

TELLING IT AS IT WAS: INCORPORATING ORAL HISTORIES INTO A COMMUNITY VISIONING PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

As participatory practice continues to offer benefits in the community design and development process, new strategies of engagement are showing increases in participant recruitment and sustained levels of involvement in participatory activities. New process approaches centering on accessible technologies such as video, soundscape, mobile GIS and digital photography have seen increases in voluntary participation of one particular demographic: community youth. While youth participants offer a unique perspective in community planning activities, they will often turn to elders who provide valuable input by offering insights into the history of their community, its people and their landscape. This historical contextualization not only makes us aware of the past, it also helps us better understand contemporary local value systems as important determinants in design and planning outcomes. With a combined professional experience of more than thirty years, the authors have observed the challenges of broadening participant demographics first hand. This paper presents a model for motivating a typically under-represented population, namely, elders, to take part in a community-visioning project. The model we present, "eldervoice," adapts traditionally employed oral history approaches by involving project designers in the multiple stages of a video documentary-based oral history project.