## Introduction

Community Engagement | Planning Guide

This planning guide is intended to help you and your team understand the purpose and objectives of the community engagement process for your project, and to build a plan that is driven by these objectives. It can be used alongside your project management plan.

If your agency has designated staff to lead community engagement processes then this guide should be completed by the community engagement lead with support and collaboration from the project manager. It is OK to not have everything filled out on the first take. It will take time and additional information gathering to complete it. As you work through this guide, consider inviting interested or impacted program staff or community members into the planning process. Community engagement, as are other projects and processes, is strengthened by involving additional perspectives especially of individuals who are most impacted or have connections to the project.

This recommended approach might not fit within the capacity or structure of your agency. Adapt this guide to work for you and the resources you have available. To address staff capacity consider hiring a consultant, a part-time support staff or collaborating across programs/departments.

Community engagement is an iterative process and this guide should function that way. Although the sections are intentionally sequential, it is OK and expected to go back and forth sections as you are mapping out your work. Things will change as you learn more about your project and about the communities you are prioritizing. It is encouraged to reflect and modify your plan as you continue through this process and collect new information.

As you use this guide do not hesitate to reach out with feedback, questions or suggestions for improvement. You can reach out to Humberto Marquez Mendez at [Humberto.marquezmendez@oregonmetro.gov](mailto:Humberto.marquezmendez@oregonmetro.gov) or (541) 604-2177.

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## 1. Project overview

Briefly describe your project or program (henceforth referred to as “project”) and identify its **purpose**. Consider how the project seeks to **benefit** the communities you serve.

Project **purpose** statements to consider are:

*The purpose of this project is…*

*The project will result in…*

## 2. Purpose, objectives and outcomes

Before developing a community engagement plan, it is critical to have a shared understanding of why community engagement is a significant component of your project and to identify your **objectives** and **outcomes** for community engagement. Well-defined **objectives** and **outcomes** for the project will help identify the engagement tools and activities that you will need to have an effective process with mutual-benefit.

Why is it important to engage communities in this project? (**Purpose**)

*The purpose of community engagement for this project is to…*

What will community engagement accomplish and deliver for this project? (**Objectives**)

*The community engagement process will be successful if…*

What project outcomes will demonstrate that you’ve achieved the intended community engagement objectives? (**Outcomes**)

*The project will be successful if…*

## 3. Community impact

To center **racial equity** and lead with equitable engagement strategies means to disrupt traditional forms of public engagement that, intentionally or not, exclude and silence BIPOC, low-income, immigrant and refugees, and people with disabilities. In this next step your project team will identify who is **impacted** by your project and who needs to be **prioritized** through your engagement plan.

What are **anticipated impacts** of this project? (intended and unintended)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Intended Impacts** | **Unintended Impacts** | **Impacted external communities/stakeholders** |
| * *New and only park in neighborhood* | * *Gentrification as a result of new park* | * *Neighborhood residents* * *Immigrant, low-income communities in the area* |
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## 4. Power analysis

Knowing the **impacted external stakeholders and communities**, use the following power analysis exercise to identify what groups have historically engaged in your public participation process in relation to their level of influence and experienced impact. Place groups in the appropriate quadrant as you understand them given your previous projects and experiences. Be as honest as you can, no matter how uncomfortable it may be. The purpose of this activity is to understand where power lies and where it needs to shift.

Level of Engagement

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| High engagement, minimal impact  *Trail advocacy group* | High engagement, high impact  *Neighborhood association* |
| Minimal engagement, minimal impact  *Large businesses* | Minimal engagement, high impact  *Communities that don’t speak English* |

Level of Impact

Level of Engagement

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| High engagement, minimal influence, | High engagement, high influence  *Trail advocacy group*  *Neighborhood association* |
| Minimal engagement, minimal influence  *Communities that don’t speak English* | Minimal engagement, high influence  *Large businesses* |

Level of Influence

With this understanding – what is your goal with engaging highly impacted communities who have not been previously engaged or had influence on previous community engagement processes? How will you ensure that you reach this goal?

*This community engagement process will be grounded in racial equity and will prioritize…*

## 5. Redistribution of decision-making power

Effective and meaningful community engagement **redistributes power** to communities whose power has not been recognized by government institutions. To truly implement meaningful engagement opportunities requires institutions to let go of decision-making power. This demands that you identify critical decision points that impact your project outcome and create engagement opportunities for communities to make those decisions. This next step is critical in ensuring that community engagement is not just a “listening session” or “open house” but an actual opportunity for communities to have **decision-making power** and **impact** the final outcome of your project.

Use the following matrix to identify the decisions that have been made and need to be made throughout the development of your project, the constraints around each decision (if any), who is the decision-maker, and how they impact the final outcome. For decisions that will be made by external community members identity what level of engagement will be needed using the [**Spectrum of Community Engagement**](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/facilitatingpower/pages/53/attachments/original/1596746165/CE2O_SPECTRUM_2020.pdf?1596746165). *Expect this section to change based on feedback from community engagement staff and other partners involved in this process.*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Decision** | **Constraints** | **Decision-maker** | **How does it impact the final outcome?** | **Level of engagement (if any)** |
| *Project must be capital construction* | *Funding restrictions* | *Funder* | *Determines type of project* | *N/A* |
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**Transparency** is essential to community engagement and that means being transparent about the decision-making power that communities have on the outcome of a project. This includes sharing how and why input was or was not incorporated into the development of the project. Having identified the decisions at hand, answer following questions:

Are there perceived constraints that are limiting community input from impacting decision-making? Can these be addressed so the decisions can be made by external stakeholders?

*I.e. the timeline can be more flexible and therefore allow for community feedback to be incorporated*

Do the decisions being made by external stakeholders have significant impact on the final outcome of this project?

*I.e. project direction could change as a result of community feedback. It is now X and could be Z*

How will the input collected through engagement be implemented in the development of the project?

*I.e. the parameters of the project are X and this is the plan for implementation of community feedback*

How will you communicate what input was and was *not* implemented into the project?

I.e. *the team will follow up on outcomes through community presentations by X months*

## 6. Engagement strategies

Community engagement strategies should be **adaptive** and **responsive** to the communities you are prioritizing and to the changing circumstances. This requires reflection on previous engagement efforts and determining how to adjust to accommodate the objectives of this plan.

How have your community engagement efforts looked in the past for similar projects? Were they effective or ineffective? How will this community engagement process implement different strategies from previous efforts and why?

Identify possible barriers or challenges to connecting and involving the communities you are prioritizing:

*i.e. majority of Latinx families in the area are Spanish speakers*

Identify strategies that you will use to address these challenges and connect with and collaborate with communities that are impacted by this project:

*i.e. create Spanish and English social media flyers to post on social media channels to promote community forums*

*i.e. collaborate and compensate local Latinx, Spanish-speaking leaders to support outreach*

## 7. Engagement Activities, Timeline and Roles and Responsibilities

A community engagement plan needs to be **responsive** and **iterative**. While it is important to create a timeline it is also important to be malleable as relationships are formed and feedback is collected. Use the following template to identify the key engagement activities and a draft timeline to *guide* the process. This timeline should also include an opportunity at the end of your process for your team to report back to communities on the final outcome of the project. **This is only a foundation for the work ahead and should be guided by the intended objectives not by the dates.**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Dates** | **Activity/Task** | **Objectives** | **Communities/Audience** | **Lead** |
| *3/3/21-4/3/21* | *Outreach for community forums, prioritizing efforts to connect with Latinx communities* | *To recruit X participants for community forums, specifically Latinx participants* | *\*Latinx communities in the area*  *\*nearby residents*  *\*neighborhood association* | *\*community engagement coordinator* |
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Who are the individuals involved in this project and what are their roles and responsibilities with respect to community engagement? Identify **internal** and **external** individuals and/or groups (I.e. consultants).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Roles** | **Responsibilities** | **Notes** |
| *Community engagement coordinator* | *Lead for community engagement plan* | *\*list any additional details to be considered* |
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|  |  |  |

## 8. Budget and partnerships

Community engagement involves reaching out to communities outside of dominant groups and asking for their time, energy, and experience. More often than not, institutions expect this to be done for free, further perpetuating inequities. When seeking out this knowledge, especially as a government institution, you must allocate money within your overall budget to **compensate** community members for sharing their expertise. In addition, engagement needs to be led by individuals who have **shared lived experience** with the communities you are prioritizing and have knowledge and experience with **racial equity**. Although budget restrictions present real limitations around this part of the planning, consider the following questions and ways you can address them.

What is the budget necessary to effectively and equitably complete this community engagement plan?

*I.e. X amount of overall budget can be dedicated to gift cards for participants*

Are there staff capacity needs that need to be addressed? What training or support will they receive to ensure that they lead engagement processes in an equitable and, if needed, a culturally-responsive way?

*I.e. resources for trainings are limited but project manager will collaborate with community leader to lead through culturally-responsive strategies*

What external or internal partnerships can you build to ensure that you lead an engagement process with a team that is reflective of the communities you are prioritizing?

*I.e. project manager does not identify as BIPOC but will contract and collaborate with BIPOC leader*

## 9. Evaluation

A plan for evaluation is key to ensuring that engagement strategies are effective and meeting the needs of communities. Participants engaged in the process should have opportunities to provide **honest feedback** in order to evaluate and improve engagement plans. Steps for evaluation should be built into every component of your engagement plan and feedback should be implemented as it is collected.

How will you seek out **feedback** from participants on their experience engaging in the engagement process? Include opportunities throughout and at the end of the process.

*I.e. anonymous evaluation surveys that include demographic questions will be provided after each activity*

What are steps your team and agency can commit to in order to implement this **feedback** throughout this plan as well as for future engagement processes?

*I.e. evaluation surveys will be reviewed after each activity and implemented before the next one*

Establishing parameters for evaluation of this plan is also essential to acknowledge **successes** and identify the **opportunities** for improvements. Based on your set objectives and outcomes from section 1, how will you evaluate your progress **throughout the process**? How will you evaluate the intended community engagement objectives and outcomes at the **end of the process**?

**Throughout the process**, these are key points and metrics for evaluation:

*I.e. one of the objectives is to hear from Latinx residents and the engagement period will be extended if demographic data shows that there has not been a significant number of Latinx participation*

At the **end of the project**, these are key points and metrics for evaluation:

*I.e. feedback received at Spanish-specific community forums will be incorporated in project and will be clear to participants how their comments influenced the outcome*

What other methods can be implemented to include **community perspectives** in the evaluation of your engagement plan?

*I.e. participants will be invited to focus group discussions after engagement process concludes*

What are other methods that your agency can evaluate your engagement plan?

*I.e. internal focus groups will be led by project manager after engagement process concludes*