**The Importance of Hosting**
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*“I was recently asked to speak about disability politics in an inaccessible space.* *For future reference to others please don’t put disabled people in this position. Just don’t invite us if you aren’t going to meet minimal levels of accessibility.” – Gabrielle Peters, 2020 (*[*Twitter*](https://twitter.com/mssinenomine/status/1235309539479687172)*)*

This week’s readings left me with many feelings around how we conduct stakeholder engagement and host meetings. As a planning student, I have been told exhaustively that our engagement with stakeholders must be more diverse inclusive – e.g. better representation across all ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, sexual attractions, income levels, and abilities. In our efforts to do so, however, we forget about the art of hosting and the significance this holds in enabling individuals from providing their opinions freely (Block, 2008).

I recall reading a Twitter thread a couple of months ago (I cannot locate it now) that spoke about an engagement event held specifically for individuals with disabilities; however, but building access from the parking lot was inaccessible for individuals using mobility aids or wheelchairs. Many of the engagement resources read, emphasized the framework of engagement, emphasizing content development, but forgetting about the logistics. Whether we ask individuals to meet in person or come to an engagement, we forget that we are often hosting them in our space, which can be uncomfortable, especially if we’re asking them to share their opinions candidly.

In the Tweet above, Gabrielle Peters highlights event organizers’ lack of awareness around accessibility. We hold a responsibility host our invited guests – even if it is just a meeting – by considering their needs and helping them feel at home.

Peter Block (an American author and speaker who specializes in community building) identifies “hospitality” as part of the stakeholder engagement process (2008).

*“We usually associate hospitality with a culture, a social practice, a more personal quality to be admired. In western culture, where individualism and security seem to be priorities, we need to be more thoughtful about how to bring the welcoming of strangers into our daily way of being together.” (Block, 2008).*

These considerations are often taken for granted, but we must remember that we are not just hosting and organizing meetings to share information, but to create relationships, formulate trust, and understanding. We must also acknowledge that meeting “bare minimum” does not always permit our participants from engaging with dignity – there are many other considerations in making truly accessible spaces as Emily Gillespie shares [here](https://www.workinculture.ca/FYI/WorkInCulture-Connects/September-2019/So%2C-you-Built-a-Ramp%E2%80%A6Community-Engagement-and-Mean). While disability provides an example of providing for others’ needs, we must consider the needs of other population groups; we can hardly expect to serve an increasingly diverse population without tokenism if we do not show them that we also value their contributions.

**This work was inspired by:**

Peter Block's The Structure of Belonging

Priya Parker's The Art of Gathering

**As well as by the following people’s work on Twitter:**

@mssinenomine

@BuiltJustice

@bambinoir

@dfergusson

**Works Cited:**

* Block, P. (2008). *Community: the structure of belonging – the structure of belonging*. Berrett-koehler.
* Gillespie, E. (2019, September 18). So, You Built a Ramp…Community Engagement and Meaningful Outreach. Retrieved March 8, 2020, from https://www.workinculture.ca/FYI/WorkInCulture-Connects/September-2019/So,-you-Built-a-Ramp…Community-Engagement-and-Mean
* mssinenomine. (2020, March 4). I was recent asked to speak about disability politics in an inaccessible space. For future reference to others please don’t put disabled people in this position. Just don’t invite us if you aren’t going to meet minimal levels of accessibility. [Tweet]. https://twitter.com/mssinenomine/status/1235309539479687172