COMMUNITY MEETS GOVERNANCE

2024

CO-GOVERNANCE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Location: Equiticity

Date: November 23, 2024

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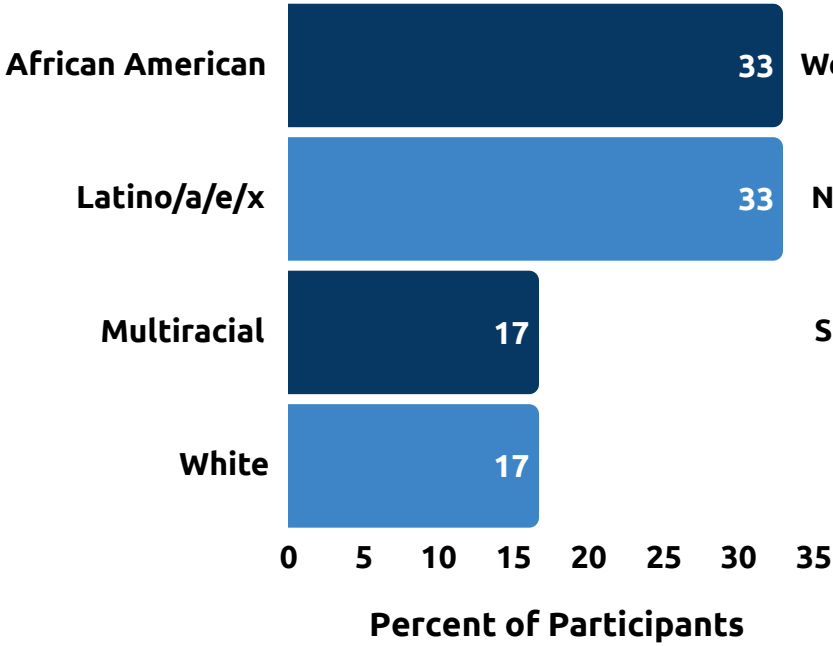
Language:

English

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Demographics

Participant Demographics
Total Number of Participants: 6

Race/Ethnicity
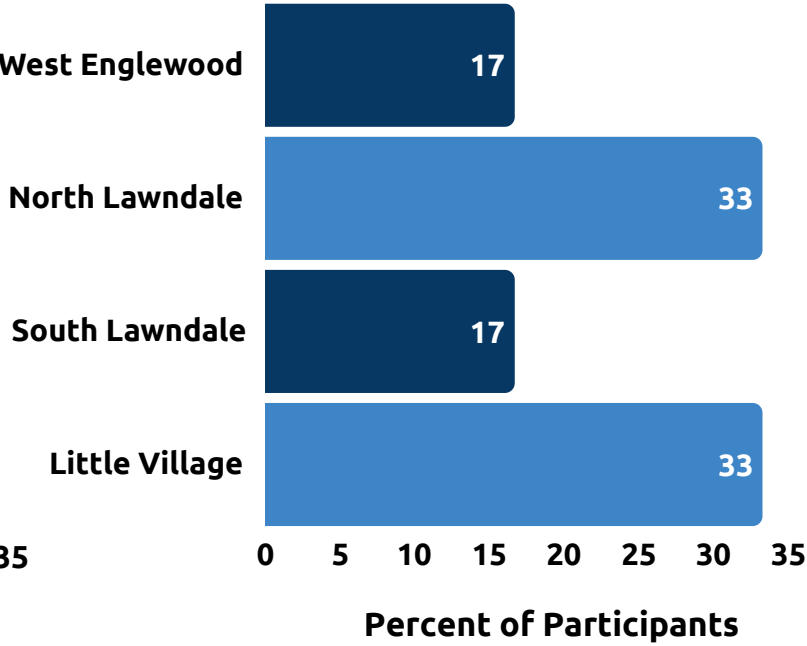
Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Participants
African American	33
Latino/a/e/x	33
Multiracial	17
White	17

Percent of Participants

Neighborhoods

Neighborhood	Percent of Participants
West Englewood	17
North Lawndale	33
South Lawndale	17
Little Village	33

Percent of Participants

Demographics

Participant Demographics
Total Number of Participants: 6

Age

Age	Percent
65+	33
55-64	17
35-44	17
25-34	33

Percent of Participants

Gender Identity

Gender	Percent
Woman	33
Man	67
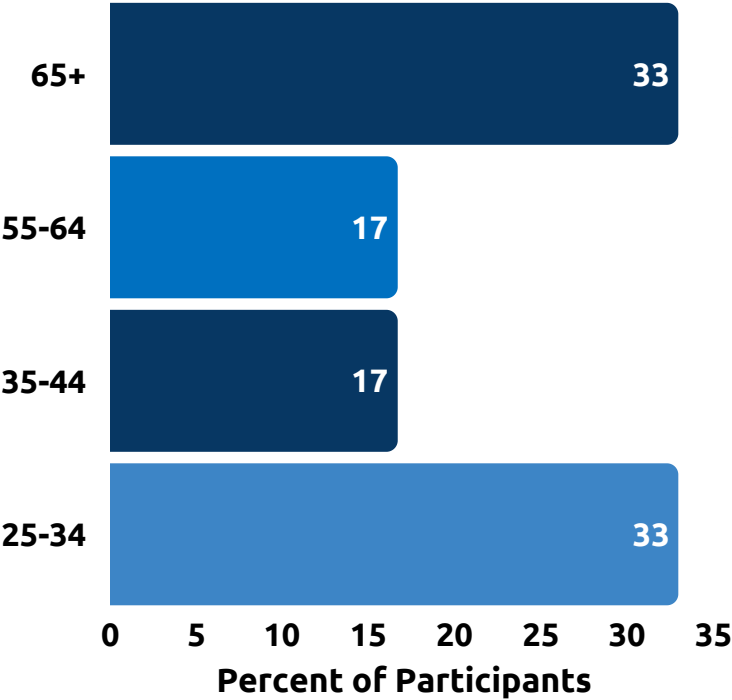
Percent of Participants
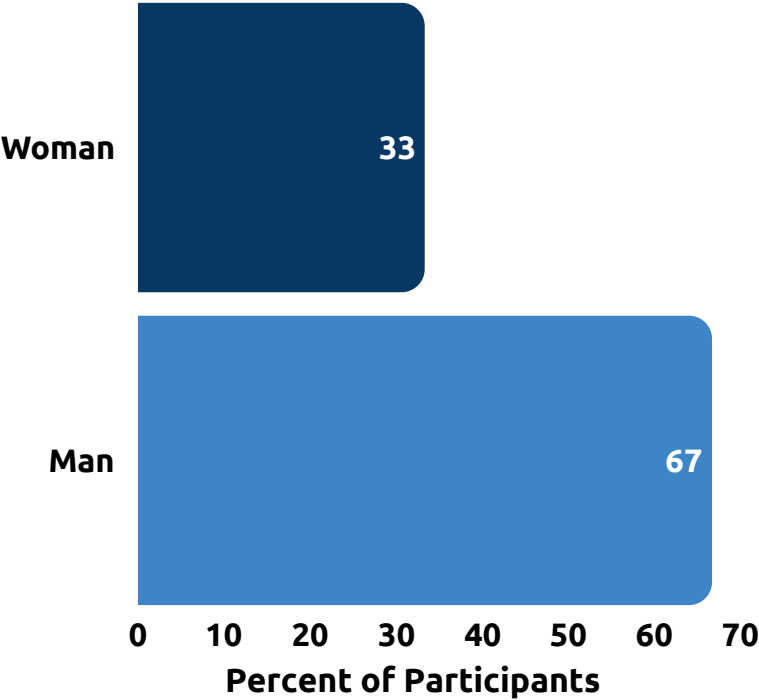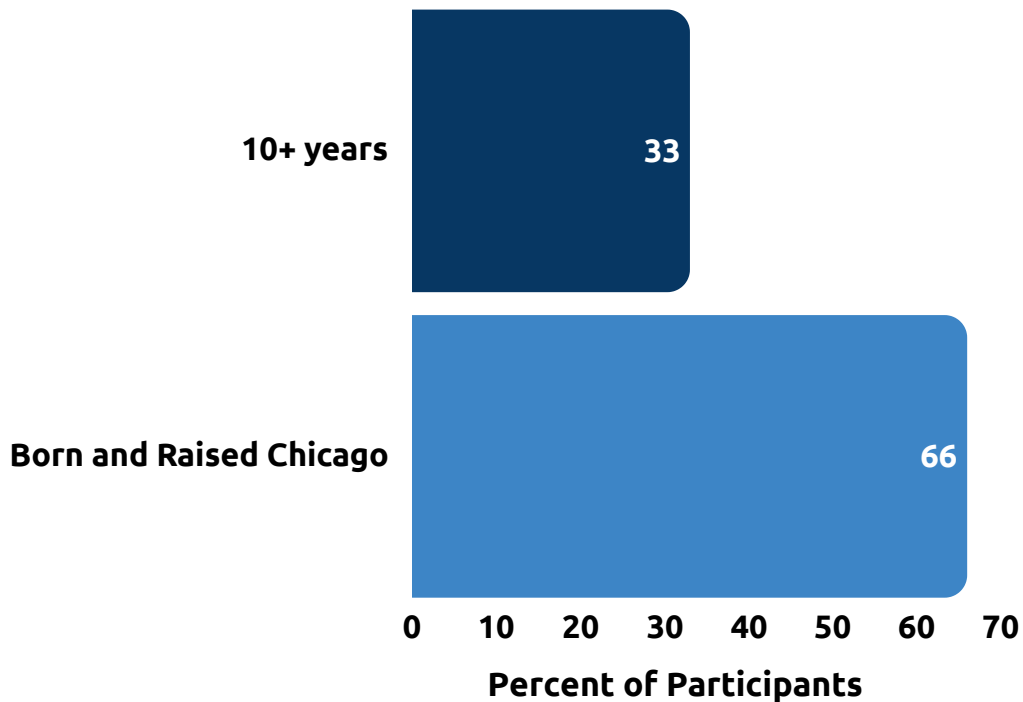
Demographics

Participant Demographics
Total Number of Participants: 6

How long have you lived in Chicago?

Demographics

Participant Demographics
Total Number of Participants: 6

Gender Identity

Gender Identity	Percentage
Woman	68%
Man	27%
Nonbinary, Gender non-conforming, or Genderqueer	1%
Transgender Woman/Female/Feminine	1%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%
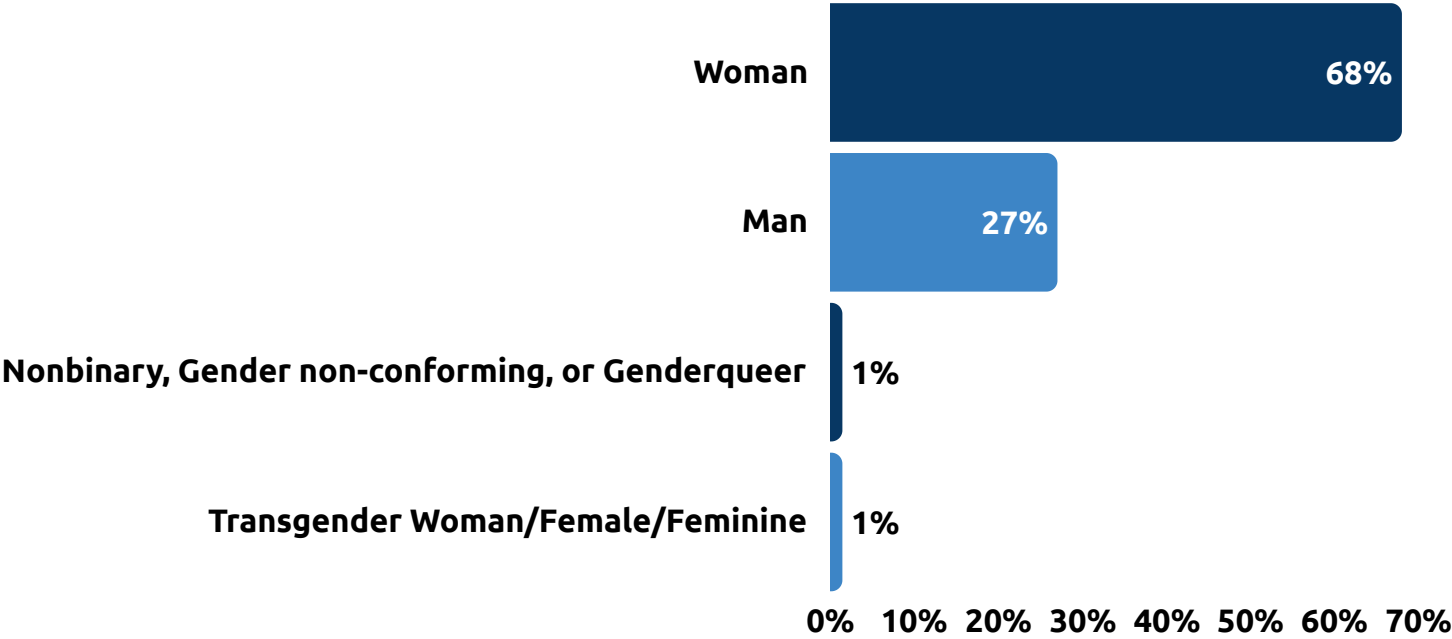
Overview

The Office of Equity & Racial Justice (OERJ), Chicago United for Equity (CUE), and Chicago's Co-governance Steering Committee guided community members through a conversation to create a shared definition of co-governance that prioritizes equitable partnerships and decision-making between government and community.

Objectives

- Provide insights on current experiences with city government—highlighting both successes and challenges.

- Imagine what co-governance could look like in practice, focusing on equity, transparency, and inclusivity.

Key Takeaways

- Engagement with the government is extractive and dismissive. Aldermanic offices are unresponsive; resources are inaccessible; and there is little to no accountability in addressing community concerns. Government engagement is performative which leads to fatigue and cynicism.

- Co-governance should prioritize equity, trust, and genuine community involvement. Sgift decision-making power to communities most impacted by structural racism and ensure that equity is clearly defined and actionable.

- Systematic barriers such as language access, transportation challenges, and power imbalances are obstacles to engagement. Integrating lived experiences and community knowledge into processes to overcome these hurdles and build trust.

Conversation Highlights

"I want to see us move away from a paternalistic view of what the community needs and prioritize community knowledge in the process."

"The city needs to hear our experiences and understand that solutions aren't transferable – one size does not fit all."

"I don't want to be "sitting next to a decision maker." I want to be one. The government lets us come and make complaints, but we don't have any power."

Understanding Your Experience

> Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences engaging with the City of Chicago, rating experiences as "Difficult," "Neutral," "Excellent," or "No Government Engagement."

Engagement Activity Results

6 "**Difficult" ratings:** Reported frequent issues with unresponsive aldermanic offices, confusing processes, and inaccessible resources

6 "**Neutral" ratings:** Noted limited success when persistently following up with government services like 311

0 "**Excellent" ratings:** No participant responses

2 "**No Engagement" ratings:** Avoid engaging with government due to previous negative experiences or barriers such as language and transportation.

*** Participants provided more than one rating.*

Reflections

- " I've engaged on lots of issues, both big and small and they ask you these questions, and they don't like your answers. It's just like checking a box. They're going to do whatever they want to do. That's the problem I have with the Parks Department. My main topic is "one size does not fit all." Solutions aren't transferable because they fit on some of our streets but not all of them."

- "I'm tired of sitting about in these circles. You're taking these statements, but you're not looking at the people who say things. My question to this committee is a simple but hard one— what does it take to listen to communities? What does it take for them to stop doing what they're doing to this community? We're not being listened to and it makes me feel like you're not listening to us."

- "My experiences have not been good. The [government] people I've engaged with have been disrespectful. I don't know if it's a class thing or questioning your knowledge but that's how it comes off. The way community engagement is done is not okay like it's an enablement of more harm—even though you hear "we're listening". You're co-opting words like community while blocking constituents, and hosting at times that are inaccessible during the day. You have alders running away from constituents or fueling racial divides without being held accountable. Trusted messengers like Jose (co-facilitator from Equiticity) are necessary."

- The extractive and pro forma nature of previous community engagement on behalf of government and then not seeing things change cause fatigue. We need localized approaches. I've observed inequity of resource distribution (especially to the North side); There needs to be a new process, not just community voice.

How Do You Define Co-Governance?

Facilitators shared three definitions of co-governance and asked participants to underline or verbally share phrases they would like to see reflected in Chicago's definition of co-governance.

Engagement Activity Results

Participants verbally shared or highlighted the following phrases from three definitions to build Chicago's definition of co-governance:

- Most impacted by structural racism
- Change sitting next to a decision maker to [community] also being a decision maker
- Equity
- Community
- Trust
- Power

How Do You Define Co-Governance?

> **Facilitators asked participants what they thought would be an effective pathway to co-governance:**

- "I don't know if co-creation is possible when there is such a power imbalance, but it needs to be acknowledged. Another example is the phrase "most impacted by structural racism" for example. Can those people really be part of this process? A lot of those folks are under house arrest or jail. We need to acknowledge the privilege it takes to get here and participate. I'm curious how we would obtain information from the most harmed if they can't be here mentally or physically to have these conversations."

- "I don't want to be "sitting next to a decision maker." I want to be one. The government lets us come and make complaints, but we don't have any power.

- Decision-makers are often beholden to others, so I may not really have access to them. [Meetings] are a difficult way to reach them. There's a lot of cynicism in the words "we hear you."

- "We hear you", but are you listening? [The definitions] don't talk about voice. "

- Equity should be in there but also defined so it's not just a buzzword and community members know what you mean/what groups are included in that scope."

- Unacknowledged power imbalance(s) and dynamics prevent trust building."

How Do You Define Co-Governance?

- Plans need to come from the community. The vision is for the work needs to be government-funded but community-informed. We need the lived experience of people that live in the community. Projects need ingenuity to recognize the social impacts and economic development."
- "It shouldn't be back and forth between community and City Council. It should be done all at the same time. Bring people together. Sit down together and make decisions together each time. I want to see us move away from a paternalistic view of what the community needs and prioritize community knowledge in the process."
- "Lived experience and community knowledge have not been integrated optimally."