structure of a public meeting, known more for asserting control and order than engaging in open dialogue. Additionally, public meetings tend to prioritize technical reasoning over more narrative forms of communication (Young, 2000). A “high inclusion” public involvement tactic, the strength of a citizen advisory board is the opportunity to participate in deep deliberation to reach well-rounded decisions (Feldman & Quick, 2011), but through our research we find most boards do not operate this way in reality. While participants shared that they felt able to ask questions within board settings, the processes were often not designed to engage in deep deliberation among members. Instead, formal agendas drive boards towards a decision at the sacrifice of other types of information processing, dialogue, and reflection. The question remains as to what extent board administrators are willing to loosen the formal structure of the public meeting and allow for agendas and work plans that prioritize these other forms of meaning-making. I argue that meetings with less rigid structure and emphasis on technical knowledge will also help participants to develop relationships with each other and define a shared board culture.

The meeting agenda and structure are key to providing space for culture setting, but they are often determined by staff administrators. These individuals make dozens of design decisions in shaping and facilitating each board, ranging from the seemingly minute - how many members there are, to the significant - how much influence the board has with decisionmakers. Each of these design decisions strongly influences the culture of the board. When participants, and not just staff, are able to have a hand in shaping meeting form and function and thus culture, they are more trusting and engaged in the process itself (Bovaird et al, 2016; Bryson et al 2013). A carefully cultivated board culture helps to achieve both transparency and popular control over the process and outcomes of the board (Smith, 2009). Often, board culture has been previously established by the sponsor institution or years of dominant white male presence and influence. Developing a shared culture that values relationship building was most commonly desired by non-white immigrant participants who may feel most uncomfortable or intimidated in a more formal, dominant culture structure. This culture informs design decisions of the board environment, often providing additional barriers to participation for immigrant members (Meléndez & Parker, 2019). Many features of civil society are inseparable from whiteness,

including the discipline of public meetings and social capital needed to access and succeed in such government bureaucracies (Ong, 1996).

Similar to the transition from passive to active representation within a bureaucracy (Ricucci and Van Ryzin, 2016), board members from diverse backgrounds must have influence on decision-making. This influence will also ensure the service opportunity is more meaningful to the participants themselves (Hafer & Ran, 2016). As described by immigrant participants, influence is easier to achieve for governing bodies like a school board who have clearly stated decision-making authority and mission. For advisory bodies, the connection is often murky as they may use goals and outcomes that precede current members or do not clearly delineate from staff responsibilities. Participants might feel that they are checking a box, or only receiving information and deferring to the technical expertise of staff. As described by some immigrant participants, they might give advice to the staff but aren't sure if the advice effectively influenced a decision or was communicated directly to decision-makers. In this sense, it is essential that participants understand why they are involved in the process, and even better if they can co-produce the purpose and their influence (Bryson et al, 2013). Co-production of board outcomes can also more effectively utilize "multiple ways of knowing," and take advantage of both the lived experiences and technical prowess of members. Co-production also results in more satisfaction from participants when they see their direct influence (Bovaird et al, 2016). As described in our research findings, board participants are often motivated by their own personal values and ethic of service. In co-creating board outcomes, government institutions can more effectively tap into these motivations and provide a clear pathway for participants to act upon their values within government systems. As immigrant participants described, the opportunity to learn about government process and use this knowledge to advocate around their own values was an important outcome of board service.

In summary, more inclusive boards will develop a shared culture built by diverse participants, allow for relationship building, and ensure more legitimate outcomes through deliberation and co-creation of the board's purpose and influence (Feldman & Quick, 2011). When this is established, both participants and sponsor institutions are more likely to achieve mutual benefit of a highly resource intensive engagement opportunity. Participants benefit from their improved social capital through relationship-building, civic and leadership skills, and increased trust and engagement in local government processes (Nabatchi & Anslar, 2014). Immigrant groups in particular benefit from this opportunity to build cultural citizenship by gaining social capital and demonstrating their ability to contribute to the community through public service (Ong, 1996). As the participants in this study noted, they better understood local government systems and had increased their own professional and personal networks through service, often leading to future career development opportunities.

## Chapter 6. Recommendations

I present the following recommendations for government agencies seeking to develop inclusive government boards and committees through a two-pronged approach of increase representation of underrepresented populations and ensuring voice and influence of these more diverse members.

### 6.1. Presence

Government agencies and potential participants must overcome significant structural and cultural barriers to improving diverse representation on boards and committees. By first focusing on these volunteer, entry point roles, agencies and community-based organizations who work with underrepresented populations invest in a long-term strategy to build more diversity at the leadership level. Based on the findings of this research, the following strategies could be deployed by local jurisdictions to increase the presence of immigrants and other underrepresented groups:

6.1a. Adopt a policy prioritizing recruitment of diverse individuals onto boards and committees.

This policy can serve as a clear articulation of diversity and inclusion goals from leadership and signals that the institution understands the benefit and importance of diverse representation. An effective policy will include metrics for improving diversity along race, gender, age, etc. and requires tracking current board demographics. In our initial inventory, few cities were tracking volunteer demographics.

6.1b. Conduct a stakeholder analysis that informs a recruitment plan.

Staff administrators, agency leadership, and current board members should be involved in developing the plan and conducting intentional outreach through personal and professional networks. The plan should outline clear roles and responsibilities for recruitment and member cultivation, rather than relying solely on “post and wait” strategies such as flyers or newspaper advertisements.

6.1c. Focus on recruiting candidates who care about the issues.

Emphasize the importance of soft skills or lived experience in board service, rather than technical expertise and education or professional work status. Immigrant participants cited analytical skills, ability to question, representation of a particular identity, and a passion for an issue area as important ways they influenced their board. Less frequently did they mention technical skills or professional achievements. Potential board members are hesitant to join until asked to do so, and many are not sure whether they belong or how they can contribute. Staff and leadership recruiters can bridge this gap by emphasizing the importance of other skills and assets potential participants can bring to their service.

6.1d. Partner with local leadership development programs.

In most communities, community-based organizations, chambers of commerce, young professional networks, and other groups recruit and develop promising local leaders. Agencies can tap into these existing networks to communicate the importance of board service and advertise open positions. As demonstrated by our immigrant participants, these programs can serve as a gateway to continuing civic engagement and service.

6.1e. Provide accommodations that address the socio-economic barriers to service.

As with other forms of public engagement, stipends, childcare, and translation services are essential to making board positions available to working families and lower income groups. Additionally, government agencies should assess meeting time, duration, and location to accommodate those without flexible schedules or easy geographic access. The COVID-19 pandemic illuminates both the opportunities and challenges of replacing in-person meetings and convenings with online engagement strategies, but there may be some learnings for government boards in the future.

## 6.2. *Equality of Voice*

Once more diverse participants are invited to the table, government agencies must ensure that the board structure facilitates all members to have voice through influence on decision-making. This is especially important for those who have less experience in government processes. To ensure this voice, the sponsor institution must support a board structure and culture through which participants can co-create their influence and outcomes and dedicate time to relationship building. Based on the findings of this research, the following strategies could be deployed by local jurisdictions to increase the equality of immigrants and other underrepresented groups:

6.2a. Engage in annual strategic planning where members develop clear purpose, goals, and outcomes.

When immigrant participants felt they had clear purpose as a board and were able to shape decision-making by the sponsor institution, they felt more valued and influential in their roles. This influence is an important step to achieve mutual benefit for a highly time intensive form of public engagement. Annual strategic planning allows regular opportunities for members to reflect on their work and role and co-create board outcomes on a regular basis in partnership with staff.

6.2b. Reconsider unnecessary meeting procedures to encourage more informal meetings.

While public meeting laws require certain procedures, they do not have to dictate the formality of meetings. Staff administrators and board leadership should analyze current procedures and confront those that may enforce dominant cultural norms, including Robert's Rules of Order.

6.2c. Empower board leadership and members to build meeting agendas.

As an outcome of a good strategic plan, board members are more equipped to build thoughtful and intentional meeting agendas that incorporate deliberation and dialogue among members. This may require a strong facilitator as board chair, or government agencies can consider third-party facilitation support. Creating time on meeting agendas for deliberation will aid in relationship building and ensure trust in the process and outcomes. This is especially important for advisory boards without direct decision-making authority, but who instead serve as a source of other forms of knowledge.

6.2d. Organize mentorship and other relationship building opportunities between members.

Relationship building does not need to be restricted to the confines of a meeting. Subcommittees, one-on-one meetings, or mentorship models can serve as a mechanism for the agency to support learning across board members. These opportunities also serve as an opportunity to shape culture, reflect on process and outcomes, and orient new members.

## Chapter 7. Conclusion

Through this research project I focused on one core research question: how can government institutions expand and support the inclusion of immigrants in decision-making roles? In order to develop and support inclusive government boards, at all levels of authority and influence, institutions must focus on both recruiting diverse representatives and designing bodies that allow for the voice of participants in the purpose and outcomes. Often, citizen advisory bodies serve as an essential “gateway” to other, more influential forms of public service. That role makes it even more important for these institutions to pay close attention to the barriers to service for diverse and traditionally underrepresented groups who benefit from participation, including immigrants. Diverse representation will be achieved only when structural obstacles, from socio-economic barriers to strong network ties and social capital, are addressed. Equality of voice is embedded within the board structure and norms, resulting in a board culture that ensures influence on decision-making, incorporates relationship building, and includes learning opportunities as key outcomes of service.

While highly resource intensive for both government institutions and participants, citizen advisory boards and government boards can provide immense mutual benefit. Participants build their social capital and networks, as well as access a unique opportunity to influence important decision-making in their communities. Government institutions benefit from more well-informed, transparent, and trusted decisions on projects and local priorities. An increased diversity of perspectives and experiences can lead to more strategic and innovative policymaking. As a strategy for inclusive public engagement, boards present an often utilized but under-appreciated strategy to collaborate more effectively and co-produce shared outcomes and strategies across a wide variety of public priorities. A well-designed process and board environment will be beneficial for encouraging participation and influence from traditionally underrepresented groups. The recommendations provided in this report are not incredibly difficult to achieve, but will require government institutions prioritizing these sustained forms of public engagement and a change of perspective for many on the importance of these bodies.

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## Appendix A. Research Geographies

Counties	Top Cities
Benton	Corvallis
Clackamas	Lake Oswego, West Linn
Deschutes	Bend, Redmond
Hood River	Hood River, Cascade Locks
Jackson	Medford, Gold Hill
Jefferson	Madras, Culver
Klamath	Klamath Falls
Lane	Eugene, Springfield
Lincoln	Newport, Lincoln City
Malheur	Ontario, Nyssa
Marion	Salem, Woodburn
Morrow	Boardman, Irrigon
Multnomah	Portland, Gresham
Polk	Dallas, Monmouth
Tillamook	Manzanita, Tillamook
Umatilla	Umatilla, Milton-Freewater
Wasco	The Dalles
Washington	Beaverton, Hillsboro
Yamhill	McMinnville, Newberg
Clatsop	<i>No cities included</i>
Linn	Lebanon, Albany



## Appendix B. Interview Protocol

### Category 1: Personal and Professional Experience

1. Tell me about what led you to your current position. What experiences have been most beneficial to you in your current role?
  - a. Education, work experience, community-based organizations, volunteering, etc.
2. Are there any individuals who you feel have helped you to reach this point? How have they supported you?
3. Have you participated in any training related to leadership development or civic engagement?
  - a. If so, what were they?
  - b. What did you find most beneficial?

### Category 2: Joining the Board

1. Why did you choose to join **board name**?
2. Tell me about the process of getting onto **board name**.
  - a. Were you invited to participate? Did you apply?
3. What were you told about the opportunity to serve?
  - a. Goals/objectives, expectations, qualification, representation, etc.
4. What type of orientation/onboarding did you receive, if any?
5. Have you served on other boards or committees in the past?
  - a. How did the process of joining the different boards compare?
6. What about the recruitment and application process would you have changed to make it more accessible?

### Category 3: Serving on the Board

1. How would you briefly describe your board?
2. How would you describe your meetings?
  - a. Formal/informal, open to dialogue or procedural, opportunities for public comment, etc.
3. How would you describe the purpose of the board and your role in it?
  - a. How has your board influenced decision-making by **AGENCY**?
4. What would you say you've gained, personally or professionally, as a part of your participation?
  - a. Could you describe some positive things or experiences from being on the board?
  - b. Relationships, new knowledge, helping your community, working on project x., etc.
5. What are some of the ways you've contributed to the group?
  - a. Process, perspective, community or professional connections, expertise, etc.
6. What have been some of the greatest challenges in serving on the board?
  - a. Do you feel your perspective is asked for / listened to / received?
7. How could the **AGENCY** improve your service experience?
  - a. How might serving on the board be more accessible for others?
    - i. Are there any special accommodations that you receive for your participation or wish were available to you?
  - b. How could the **AGENCY** improve diversity in membership?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience sitting on board?

### Category 4: Demographics

1. Years in the U.S. (parents' years in the U.S.)
2. Educational Attainment

## Appendix C. Interview Participants

Category	Name	Board/Committee	Location	Country of Origin
Budget	Izabella Pena	Audit Committee	Hillsboro	Hungary
Budget	Rambod Behnam	Audit Committee	Multnomah County	Iran
Budget		Budget Committee		England
Budget	Bernard Seeger	Budget Committee	Cascade Locks	2nd/Poland
Budget	Alexander Diaz Rios	Budget Committee	Hillsboro	2nd/Mexico
Budget	Eleri Ann Frazier	Citizens Budget Advisory Committee	West Linn	England
Education	Sami Al-AbdRabbuh	Corvallis School District Board	Corvallis	2nd/Saudi Arabia
Education	Satya Chandragiri	Salem Keizer School Board	Salem	India
Education		State Board of Education	Statewide	2nd/Mexico
Education		State Board of Education	Statewide	2nd/Mexico
Transportation	Julie Daniel	Active Transportation Committee	Eugene	England
Transportation		State Agency Advisory Committee	Statewide	Vietnam
Transportation	Tiel Jackson	Portland Pedestrian Advisory Committee	Portland	2nd/China
Transportation	Allan Pollock	Public Transit Committee	Salem	Scotland
Transportation		Transit District		Vietnam

## Appendix D. Interview Coding Guide

Code	Definition	Operationalized
Access	The right or opportunity to use or benefit from something or enter a space	Talk about the ease of participation in the board
Barriers	An obstacle that prevents movement or access	Talk about limitations to participation in the board for various groups
Culture	A broad set of traditions and habits developed over time that guide behavior	Talk about the existing or evolving group norms, values, and processes that shape the board's work and the interactions between board members
Dialogue	A discussion between two or more people or groups, especially one directed toward exploration of a particular subject or resolution of a problem.	Talk about the presence or absence of meaningful conversation and discussion during meetings or the balance between discussion and information sharing from staff
Diversity	The range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs.	Talk about people on the board that represent different groups or identities.
Experience	The process of acquiring knowledge or skill over a period of time	
Experience: academic		Talk about any level of formal school education
Experience: boards		Talk about service on another government board
Experience: community-based		Talk about participation in community groups (nonprofit board, volunteering, organizing efforts)
Experience: leadership		Talk about previous opportunities to lead a group of people or institution
Experience: political		Talk about public service as an elected official
Experience: lived		Talk about personal stories or moments that shaped the individual's journey
Experience: professional		Talk about paid employment opportunities, including military service

Expertise	Holding a high-level of skill or knowledge in a particular field	Talk about knowledge or experience that assists in service to the board (process, topic area)
Inclusion	The action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure	Talk about feeling that an individual's knowledge, identity, and experiences are welcomed and valued within the board
Independence	Freedom from outside control; not depending on another's authority.	Talk about the separation between the board members and the staff support or institution
Influence	The capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something, or the effect itself	
Influence: external (board)		Talk about the ability of the board to contribute to wider community conversations or efforts
Influence: internal (individual)		Talk about an individual's ability to change and contribute to decision-making by the board and/or institution
Leadership	The action of leading a group of people or an organization	
Leadership: individual		Talk about an individual's ability to guide a group
Leadership: institutional		Talk about the direction and decision-making from senior staff of the government agency that formed the board
Learning	The acquisition of knowledge or skills through experience, study, or by being taught	
Learning: local government		Talk about new knowledge about the processes of local government institutions as a result of service on the board
Learning: professional development		Talk about new skills acquired as a result of service on the board
Mentorship	The guidance provided by a mentor, especially an experienced person in a company or educational institution.	Talk about a specific individual and their impact in the participant's life
Motivation	The reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way	
Motivation: political		Talk about future political ambitions in relation to the decision to join the board

Motivation: relationships		Talk about existing or potential personal and professional contacts in relation to the decision to join the board
Motivation: representation		Talk about the desire to see different perspectives and identities participate in the board
Motivation: values		Talk about social, ethical, or political beliefs and feelings in relation to the decision to join the board
Networks	A set of human contacts known to an individual	
Networks: personal		Talk about family, friends, or community members that connected the participant to other people, services, or opportunities
Networks: professional		Talk about employers, colleagues, or other individuals that connected the participant to other people, services, or opportunities
Personal identity	The concept you develop about yourself that evolves over the course of your life	Talk about the ways the participant defines themselves through different experiences
Process	A series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end	
Process: application		Talk about finding and completing the steps to indicate formal interest in board service
Process: election		Talk about a campaign to secure public votes to serve on a board
Process: meetings		Talk about the standards and norms for board meetings
Process: nomination		Talk about another person putting forward an individual's name for consideration for the board
Process: orientation		Talk about materials provided or training received at the beginning of board service
Process: public involvement		Talk about the steps involved in building or soliciting public input within the work of the board
Process: recruitment		Talk about the institution's efforts to find and solicit board members

Race	The fact or condition of belonging to a racial division or group; the qualities or characteristics associated with this	Talk about belonging to a specific racial group
Relationships	The way in which two or more people are connected, or the state of being connected.	Talk about building personal connections with other board members
Representation	The action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone or a larger group	Talk about an identity (racial, ethnic, gender, etc.) as a part of the nomination to or service on a board
Role	The function assumed or part played by a person or thing in a particular situation	
Role: committee		Talk about the responsibilities of the committee related to authority or stated goals and objectives
Role: individual		Talk about the responsibility or function of an individual board member
Staff Support	The people employed by an organization or institution	Talk about the role of paid staff members in supporting or guiding the work of the board
Training	The action of teaching a person a particular skill or type of behavior	Talk about education or skill-building received prior to board service
Values	A person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life	Talk about the social, ethical, or political beliefs that impact participation on a board