



2021

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK



WHY WE ENGAGE

Each engagement exercise is different depending on the decision or issue at hand, the needs of those affected, and the time and resources available to support the process. As a result, there is no one size fits all engagement, and each decision or topic requires thoughtful consideration of how best to engage in a meaningful way. Public engagement efforts should be customized and scaled based on conditions, constraints and impacts.

Transparent processes and consistent language helps Council, staff and the community have better, more consistent conversations about how, when or if, public engagement will occur.

CORE VALUES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

It is important to ground commitments to public engagement that will inform decision-making at a local government level in core values. The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Core Values are recognized globally and have been adopted by many Canadian municipalities and public sector agencies, including those in the Capital Region.

These core values help establish clear expectations and strive to respect the needs of all stakeholders involved in the decision. The purpose of these core values is to help make better decisions which reflect the interests and concerns of potentially affected people and entities.

THE CORE VALUES

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

DETERMINING THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Each topic or decision requires a different level of public input. In some cases, the public simply requires notification and updates. In other cases, there may be a complex decision to be made that requires a lot of information to be shared in a variety of ways for different perspectives to be captured.

The Spectrum for Public Participation starts from a level of **inform** and progresses to a deeper level of public participation at **empower**. In a local government setting the majority of broad public engagement is within “Inform - Involve” with advisory committees and participatory processes falling in the level of **collaborate**, and referendums, elections and voting offering the greatest of level of public influence, at **empower**, Councils, elected by the citizenry, are one example of empowered public decision-making.

SPECTRUM OF ENGAGEMENT



INFORM



CONSULT



INVOLVE



COLLABORATE



EMPOWER

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TECHNIQUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Websites • Open Houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberative polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen advisory committees • Consensus-building • Participatory decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated decision

DECISION-ORIENTED AND GOAL DRIVEN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

When preparing for public engagement, it is imperative that the decision or outcome for the project or initiative is clearly defined from the outset. If Council wishes to incorporate public input and feedback towards a decision, public engagement is encouraged. If there is no outcome or decision that public input can impact, public engagement should not be undertaken and the inform level of the IAP2 spectrum should be considered.

When planning for public engagement, the community's role needs to be clearly defined and communicated to ensure a shared understanding of the level of engagement that is to be undertaken. The IAP2 spectrum will be used to determine what the level of engagement is and what methods should be employed.

Staff reports to Council clearly identify what level of engagement has or will be undertaken. It should be recognized that public engagement varies depending on the decision-making matter. For example, processes such as the development of an Official Community Plan will require robust public engagement whilst other processes, on the other end of the spectrum, may be restricted by legislation, regulation or other identifiable constraints.

PLANNING FOR ENGAGEMENT

Once an initial scope has been established for a project with opportunities for public engagement, a detailed communications and public engagement plan should be developed to outline all elements of the process. Having information contained in one location creates a quick point of reference and ensures that all aspects of public engagement have been considered.

KEY COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN ELEMENTS

Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Define the purpose of public engagement</i>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Outline what you hope to achieve through the process</i> • <i>Objectives should be focused and measurable</i> • <i>These may appear as “increasing understanding of... engage new stakeholders... exceed the minimum requirements for...”</i>
Relevant Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What background is necessary to provide context for the decision being made</i> • <i>Describe decisions, steps or process that has led to this point</i>
Promise to the Public/IAP2 Spectrum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Describe your commitment to the public and how their input will be used</i> • <i>Outline the level of public participation based on the IAP2 Spectrum</i>
Stakeholders Interests and Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>List who is affected by the decision and identify their interests</i> • <i>Remember that stakeholders are internal and external</i> • <i>Outline corresponding tools for reaching stakeholders and seeking their input</i>
Key Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Craft concise, active, plain language information that outlines the most important items people need to know</i> • <i>“5Ws and “H” (who, what, when, where, why, and how)</i> • <i>Anticipate secondary information that will also be needed and will inform FAQs and background documents</i>

KEY COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN ELEMENTS

Engagement Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline the overall approach to engagement and strategic considerations that provide context for the strategies, tools and techniques to be utilized
Opportunities and Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the key risks and opportunities related to the process and how you will mitigate risks and capitalize on opportunities
Tools and Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline which tools and techniques you will utilize to engage stakeholders and broad audiences Describe each technique and how it will be used Outline key considerations related to each
Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline the phases of engagement and time needed to complete the process Timeline should include preparation and planning, active communications and engagement, data collection, analysis and reporting, and closing the loop with participants
Action List and Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline in a table who is responsible for each task, associated deadlines and critical approvals
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline the associated budget for all engagement activities Budget may include printing, venue rental, advertising, facilitation services, catering, data collection, etc. This may also include estimated staff time or consulting fees
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline what will be measured and what “success” looks like This may include web and social media analysis, media coverage, surveys completed, participation rates, event attendance, stakeholders reached, awareness raised, and anecdotal feedback
Closing the Loop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline how input received and next steps will be communicated to those who participated and those affected
Responsible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan should indicate key roles and overall responsibility for the plan

HOW WE ENGAGE

There are a variety of ways to gather feedback and input from citizens and stakeholders. Once the level of public engagement has been identified, it's important to determine the appropriate techniques for engaging the public in a meaningful way.

TECHNIQUES	OVERVIEW	WHAT TO CONSIDER
Presentations	<p><i>Presenting to organizations throughout the community is an excellent way of building relationships and doing outreach.</i></p> <p><i>Can also be advertised for community presentations for citizens to attend and learn about a topic or milestone in a project.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ensure the presentation is short and simple, as there will likely be many questions.</i> • <i>Provide handouts so that people can review later.</i> • <i>Outline next steps and any opportunities for input.</i> • <i>Presentations can be “piggy-backed” on to existing meetings.</i> • <i>Make a special effort to meet with groups which are harder to engage, such as immigrants and youth, as they are often under-represented in public processes.</i> • <i>Attendees may want to ask questions. Establish expectations for taking questions or create follow-up opportunities for comments and questions to be submitted.</i>
Surveys (mail/telephone/ online)	<p><i>Surveys are a good way of getting a snapshot of opinions, across a wide range of demographic groups.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The level of statistical validity depends on the type of survey undertaken. Generally, it is harder to get a representative sample or statistical validity from online survey, although they are easy and affordable to organize.</i> • <i>Online surveys are good ways of engaging with youths, working people, and anyone who would not otherwise participate.</i> • <i>Mail and telephone surveys can be more representative – however, they are more expensive to arrange, due to the costs of carrying out the surveys and coding the results.</i>

HOW WE ENGAGE

TECHNIQUES	OVERVIEW	WHAT TO CONSIDER
Key Informant Interviews	<p><i>Interviews are excellent ways of gathering initial information and learning about specific situations.</i></p> <p><i>Often engages individuals or agencies that are very close to an issue or topic. They may be outspoken on a topic or have been involved for a long period of time.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>An interview requires an established format with a set number of questions. 4-6 questions are more than enough and allows for participant to expand at length on their ideas.</i> • <i>Questions should be consistently applied to all interviews.</i> • <i>It is useful to share your notes with the interviewee afterwards, to ensure that you captured all the main points.</i> • <i>More than one interview can be done with each interest group, to make sure that the information gathered is representative and valid.</i>
World Café	<p><i>World Cafés enable groups of people to participate together in evolving rounds of dialogue with three or four others while at the same time remaining part of a single, larger, connected conversation.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Small, intimate conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into questions or issues that really matter in their life, work, or community.</i> • <i>www.theworldcafe.com</i>
Focus Groups	<p><i>Small group discussions with 8-10 participants.</i></p> <p><i>An established format and a trained facilitator can effectively “dig deeper” for participant insights.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Skilled facilitators are useful to ensure broader levels of discourse.</i> • <i>Use the same process and questions for each focus group, if you are doing more than one, so that the results are comparable.</i> • <i>An honorarium may be provided to participants for their time.</i>
Online Forums	<p><i>Online forums are web-based discussions that can occur in real time or over a period of time and are complementary to face-to-face engagement.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Participant guidelines are essential, and these instructions should be simple to understand.</i> • <i>Forums need to be moderated in order to vet the input and focus the discussions to avoid limited loud voices.</i> • <i>Some forums allow participants to vote comments “up” or “down”, rank options, or discuss options.</i> • <i>The amount of real-time forums should be limited to allow for participation from a wide range of people.</i>

HOW WE ENGAGE

TECHNIQUES	OVERVIEW	WHAT TO CONSIDER
Workshops	<p>Workshops are either small or large structured events with a set process and structure to facilitate discussion on specific topics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The goal of the workshop is to generate ideas and input from participants. No more than 25% of the workshop time should be dedicated to providing information. • Ensure that larger workshops offer opportunities for everyone to participate, through regular small group discussions. • Begin with a clear idea of the desired outcomes, both when planning the event and when communicating with participants. • Participants should have an opportunity to provide feedback. • Circulate the summary of the workshop to participants and articulate how the information will be used.
Open Houses	<p>Open houses were traditionally static, information sharing events. However, by including interactive stations, entertainment, and other ways of providing input, they can be exciting and appealing to a wide range of people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays should be visually appealing and only share the information that is important. • Staff at the open house should be well briefed prior to the event. • Staff should discuss the issues and options with attendees without bias towards any options or opinions. • Open houses can offer a range of other engagement exercises as separate “stations” within the larger event.
Kitchen Table Discussions	<p>Kitchen table discussions, also known as “coffee klatches”, are informal meetings of community members to discuss certain issues and share feedback. The feedback can be guided by a booklet of background and discussion questions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing a good kitchen table guide is useful – this would include background information, discussion questions, and a form for completing feedback and sending back to the project team. • They can be effective for grassroots efforts or neighbourhood problem-solving and idea generation. • They can also be used as an innovation to add depth to a larger process (e.g. such as development of an OCP).

HOW WE ENGAGE

TECHNIQUES	OVERVIEW	WHAT TO CONSIDER
<p>Town Hall Meetings or Forums</p>	<p><i>Town Hall meetings are a way for elected officials to hear from residents about a specific issue or topics of interest</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Can be held in a range of public venues, including schools, libraries, municipal buildings, and churches.</i> • <i>Can be interactive through digital mediums for viewing, voting, or posing questions or comments.</i> • <i>Should include a Chair and clearly communicated protocols for format, moderation, and behaviours to allow for broad participation.</i> • <i>Must be held in accordance with the District's Procedure Bylaw.</i>
<p>Expert Committees</p>	<p><i>Expert Committees help to identify the important questions, provide unbiased information, and review recommendations</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Experts should be sought for a range of areas to provide a balance of perspectives, e.g., technical, socio-economic.</i> • <i>Information from experts should be "translated" into simple language before being shared with the wider community.</i> • <i>Must be held in accordance with the District's Procedure Bylaw.</i>
<p>Task Forces</p>	<p><i>A Task Force is a committee charged with a specific task, deliverables, under specified deadlines.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Task Forces should be kept small, with clear guidelines and a specific timeline and deliverables.</i> • <i>A staff member should work with the Task Force to provide support and guidance.</i> • <i>Must be held in accordance with the District's Procedure Bylaw.</i>
<p>Advisory Committees</p>	<p><i>Advisory Committees are representative of a broad range of stakeholders and provide advise or guidance in a range of areas. They are tasked with providing advice and guidance to Council on particular priority subjects.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Advisory Committees should be representative of the community – examine the demographics of the group and take steps to recruit more participants from groups that may be left out otherwise.</i> • <i>Advisory Committees should have clear Terms of Reference and be aware of the level of decision-making responsibilities they have.</i> • <i>A staff member should work with the Advisory Committee to support and provide guidance.</i> • <i>Must be held in accordance with the District's Procedure Bylaw.</i>