

THE GRAND RAPIDS  
**COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT  
FRAMEWORK**



I am pleased to introduce you to the City of Grand Rapids Community Engagement Guidebook. This resource is a direct reflection of our City's core values and strategic priorities, particularly our commitment to collaboration and a community-centered approach to public service.

This guidebook is designed to be a tool for every city employee, establishing a common language and set of best practices for how we engage with the people we serve. It outlines a framework built on four key pillars: Proactive Relationships, Clear Engagement Expectations, Thoughtful Experience Design, and Shared Learning. By focusing on these principles, we can ensure our community engagement efforts are consistently excellent, accessible, and truly reflective of the diverse voices within our city.

The community stands to gain significantly from these efforts. By proactively building trust and creating opportunities for direct interaction, we can demystify the processes of local government and empower residents to become more involved. This guidebook is built on the belief that community knowledge and lived experiences are valuable. By embracing a process of shared learning, we can not only make better-informed decisions but also strengthen the capacity of our community members and foster long-term, mutually beneficial relationships.

I am confident that by embracing the principles outlined in this guidebook, we will strengthen our partnerships, enhance our accountability, and ultimately build a more collaborative and responsive city government.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Q. Washington". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "M".

Mark Washington,  
City Manager

# Introduction

Welcome to the City of Grand Rapids Community Engagement guidebook. In alignment with the Values (accountability, collaboration, customer service, equity, innovation, and sustainability), the City of Grand Rapids places a high value on the direct engagement, involvement, and well-being of the community.

## The City of Grand Rapids Values



Accountability



Equity



Collaboration



Innovation



Customer service



Sustainability

## This guidebook is designed to support City staff to:

- Outline concepts, values, and practices around community engagement that center the core values and strategic priorities of the City of Grand Rapids.
- Establish common practice, mutual understanding, and shared expectations of how the City of Grand Rapids conducts community engagement activities.
- Provide accessible and flexible frameworks, processes, and tools for effective and consistently excellent community engagement.
- Encourage inter-departmental, cross-departmental, and community collaboration.
- Telling our story as public servants, including our successes, challenges, and opportunities for growth and transformation.

Intentionally so, this guide is a living document designed to both address the areas of consideration that will most directly impact the quality of community interactions led by the City of Grand Rapids and adjust how those areas of consideration are addressed as needs and expectations shift.

## How to Use this Guide

This guidebook is designed to be a resource for all City of Grand Rapids staff. To support the uniqueness of each department and their shared work with community partners, this guide is designed with the understanding that community engagement will never be one-size-fits-all. Engagement will be practiced differently depending on a variety of factors, including, but not limited to:

- How the project or call to action came to be
- The department and individuals involved
- The goal of the project
- The identified role of the community in the decision-making process
- Pre-existing relationships with the community
- Resources (time, money, human capacity)
- Timelines and time restraints

The goal of this guide is to provide a resource that is simple to use and robust in both context and supplemental tools and resources.

To make this resource easy to use, the community engagement guide includes a Framework ([pg. 14](#)) and a Planning Process Map ([pg. 20](#)). These are related resources that will help you and your working group(s) organize your thoughts and plan your specific community engagement projects. They will help you move from simplified to more granular as you move through your planning process. Additionally, you will find a robust library of Supplemental Tools to assist your planning process ([pg. 72](#)).





# Framing & Philosophy

## What is Community Engagement?

In the public sector, community engagement can mean a lot of things. As public servants, anyone with a public-facing role in local government has a community engagement role. This includes everything from interacting with a resident at a community event to presenting a report at a City Commission meeting.

This section defines community engagement within the context of the operations of the City of Grand Rapids and provides concepts and terms to support the understanding of the life cycle of engagement.

### **Community Engagement is an umbrella term that describes:**

- The values for successful and meaningful collaboration among staff and work groups that include staff, community members, community partners, and financial stakeholders.
- Wise practices for developing relationships and interacting with community.
- Implementation of a project that includes staff, community members, community partners, and financial stakeholders.
- Communication of the process and product of the collaborative effort

For the purposes of this guide, we will focus on the practice of community engagement - those situations when we are called to action and are preparing direct interaction with community members, community partners, and financial stakeholders.

## Why is Community Engagement Important?

Everyone has a reasonable right to access their local government, and as such, we have a responsibility to establish methods, norms, and venues by which to make that happen in an accessible, inclusive, and successful manner.

While each City employee was hired for their specific subject matter expertise, there are many instances where professional knowledge and understanding may lack the context, history, or local relevance that comes from lived experience.

Broadly, community engagement is critical for the purpose of multi-directional information sharing, soliciting feedback, co-creating, and, most importantly, building relationships of trust.

## **Our Why: The City of Grand Rapids**

Thoughtful and effective community engagement is essential for the City to align with our Values (accountability, collaboration, customer service, equity, innovation, and sustainability). Below explains the relationship between community engagement and our Values.

If we, as City Staff,

- Build trust,
- Provide consistent and accessible communication,
- Cultivate long-term relationships, and
- Create opportunities for direct interaction

Then, as public servants, we will create a more humane collaborative experience with each other and the community that:

- Demystifies the process and product to community members and to staff.
- Encourages and supports community members' capacity building and skill development.
- Shares decision-making when relevant and appropriate.
- Reduces departmental boundaries to encourage cross-departmental collaboration and resource sharing.
- Embraces the messiness, pacing, and fun of engagement.

## CoGR Values & Community Engagement

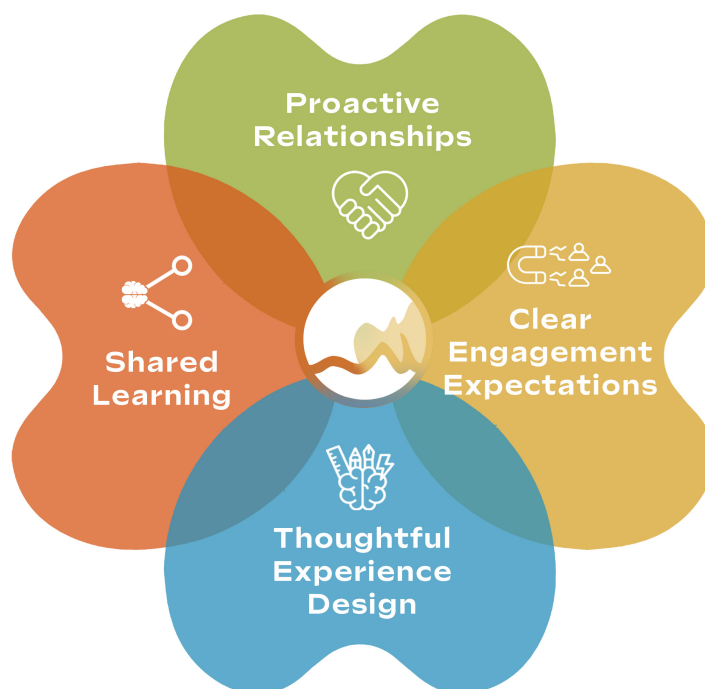
Value	In Practice via CE Framework
<p><b>Accountability:</b> Always acting with integrity and transparency, and being responsible for what we do and say.</p>	<p>Being transparent with the community and their role in shared decision making. Providing consistent check-ins and updates throughout the decision-making process.</p>
<p><b>Collaboration:</b> Working together in partnership with others; teamwork.</p>	<p>The foundations of the guide center community engagement as collaboration. Thoughtful, effective community engagement encourages resource and information sharing, both internally and externally which will inevitably reduce the silos of organizations.</p>
<p><b>Customer Service:</b> Professionally serving those who live in, work in, or visit the city. Providing respectful, excellent, high-quality service and assistance before, during, and after the person's interactions with the City.</p>	<p>Striving towards a positive outcome, practicing empathy, and approaching all partners with respectful, timely, and honest communication.</p>
<p><b>Equity:</b> Leveraging City influence to intentionally remove and prevent barriers created by systemic and institutional injustice.</p>	<p>Developing proactive relationships, creating opportunity for public participation for all groups, and demystifying the processes and policies that may hold some communities back from fully participating.</p>
<p><b>Innovation:</b> Challenging how things have always been done before. Fulfilling community needs by offering new ways to serve our customers and enhance operations. Being nimble, self-aware, and open to feedback.</p>	<p>Thoughtful engagement design values human-centered design and focuses on creating accessible materials and processes. It is striving to improve and develop new and different ways of engaging to ensure all groups can meaningfully participate.</p>
<p><b>Sustainability:</b> Making decisions with the goal of achieving long-term net positive benefits that are informed by an understanding of how those decisions will impact climate resilience and the environment, people and communities, and finances, both today and in the future.</p>	<p>It is evaluating and adjusting practices and approaches to achieve long-term results and cultivate long-term relationships. Ultimately, consistently excellent community engagement practices and community member experiences establish and maintain the trust necessary to successfully navigate the complex, nuanced, ever-changing landscape of local government work.</p>

## A Philosophy of Community Engagement

At its core, this framework centers collaboration and relationships to focus on the process of shared decision making, consistent and accurate communication, and ensuring that all community members have the opportunity to participate when relevant and meaningful. Since relationship building is central to collaboration, the City of Grand Rapids recognizes that engagement is a high-stakes effort. It is also a practice of expressing care, respect, and accountability. This includes:

- Providing consistent professional development and training to all staff regarding community engagement.
- Removing organizational silos to enable intentional and consistent communication across departments and work groups.
- Providing intentional, consistent, and accessible information to all communities regarding community engagement efforts and the development and design of projects in their neighborhoods.
- Creating meaningful opportunities for community members to provide input and feedback.
- Managing expectations with and alongside the community to clearly explain why we need their feedback, what we plan to do with their feedback, and how it will impact decision-making.

### Community Engagement Principles



## **Prioritize People**

Relationships are vital to collaboration and community engagement. This holds true for staff as we work together or as we include residents, community partners, and stakeholders in shared work. It's important to note that relationships vary and can change. The collaboration process will differ depending on if staff need to form a new relationship, rely on a pre-existing relationship, or foster a short-term relationship into something longer and sustainable.

## **Trust Community Knowledge**

As City employees, we trust the knowledge of the multiple Grand Rapids communities and their lived experiences. We acknowledge that systematic injustice and white supremacy have led to preconceived beliefs and assumptions about historically oppressed communities that may impact how staff receive some lived experiences. As public servants, we are committed to affirming and validating that communities have resources, skills, networks, and cultural knowledge that is valuable, intellectual, truthful, and meaningful.

## **Embrace Storytelling**

Community is about culture, and culture is about story. All communities model knowledge exchange with a culturally-specific context. Story translates a list of observations into a human tapestry that brings our communities together to better understand lived experiences, goals, and needs. As public servants, our goal is to create engagement sessions, design events, and communicate in frameworks that value the lived experiences (stories) of communities and community members. In this pursuit, we will:

- Make space for contextual stories as a valuable data set
- Value anecdotes as unpublished community knowledge
- Model storytelling to demonstrate transparency, respect, and vulnerability

## **Diversify Community Partners**

We work in a complex system with multiple partners, connectors, and associations. We recognized that there are power hierarchies based on funding, resources, and subject position that impact access or create conditions for easier, trusting, and transactional relationships. Additionally, our responsibility is to engage with communities that have been historically harmed by the hierarchies in which our institution is structured. It is our responsibility to design partnerships with and for all kinds of communities and to adjust our framework to make space and engage with the most resilient communities who experience barriers to trust, participation, and civic involvement.

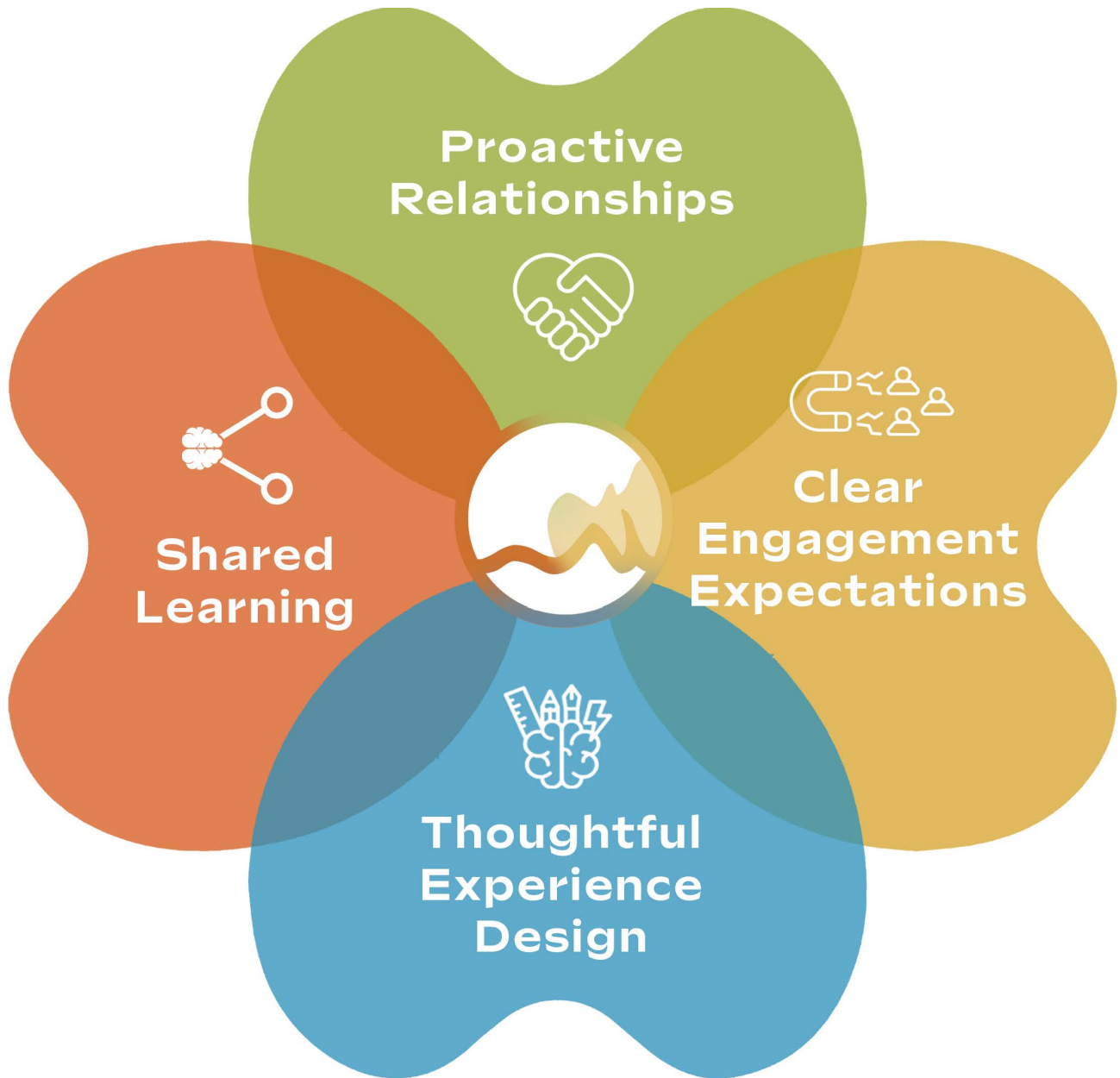
## **Acknowledge Labor**

As public servants, our responsibility is to serve the community, foster a welcoming environment, and create space for belonging. We recognize that community members are sharing their lived experiences and have crucial expertise that should be recognized. As public servants, we engage with residents as part of our professional responsibilities, for which we are compensated. It is therefore our duty to acknowledge the labor and contributions of community members. This includes developing systems that provide fair compensation. Where compensation may not always be possible, when designing an engagement effort, it is crucial to develop approaches that reduce barriers for participation. This may include providing childcare, dinner, or transportation.

We must also ensure that we acknowledge the contributions of community members and their impact on a project or process.



# City of GR Community Engagement Framework



Whose expertise, experience, and perspectives will contribute to this project?



How do we clearly and consistently communicate the impact community feedback will have on the project and process?



What is the intended purpose and outcome?



How can we apply our learning to improve future projects?

# Community Engagement Framework

The CGR Community Engagement Framework provides a standardized and simplified approach to organize your thoughts and planning for a specific engagement project. It is organized into four buckets of consideration.

- Proactive Relationships
- Thoughtful Experience Design
- Clear Engagement Expectations
- Shared Learning

The CoGR Community Engagement Framework is designed to encourage broad reflection of these three consideration areas in both the initial planning phases and as a reference for team members throughout the engagement implementation.

## Proactive Relationships

Proactive Relationship refers to the intentional practices of building relationships with staff and with community partners to ensure experts and impacted audiences are included in public participation and communication.

*Value Highlight: Collaboration, Equity, Innovation*

### Navigating Relationships

Prioritizing Proactive Relationship building through inter-departmental and cross-departmental knowledge sharing and collaboration maximizes the talent and knowledge resources of our institution, leading to more strategic and informed outcomes, and puts into action the culture and values of our organization.

Living the values of our organization means that we conscientiously strive to embody our engagement practices both internally and externally. This is the foundational work of trust-building, which is critical to all endeavors.

Our ultimate goal is to practice community engagement in a manner that encourages mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationships between community members, community partners, stakeholders, and the City of Grand Rapids organization.

### Context Matters

Relationship development is vital to collaboration and community engagement. It is important to remember that, in many ways, as a public servant, new external relationships are never truly new because the City has a long history and relationship with local communities that predates individual staff. These histories and relationships are based on political, cultural, and social experiences and values. As stewards of these historically impacted relationships, public servants are called to hold these nuances with the grace of context.

This can be easier said than done, as differences of opinion and priority are inevitable. As public servants, it is important to try not to take this personally. Instead, we strive to use community engagement as an opportunity to identify areas for growth and transformation and to strategize on the relationship work that needs to be developed.



See [page 74](#) for Proactive Relationship tools.

## Top Tips & Considerations

- **Know your who:** Whose expertise, experience, and perspectives will contribute to this project?
  - What subject matter expertise will guide decisions?
  - Who is your internal working group?
  - Who is your external working group?
  - Who needs to be in the working group(s) vs. who needs to be engaged?
- **Prioritize relationship development:** Relationships take effort. Prioritize people over product
- **Embrace the unknown:** Make space for flexibility, idea generation, and innovation
- **The value of collaboration:** Collaboration is community engagement. From a relationship cultivation and values lens, collaboration and engagement have value outside of direct outcomes.

## Clear Engagement Expectations

Clear engagement expectations emphasize the importance of assembling a work group with the right expertise, insight, and experience to implement the engagement and the final product. The work group is responsible for developing a strategy for determining the right impact of engagement for the project and audience and also communicating and managing those expectations with greater audiences and communities.

*Value Highlight: Accountability, Collaboration, Customer Service*

### The Importance of Clear Expectations

Success in any community engagement endeavor depends on clarity of expectations and the ability to clearly articulate those expectations to all involved. The creation of a formal work group is the first action item once a project is defined (see the CoGR Community Engagement Planning Process Map for more details). One of the first responsibilities of a community engagement work group is to provide clear and consistent information on the roles, expectations, and processes within that work group. It is essential to come to a shared understanding of the project and processes for the design and development of the project in question. See [page 80](#) for work group expectation setting tools.

Once internal roles and expectations are established, the work group must be prepared to explain the project, its goals and needs, and the type of collaborative relationship that is most appropriate for the project.

### The Threshold of Engagement

The Threshold of Engagement refers to the thoughtfully determined level of involvement and impact of a given community engagement project. The

Threshold of Engagement is designed to manage expectations between staff and community members through the clear communication of the goal and purpose of the engagement project. The Threshold of Engagement asks, “What is the objective of this particular community engagement project?”



It is important to note that many factors can impact the Threshold of Engagement for a given project, including the real resource constraints of a given moment (e.g. , budget, time, space, people). While the Threshold is displayed on a continuum, there is no inherent moral value to the levels of engagement. A high-impact engagement is not automatically “better” than a low-impact engagement. Some departments, due to the nature of the work and staffing, will remain within the low to moderate impact of engagement, whereas others will not. **What is most important is that City staff and work group members are aligned on and can clearly articulate the Threshold of Engagement for a given project and that the project goals reflect the Threshold.**

### Top Tips & Considerations

- What is the project?
- What is the intended purpose and outcome?
- What communities or neighborhoods will be impacted?
- How will engagement provide meaning to the community?
- What kind of input do you need from the community?
- How will the input impact the process or product?
- Whose approval (formal & informal) do you need throughout the process?
- What real constraints do you have (budget, timeline, space, staff)

## Thoughtful Experience Design

Thoughtful Experience Design refers to creating meaningful and accessible engagement experiences that reflect the values of our City and the philosophy of this framework. In this part of the process, the work group and partners are focusing on specific methods and practices for public participation and how they plan to communicate the insights and feedback gained from participation to City officials and the greater community.

*Value Highlight: Customer Service, Accountability, Sustainability, Equity*

For the purposes of this guide, Thoughtful Experience Design refers to all community interaction past the Proactive Relationship and Clear Engagement Expectation

sections (e.g. after the creation of the work group, partner mapping, and determination of the threshold of engagement). *Note: For more complex projects with a broad scope and a high threshold of impact, the tools for Thoughtful Experience Design can and should be used in the initial phases of work group creation and partner mapping.*

### **The Community Engagement Experience as a Customer Service Experience**

Designing an excellent, thoughtful community engagement experience is an opportunity to fully embody our Customer Service value. When we design experiences, we must consider the entire customer (community member or staff) journey, from how they initially receive information about the community engagement opportunity, through the logistics of the engagement itself, and closing the loop with engagement follow-up, learning, and ongoing communication.

### **The Community Engagement Experience as a Relationship Building Tool**

Returning to the Philosophy of Community Engagement, the overarching objective is to transform relationships and improve the quality of life of Grand Rapids residents and neighbors through community engagement. At its center, community engagement is people work. It's collaboration.

Consider your best collaborative or project management experience. What stands out to you? When collaboration is done exceptionally well, it builds a trusting relationship with the individuals involved in the interaction and the organization at large. To develop and maintain trusting relationships, one needs to consider how to create participatory spaces for all and indicate their role in those spaces.

#### **Top Tips & Considerations**

- How do we cultivate belonging?
- How do we make community engagement accessible & meaningful to all?
- How do we follow wise practices of universal design and accommodations to make physical spaces inviting and accessible? As we invite the community into spaces and dialogue, are we embodying our role as hosts?
- How can we clearly communicate expectations, logistics, and context?

## Shared Learning

Shared Learning refers to a systematized effort of evaluating the engagement and its design to create transparency regarding the decision making process and identify areas for growth for next time. This part of the process is iterative. The work group may create multiple formal and informal opportunities for feedback during public participation and after the effort has concluded. Shared Learning represents the experiences that both the work group and community undergo while evaluating the process and reporting out the findings. *Value Highlight: Accountability, Sustainability*

The Community Engagement process is intentionally cyclical. It should begin and end with relationships. The practices and values of shared learning is in service of nurturing the relationships the work group formed throughout the engagement experience. By inviting feedback and being transparent about decision making, we build and maintain trust. We invite accountability.

### **Making Meaning of Engagement**

Once the public meeting has ended, the steering committee has concluded their work, or the big event is over, there is still work to do and more to learn. Data gathering and analysis is one way that we can tell the whole story of the engagement efforts, understand its impact and success, as well as make adjustments for next time. Early in the engagement design, the work group should decide what information is necessary to gather and how you plan to share it out. There are many ways to gather data: qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of both.

We seek qualitative data when we want to know perceptions, experiences, or beliefs. For example, your work group may be interested in questions like:

- What are the perceptions that a neighborhood has on a topic?
- What has been prior experience partnering on an effort?
- Why does a community group express a particular belief about a space?
- What advice might a leader give to a work group while planning a meeting?

### **Examples of gathering qualitative methods are:**

- Asking open-ended questions
- Designing a focus group or conducting an interview
- Journey mapping

We seek quantitative data when we need to count, measure, or track. For example, your work group may be interested in questions like:

- How many people attended an event?
- Who is represented at a meeting?
- What topics were addressed?
- How many voted for a particular decision?

**Examples of gathering quantitative methods are:**

- Census / demographic data
- Survey / questionnaire
- Ask a close-ended question

Regardless of the kind of data gathered, it is crucial to identify and understand relationships, trends, or themes presented to gain insights.

**Closing the Loop**

Closing the loop refers to ensuring that all parties who participated in the engagement receive information on decisions that were made and any rationale as well as next steps. This practice demonstrates how Shared Learning is an interactive process and a form of accountability. Closing the loop may occur multiple times throughout the process or just once. Yet, what's crucial is that the communication is accessible, consistent, and timely. Some examples are:

- Sharing notes and action steps after a meeting
- Publicly documenting feedback during a meeting
- Creating a communication and marketing plan to circulate information

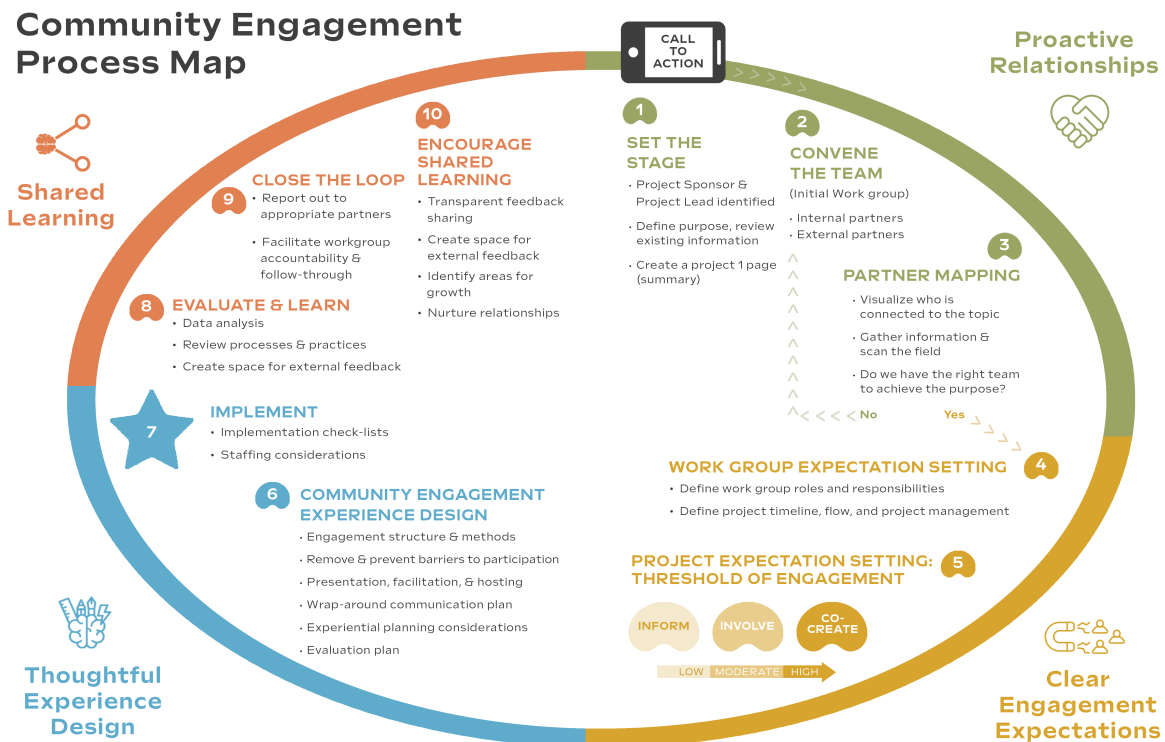
**Top Tips & Considerations**

1. Feedback is a gift.
2. How we communicate is just as important as what we communicate.
3. Make meaning of the design and process to identify areas of growth for the future.
4. Document the process as well as the product/effort.
5. Create a page on EngageGR to collect data, schedule meetings, and share out information.



# CGR Community Engagement Planning Process Map

The CGR Community Engagement Planning Process Map will help you expand your initial considerations into a clear and actionable plan through a step-by-step process.



Starting with a call to action, move clockwise around the oval through each of the nine steps, taking into consideration the objectives of each step. The steps are color coded to correspond to the overall bucket they are a part of (Proactive Relationship, Clear Engagement Expectations, and Thoughtful Experience Design, and Shared Learning).

After the event takes place, steps 8-10 provide valuable information that is taken back to the team and analyzed to improve future projects and engagements, thus closing the loop.

# Community Engagement Process Map





# Proactive Relationships



1

## SET THE STAGE

- Project Sponsor & Project Lead identified
- Define purpose, review existing information
- Create a project 1 page (summary)

2

## CONVENE THE TEAM

- (Initial Work group)
- Internal partners
  - External partners

3

## PARTNER MAPPING

- Visualize who is connected to the topic
- Gather information & scan the field
- Do we have the right team to achieve the purpose?



<<<< No

Yes >>>>

## WORK GROUP EXPECTATION SETTING

4

- Define work group roles and responsibilities
- Define project timeline, flow, and project management

## PROJECT EXPECTATION SETTING: THRESHOLD OF ENGAGEMENT

5



# Clear Engagement Expectations



**Positive  
Relationships**



# Proactive Relationships

Proactive Relationship refers to the intentional practices of building relationships with staff and community partners to ensure experts and impacted audiences are included in public participation and communication.



The Call to Action is the starting point. A project gets identified and assigned. An initiative gets kicked off. This call to action will often originate from within the City, as a task or project that is passed down from a larger strategy or initiative.

Sometimes the call to action will originate from outside the City's organizational infrastructure, either from the City Commission or directly from the community itself. For the purpose of this process map, it's how we indicate the beginning of the engagement process.

## 1 Set the Stage

Setting the Stage refers to the very first planning and relationship considerations that occur once a project has been identified and a call to action has been initiated. A project gets identified and assigned to a Project Sponsor who will identify a Project Lead and initial work group members. The Project Sponsor and Project Lead are responsible for the initial assessment and may complete the following steps or convene a work group first.

1. Define project purpose and outcomes (as they understand them). These will be updated and refined by the project work group.
2. Do an initial scan of the existing information (previous related projects, context, etc.)
3. Create a **project summary** outlining the project purpose, potential outcomes, and existing information.
4. Convene the team (first work group).

## 2 Convene the Team

Convene the Team refers to the creation of the initial work group. The work group will determine the Threshold of Engagement and design the engagement process. Depending on the situation, this can be inter-departmental, cross-departmental, or include City staff, community partners, financial stakeholders, and community members. The goal is to have shared language and consensus on what needs to occur during the engagement process in order to have a successful process and result.

**Once convened, the work group is the accountable party for the remainder of the CoGR Community Engagement Process.**

## Initial Work Group Considerations

- **Size:** What is the optimal workgroup size that maximizes collaboration and prioritizes the relevant relationships, and is functional and agile?
  - Recommended size is 3-8 people
- **Internal Relationships:** What inter-departmental and cross-departmental knowledge sharing and collaboration maximizes the talent and knowledge resources of our institution?
- **External Relationships:** Are there obvious external relationships that should be considered in the formation of the work group?
- **Multiple Work Groups:** For more complex and high-impact engagement projects, multiple work groups might be needed. Do we need to consider both an internal and external work group?
- **Work Group Expectation Setting:** Are the roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities of the work group members clear? See [Clear Engagement Expectations](#) for more information and resources.

### Work Group Top Tips

- For engagement and collaboration to be successful, planning and communication are vital.
- Use a project management tool to track tasks and communicate
- Identify roles and responsibilities for staff and community members
- Schedule recurring meetings and commit to the scheduled dates
- Virtual is convenient, but in-person allows for idea generation and relationship development
- Make time for feedback, check-ins, and updates
- Co-create an agenda as a form of consensus and consent
- Have fun! Work is stressful enough; enjoy time with each other when you can.
- Get off-site. Getting out of the building helps foster relationships and creative thinking.

## Work Group Needs Assessment

As you consider your work group, it is helpful to consider the needs of the project and where the skills exist (internal and external) to fulfill those needs.

### Project Considerations

- **Strategic Framing:** What is this project related to? What other projects are related to or will impact/be impacted by this project?
- **Project Management:** Who will lead and coordinate this project?
- **Facilitation:** Who can design, facilitate, and synthesize the interactions necessary for a successful project?
- **Operational Logistics:** Who is going to get the on-the-ground logistics planned, scheduled, and handled?
- **Communication & Marketing:** Who is going to be responsible for the lifecycle of communications and marketing of this project?
- **Subject Matter/Historical Context Experts:** Who has historical and/or subject matter expertise that relates to this project?
- **Lived Experience Experts:** Who has lived experience relevant to this project?

### City Committees and Collaboratives to Consult

On the following page is a list of internal City committees and City-led collaboratives that might have valuable insights and perspectives for your project. Where this list will continue to adapt, it is a useful starting point to understanding models of inter- and cross- departmental collaborations.

Who to consult	Role of committee / collaborative
<p>Community Engagement Collective</p> <p><i>Contact The Community Engagement Manager</i></p>	<p>This group of City staff meet regularly to discuss community engagement efforts, practices, and projects. The primary goal is to foster relationships among staff and share resources. Please contact the Community Engagement Manager if you would like to join the group or seek guidance from these staff. This group might be an ideal place to seek additional partners for a work group or guidance while Partner Mapping.</p>
<p>Community Relations Commission</p> <p><i>Contact The Office of Equity and Engagement</i></p>	<p>This Commission gives advice and assistance to elected officials in adopting measures to keep order and harmony among citizens. They also provide education on community resources. This group is useful to consult when you are seeking to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform and update</li> <li>• Ask for collaboration</li> <li>• Outreach and communication</li> </ul>
<p>Employee Resource Groups</p> <p><i>Contact The Office of Equity and Engagement</i></p>	<p>The Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are an inter-departmental resource. These groups can be an invaluable resource to foster community relationships and develop belonging. They can also serve as additional connectors both internal and external to the organization.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michigan Local Government Latino Network (MLGLN) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is dedicated to growing Latino government employees by promoting professional, leadership, and cultural excellence.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• West Michigan Chapter of National Black Public Administrators (NFBPA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The principal and most progressive organization dedicated to the advancement of Black public leadership in local and state governments.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Prism GR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formed to advocate for employees with minority gender, sexual and romantic identities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Who to consult	Role of committee / collaborative
<p>Neighborhood Association Collaborative</p> <p><i>Contact The Office of Equity and Engagement</i></p>	<p>This Cross-departmental and external collaborative consists of Neighborhood Association leadership. City staff and community organizations are also invited to attend and participate. It is recommended to reach out to the Office of Equity and Engagement when interested in participating or presenting. Ideally, one would address this Collaborative when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informing and updating</li> <li>• Asking for collaboration</li> <li>• Outreach and communication</li> </ul>
<p>Office of Communications</p>	<p>The City of Grand Rapids has dedicated staff with expertise regarding outreach, marketing, digital communication, production, and graphic design. This staff can advise and assist you with your needs or direct you to the proper channels. Additionally, staff have inter-department work groups on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Media wise practices</li> <li>• Public Input / EngageGR</li> </ul>
<p>Public Input Publishers Group</p> <p><i>Contact The Community Engagement Manager</i></p>	<p>This group of City staff meet regularly to learn about using the online public participation tool, Public Input. Staff share upcoming and ongoing projects and receive technical assistance and guidance. This group is an ideal place to seek guidance when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanting to use EngageGR</li> <li>• Understanding wise practices around public participation</li> <li>• Preparing outreach and communication for an effort or project</li> </ul>



A list of Community Organizations and Partners are included in the supplemental resources.

## 3 Partner Mapping

One of the first responsibilities of the initial work group is to do a more formal and in-depth analysis of impacted individuals, groups, and communities. Partner Mapping is a critical part of the research and due diligence necessary to implement a community engagement project in a thoughtful, responsible, and effective manner. Partner Mapping is a varied and distinctive practice. It is everything from Googling and brainstorming to having face-to-face conversations with individuals and groups requesting consulting and guidance. Whatever methods you use, the goal is to identify all groups who may have an interest or feel impacted by the effort.

### Why

This will allow your work group to determine a Threshold of Engagement and Thoughtful Engagement Design. It is possible that this partner mapping might inspire changes to the initial work group structure or composition. But to be clear, not every person or group you reach out to has to be a part of the formal working group. They may have different roles throughout the process.

### Partner Mapping Considerations

- Who is directly impacted?
- Who might be indirectly impacted?
- Who are the interested partners?
- Who is already doing work in this space?
- How can the work group align or amplify additional efforts without appropriation?
- No one can predict every possible outcome, but have we considered unlikely but possible, unintended consequences and impacts?

## Do we have the right work group?

Within this manual, readers can expect consistent encouragement to develop work groups and relationships outside of your department and with staff across the organization and community partners. After completing your partner mapping, your work group might realize that you need to modify the work group by incorporating community members or additional City Staff. Depending on the effort, the work group might be inter-departmental, cross-departmental, or external.

- For clarity, an **inter-department collaboration** refers to a melding of resources and services while working on an effort, project, or policy where multiple departments are responsible for its success.
- **Cross-department collaboration** refers to including resources, services, or partnerships from additional departments or partners yet the project is firmly positioned in a one department who is responsible for its success.
- **External** refers to when City staff fully engage and collaborate with multiple community partners, financial stakeholders, and community members.

The City of Grand Rapids has internal support and content area experts such as:

- Community Engagement Manager
- Equity Systems Manager
- Innovation and Continuous Improvement Lead
- Strategic Marketing Specialist
- Performance and Management Reporting Specialist
- Training and Organizational Development Manager

## Developing Relationships

It is often useful, meaningful, and right to involve community members in various phases of the project. This may be in the context of partner mapping, research, and framing, in a more formal role as a member of your official work group, as event volunteers, etc.

Regardless of a community members' role in the project, collaborative, respectful, reciprocal relationship development is at the heart of the interaction(s). Especially

working with community members from under-resourced communities, these individuals are often fulfilling multiple roles and may not have the time or capacity. It is important to find a way to vary your network and also develop a relationship that isn't burdensome or taxing.

### **Guided Questions to get you started on relationship development:**

- Why is this relationship necessary?
- How has this relationship been or will be initiated?
  - The community partner contacted you
  - You contacted the partner
  - Someone external encouraged this relationship to be formed
- What resources are you prepared to dedicate to this relationship?
- What strengths do you hope all groups bring to the partnership?
- What assumptions are you bringing with you?
  - For example, the community will dedicate equal time and resources to the relationship.
- Gather and review any relevant data or materials to help you better understand this community or group.
- What similar events or efforts are occurring or have occurred that might need alignment?

### **Scan the Field**

Scanning the Field refers to a series of practices to learn about what has been done related to your project, effort, or policy and why. Your work group could focus on understanding what has occurred previously in a particular space or region like a neighborhood or district. It could also refer to a particular topic or issue. Additionally, it could also refer to understanding the experiences and context of a community or group that might be your primary focus. In other words, consider the following:

- **Space:** What efforts or policies have focused on the same area or region of your call to action? Who has developed these efforts? What have been the results? How will these efforts impact your own work?

- **Topic:** What additional findings have been produced related to your topic? How will these findings provide benchmarks or case studies useful for your own work? Are there gaps in prior findings that your work group hopes to address? Or, is your effort focusing on modifying or enhancing prior findings?
- **People:** How often and to what extent has this group been engaged with in the past? What kind of perceptions and relationships does this group have with City staff? How will these perceptions and relationships impact the engagement expectations and design?

While scanning the field, the goal is to identify patterns, issues, needs, or models that will guide your work groups decisions on the effort and the engagement process. The larger goal is to understand the landscape that your team and project is operating within.

A useful tool to approach Scanning the Field is the STEEPLE Framework which is a strategic planning tool originating in business fields to understand external factors that will impact decision making.

In conclusion, Scanning the Field is an important practice for developing the foundation for a successful effort and mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationships. It also demonstrates intentionality and awareness of acknowledging and referencing prior work and contributions both locally and nationally.

### Work Group Milestones: Proactive Relationships

- Refined description of the effort/project
- Identification of partners and subject matter experts and their roles in the project design, implementation process, and engagement product (see Partner Mapping)
- Initial framing of the team
- Understanding of case studies or projects that address space, region, group, or topic that will be relevant going forward.



**Clear Engagement  
Expectations**

# Clear Engagement Expectations

Clear engagement expectations emphasize the importance of assembling a work group with the relevant expertise, insight, and experience to implement the engagement effort. It also provides a Threshold of Engagement for the work group to identify where their project will fall. The work group may be different or varied than the work group responsible for the call to action. This work group is responsible for developing a strategy for determining the right impact of engagement for the project and audience, and also communicating and managing those expectations with greater audiences and communities.

## WORK GROUP EXPECTATION SETTING

- Define work group roles and responsibilities
- Define project timeline, flow, and project management

## PROJECT EXPECTATION SETTING: THRESHOLD OF ENGAGEMENT

INFORM

INVOLVE

CO-  
CREATE

LOW MODERATE HIGH 

4

## Work Group Expectation Setting

As stated above, once convened, the work group becomes the accountable party for the remainder of the CoGR Community Engagement Process. This means that as a team, this group is responsible for the communication, relationship-building, experience design, and the shared learning of both the engagement effort and the final product.

It is crucial that each member of the work group understands and agrees with the project’s overarching objective and their individual and/or departmental accountability to the project. These responsibilities and accountabilities should not be assumed. They should be clearly and expressly communicated.



See [page 76](#) for work group expectation setting tools.

## Work Group Roles & Responsibilities

Below are some suggestions and examples to help as you consider your work group and its members’ roles and responsibilities. Use this to affirm skill sets and gifts from all work group members. *Note: This resource is a guide. It is possible for a project to have a very small work group with members taking on more than one role and set of accountabilities. Conversely, with larger groups, it is possible to have more than one person taking on the accountabilities of a single role.*

The most important takeaway is the importance of clear expectations and accountabilities for all work group members.

Project Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive or departmental level leadership</li> <li>• This person is accountable for providing support and guidance to the work group and alignment with the City’s vision and strategic priorities.</li> </ul>
Project Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main point of contact</li> <li>• Tasked with keeping the group on track with scope and goals</li> <li>• Tasked with receiving and synthesizing work group member outputs and deliverables</li> <li>• May meet with Project Sponsor to provide updates</li> </ul>
Facilitator/ Activity Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal experience development</li> <li>• Develop experiences for work group to get to goal and scope</li> <li>• Curates meetings for inquiry and innovation</li> <li>• External experience development</li> <li>• Develop experience for external partners for partner mapping and research</li> <li>• Develop experiences for community engagement events and interactions</li> </ul>

Documentarian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identified as the person(s) who will take notes, share out information, develop site for EngageGR</li> <li>• Supports data collection and analysis</li> <li>• Designs or collaborates with communications &amp; marketing team (graphic designer, social media, and website coordinators)</li> </ul>
Communication Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design the communication strategy for the engagement/ event from awareness to follow-up</li> <li>• Awareness campaign</li> <li>• Commitment/sign-up</li> <li>• Logistics communications</li> <li>• Day-of reminders</li> <li>• Follow-up &amp; feedback survey</li> <li>• Results &amp; outcome communications</li> <li>• Next steps &amp; related events/initiatives that may be of interest</li> <li>• Provides support for internal communication among the work group.</li> <li>• Circulates notes</li> <li>• Schedules meetings</li> <li>• Develops communication assets such as decks or handouts.</li> </ul>
Event Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research logistical considerations such as venue capacity, parking, setup, and tear-down schedules, etc.</li> <li>• Reserve spaces, order food, and coordinate swag</li> <li>• Coordinate speakers and volunteers</li> <li>• Coordinate and track community participation via registration and sign-in sheets</li> </ul>
Subject Matter/ Historical Context Experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has expertise in the subject matter related to the scope and goals</li> <li>• Provides institutional information and context to guide project</li> </ul>
Lived Experience Experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has network, lived experiences, social/cultural understandings, and information vital to the scope and goals</li> </ul>
Additional Roles	

## 5 Project Expectation Setting: Threshold of Engagement

	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
<b>Purpose</b>	<p>The purpose of a low-impact approach to engagement is solely to inform or educate. There is an acknowledgment among the work group that there is no shared decision-making objective and this expectation will be communicated to community members, community partners, and City staff. The engagement effort is focused on providing a service, training, or educational opportunity.</p>	<p>A moderate-impact engagement provides an opportunity for community feedback. Feedback may be limited to a specified item or during an identified milestone rather than the entirety of the project.</p> <p>It really helps to be clear about what you're asking for, the impact of their feedback, and why it matters.</p> <p>Often, there is a clear deliverable related to the effort and all parties understand that their role will end after a decision has been made or input has been shared</p>	<p>A high-impact engagement will center shared decision-making and collaboration with multiple opportunities for feedback. Partners will understand that their input will have an impact on the project. This effort could be initiated internally or externally. This may be a large capital project, a planned improvement effort, or the development of a set of actions or recommendations for City Commission.</p>
<b>Examples</b>	<p>Lunch &amp; learn or seminar on a given topic</p> <p>City staff presenting at a meeting</p> <p>City staff hosting a table at an event</p>	<p>Request for public feedback via a survey, workshop, or public meeting, where it is clearly communicated that not all options can be carried forward to the final product (eg: communication preferences, park amenities, etc.)</p>	<p>Developing a process or plan that is community-driven and evaluated.</p> <p>Develop or convene a steering committee</p> <p>Co-designing a strategic plan or budget</p>

## Threshold of Engagement Considerations

- What level of engagement is desired? By whom?
- What level of engagement is feasible, given the existing resources?
- What level of engagement will the community expect?
  - If there is a disagreement around the threshold between the community and the work group, how can it be addressed or resolved?
- How does this engagement fit strategically into the departmental or City engagement ecosystem?

At the moderate and high impact levels of engagement, there will be efforts to inform and educate. Yet, the engagement design will not end there.



### Inform

The “Inform” level of engagement describes when the work group plans an external educational effort typically around a service, opportunity, or project. These efforts could be episodic or frequent.

While informing, the work group should consider the following:

- Who is the audience?
- Why do we want to reach this audience?
- What is the benefit and outcome of providing this information?
- What knowledge does this audience have about this particular topic?
- What action steps are expected to occur after the information is shared? For example, do you hope that they will register for a program or shift how they use a particular service?

### Top Tips

- Use visuals and activities to inform
- Accept and acknowledge the limitations
- Be flexible

## **Provide Context**

Whether you are addressing an audience with prior knowledge on a topic or if they are receiving information for the first time, it is recommended that staff take the time to explain the policies and processes that impact the project. In doing so, staff are offering the context to the decisions they are making while providing transparency to the community. Where our City has multiple content experts, they might not be the best person to deliver the information on policies and processes. Instead, your work group may bring a facilitator to provide initial explanations and then invite staff to answer questions or be a resource for attendees.

## **Provide an Experience**

Even if your audience can't directly impact the effort or change policy, the event can still be meaningful and engaging. Consider visuals and other ways of communicating and receiving information such as handouts, gallery walks, or tabling conversations. Listening to content experts explain a slide deck can be isolating or boring. This can be especially useful if your work group is beginning at the Inform stage but may shift to Moderate or High Impact later in the project process. While providing information, consider milestones that can occur during the event such as:

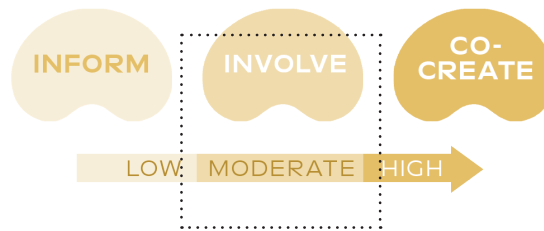
## **Be Transparent and Flexible**

Depending on the effort and scope, your work group may encounter a disconnect between what attendees may desire from the project and what the work group is able to provide. It is never easy to tell the community that they cannot impact a project. Realistically, your work group may have to prepare to manage expectations with higher level of staff. This is where relying on the Project Sponsor is crucial. It is recommended to have clear talking points developed with your Project Sponsor regarding the limitations of the project and engagement.

Your work group may receive enough feedback from the community, appointed or elected officials, or lived experience experts that you may shift your approach. There is nothing wrong with changing the engagement design during the process. In fact, it demonstrates responsiveness and flexibility.

This table shares some strategies and pathways for sharing information. It is also designed to provide nuance to informing the public.

General Strategies & Considerations for Sharing Information	
Sharing Process and Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain what ideas were accepted and approved; what ideas were not and why.</li> <li>• Describe each decision that was made, including the context and policies around that decision.</li> </ul>
Inform to receive consent or consensus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is everyone at the table who needs to be?</li> <li>• Are you willing to go forward?</li> <li>• Does the community have all the information it needs to make a decision?</li> <li>• What additional information or time do you or the community need before a decision is made?</li> </ul>
Specific "Inform" Objectives	Strategy
Initial Information Share	Provide all information regarding efforts; is transparent around the ways all can participate, shape efforts, and impact decisions
Update	An ongoing cycle of communication to share changes and progress around efforts; including to explain how any updates impact decision making and collaborative process.
Explanation and Application of Policies	<p>As you seek to offer clarity and consistent information, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What context needs to be explained or provided before explaining the engagement process?</li> <li>• For example, as City Staff, we use the phrase "affordable housing" to describe a particular concept. Yet, most community members might understand the phrase as housing that is affordable to the lowest income brackets. Due to approaching this phrase from different understandings, the conversation around a project might not lead to the intention of the engagement session or effort.</li> </ul>
Make Your Request Ask Permission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being intentional and direct about the</li> <li>• Request for the meeting</li> <li>• Interest in collaboration</li> <li>• Information needed to continue decision-making</li> </ul>



## Involve

The “Involve” level of engagement refers to efforts where the work group plans to gather public feedback or input. The work group plans to use this input or feedback to guide some decisions on their effort or the next steps of engagement.

### While preparing to involve, your work group should consider the following...

- What criteria will the group use to decide on who or what feedback is accepted?
- How will the work group communicate and manage those expectations?
- What information needs to be shared before public participation and shared decision making?
- How will you ensure that you involve the appropriate audiences?

### Top Tips

- Determine Impact
- Manage Expectations
- Make Space for Dialogue
- Invite Community to the Table

### What’s the difference between input and feedback?

Where it might not appear immediately, there is an important distinction between input and feedback. It helps to be clear about what you are looking for and explaining this to the community to manage their expectations and help them understand their role in the process.

*Input* refers to data or information that will be eventually used to make a decision. For example, asking a question like “How important is it for you to choose your trash provider?” This question provides us with information to understand the values and needs of a group of people. It will impact decision making on whether to go forward with an effort.

*Feedback* refers to perceptions or opinions regarding a previously-made decision, effort, or service. For example, asking a question like, “What has been your experience with our current trash services?” By receiving experiences and opinions on a current service or decision, it helps us understand areas of success, points of tension, and areas of growth. There may be subsequent actions but there are multiple options such as: adjusting services, dialoguing with participants directly, conduct further research, or simply report this information for transparency and accountability reasons.

In both scenarios, there are follow up actions. Yet, the impact of these actions vary. It is essential to communicate to participants ahead of time what kind of anticipated impact their input or feedback will have on the project and the engagement process.

### **Determining Impact**

The impact that community input or feedback will have on an effort or process should also be discussed and determined early with the guidance of the Project Sponsor. It may depend on a policy, law, or resource. Also, it is recommended for the Project Lead and work group to understand the context behind these policies especially if there is a disconnect between what community may want from an engagement process and what has been determined by the work group. Sometimes, past practice may need to be revised to meet new expectations or audiences. Yet, it is understandable that this is often not the case. Knowing this context and what is possible provides additional support and transparency for successful internal collaboration.

In the “Involve” stage, there should be some impact made by community whether it is on a particular decision, amenities, or processes. It is also expected that the community will not decide the entire process or effort. This is reserved for the Co-create stage. What sets Involve apart from “Co-Create” is that public participation typically happens at key milestones, rather than throughout every stage of the project.

### **Manage Expectations**

The work group needs to develop a strategy for communicating expectations clearly, consistently, and broadly. It is recommended to rely on the process map to explain the engagement process and use the Threshold language (e.g. Inform,

involve, co-create). This will create consistent and standardized language across the organization and instill this process and language with the community. During the engagement activity, the work group should ensure that the following is clearly articulated:

- Purpose of engagement activity
- Goal and desired outcomes
- Criteria for impact
- Plan to explain and communicate accessibly why input or feedback is not being utilized
- Next steps, stay informed, opportunities for future involvement

### **Make Space for Dialogue**

The purpose of this framework and manual is to provide shared language and wise practices for all City staff and transparency to the public on our values and approach to shared decision making and public participation.

It should be expected that members of the public will attempt to push for more or different processes with an attempt to change the effort. It is not our responsibility to stop the public from organizing. Instead, our responsibility is to remove barriers from participation, provide clear information, and create opportunities for dialogue. This is where drawing from the strategies from the “Inform” stage is useful. It may simply serve the work group to discuss with concerned community members regarding policies and processes.

- Document and share all perceptives
- Allow for the public to express concern even if it falls outside the scope of the effort
- Affirm civic engagement by explaining additional pathways to facilitate change when the concern falls outside of the work group realm of control

### **Invite Community to the Decision-Making Table**

When developing opportunities for public participation and shared decision making, it is recommended to involve community members to provide insight or guidance on the engagement design or logistics. The level of their presence and impact may

change depending on the engagement activity or if the design shifts from Involve to Co-Create. The work group may identify community members in additional roles, external communication, or lived experience experts.

In the Involve stage, involving community may appear as working with identified Neighborhood Association leadership or community organizations for initial guidance or feedback during the Partner Mapping stage. It may also appear as requesting consultation on ensuring the appropriate audiences are reached to get the desired input or feedback necessary.

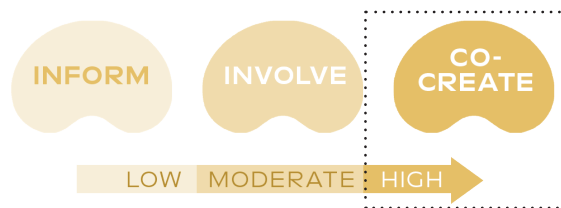
As your work group seeks collaboration, involvement, and consultation from community members, it is important to consider the following:

- Does your work group have a prior collaborative relationship with the community partner?
- If not, what relationship work needs to be developed?
- How can the collaboration be mutually beneficial or reciprocal?
- Is your work group able to compensate the community member? Alternatively, what resources can the work group provide to sustain the partnership?

A note on terminology:

**Mutually beneficial** refers to a relationship in which all parties experience a positive outcome. Importantly, this outcome is defined by each party, not for them—emphasizing self-determination and respect for each individual’s or group’s goals, values, and needs. Mutual benefit does not necessarily mean equal benefit, but rather that each party finds the outcome valuable within their own context.

**Reciprocal relationships** emphasize the ongoing nature of the connection, characterized by mutual respect, trust, and shared value—even if the exchange is not symmetrical or immediate. These relationships may be influenced by differences in power, access, or resources, yet can still be reciprocal if all parties are recognized, engaged with intention, and derive meaning from the relationship. Reciprocity may focus less on specific transactions and more on the development of sustained, responsive, and respectful interactions over time.



## Co-Create

The “Co-Create” level of engagement refers to when the work group has consistent plans for a group of community members to participate in shared decision making. The input and feedback gathered will directly impact the effort, the engagement design, or both. Depending on the scale of the effort, the duration of the engagement experience may take years. When a work group chooses co-creation, they are dedicating resources, time, and staff capacity to creating collaborative relationships between community partners and City staff.

### While preparing to Co-create, your work group may consider the following:

- Have we taken the time to understand whether the community actually wants our involvement or support, and have we asked for their permission to engage?
- Have we taken the time to ask how the community wants to be involved including whether they have time, capacity or feel that the effort will result in meaningful reciprocal change?
- In what ways are we ensuring that our invitation to collaborate is transparent, inclusive, and honors the knowledge, values, and priorities of the community?
- How are we designing the engagement process to be mutually beneficial, and how are we making that clear when seeking consent?

### Top Tips

- Ask Permission / Get Consent
- Build and design the table with community
- Develop a decision making strategy

## Ask Permission and Gain Consent

Once your work group has received the call to action, it is essential to engage the identified neighborhoods or focus groups to seek permission and obtain their consent for a co-creation approach. Before moving forward, it's important to determine whether there is genuine interest or desire for involvement from these external

groups. This phase can also serve as the “Inform” stage, where the focus is on sharing information, raising awareness, and inviting collaboration. Additionally, this process may overlap with the “Involve” stage, especially when emphasizing mutual benefits and reciprocal elements within the engagement and design of the initiative.

## **Build and Design the Table with Community**

When entering into co-creation, the nature of engagement shifts—from simply designing an engagement activity to collaboratively developing a strategy for working with and for the community. This strategy should account for multiple pathways, purposes, and levels of shared decision-making.

Co-creation is not about bringing a fully formed plan to the community for feedback; it’s about building the plan together from the start. Below are some key elements of the co-creation process:

- **Ideate:** Generate ideas collaboratively with community members and organizations.
- **Inquiry:** Co-develop questions and engage in shared learning, with openness to uncertainty and discovery.
- **Gather:** Collect insights, experiences, context, and data from all perspectives.
- **Modify:** Be prepared to revise plans based on feedback, emerging insights, and ongoing check-ins.
- **Develop:** Co-create materials, agendas, and processes in partnership.
- **Present and Share:** Communicate outcomes, data, findings, and lessons learned transparently.
- **Disagree:** Acknowledge and name disagreement as a natural and healthy part of collaboration and relationship-building.

This approach differs significantly from the “Inviting Community to the Table” model seen in the Involve level of engagement. In co-creation, most decisions are yet to be made. The process begins with openness, not conclusions.

Your work group may choose to create two distinct but connected spaces:

- A **Work Group**, focused on internal strategy, operations, and coordination.
- A **Steering Committee** of community members, empowered to co-lead, make decisions, and guide the engagement efforts.

This structure can accommodate situational needs—such as community members’ availability outside standard working hours or leveraging trusted relationships between certain work group members and the community. The work group’s role includes supporting the steering committee, ensuring alignment with policy, and promoting wise and equitable practices.

### **Develop a decision-making strategy**

In the Involve stage, there was reference to developing criteria for how the work group would accept input or feedback into decision making. This section continues those ideas by not only considering criteria for shared decision making and public participation to make decisions with the community. Most often, City staff structure meetings by expecting their Director or Manager to make the final decision or a Parliamentary process like Roberts’ Rules of Order. This is especially true for our City Commission boards and committees.

This section offers context and options for convening meetings that make space for shared decision making, consensus, disagreement, and deliberation. This is crucial to practicing co-creation. In consultation with the Law Department, we recommend that you review the Charter, specifically Chapter 8 on Boards and Commissions. Each Board and Commission has its unique format for developing an agenda, running a meeting, and coming to a decision.

To summarize, there is not a one size fits all approach to facilitating a meeting and coming to a decision. There is no legal authority to Robert’s Rules nor is there an expectation to follow the rules exactly. I share this to offer context and permission to develop a flexible and mixed methods approach to shared decision making and deliberation with community members. It is recommended that what accompanies these strategies are:

- Community Agreements
- Co-creation of agenda and approval of past meeting minutes
- Inviting / assigning community members to take on identified roles

## Majority Approach

In the majority approach, decisions are made when most of the group agrees on a course of action, even if a smaller group remains neutral, silent, or in disagreement. This model offers clarity—everyone understands the outcome and how the decision was reached. It's especially useful when timelines are short, and formal rules like Robert's or Martha's Rules are in place to guide discussion and voting. However, representation is critical. The group must ensure that all relevant voices—especially those most impacted by the issue—are present from the beginning. Additionally, not all cultural groups operate comfortably within majority-rule structures. Some may need more time or prefer to deliberate with trusted peers outside of formal meetings.

## Persuasion and Debate

This model centers around open discussion, where participants share differing perspectives and use persuasive reasoning to explore and potentially shift viewpoints. It can be valuable in surfacing a broad range of beliefs and encouraging reflection on what ideas make sense within the group's shared parameters. However, debate-based processes don't resonate with all communities. In some cultural contexts, debate may feel confrontational or disrespectful. There are also challenges related to language access, differing literacy norms, and assumptions about who has the authority to speak.

## Consensus Decision-Making

Consensus is a collaborative process aimed at achieving agreement in a way that respects all contributions. Consensus doesn't always mean full unanimity—it can also mean agreeing to move forward while naming lingering concerns or areas of tension. It invites a shared inquiry process, often resulting in documented proposals that reflect a spectrum of views. The challenge lies in interpretation: different people understand "consensus" in different ways, ranging from full agreement to a willingness to live with the decision. This process can be time-consuming and requires a strong foundation of trust, facilitation, and community agreements. This decision-making approach works best when there are community agreements and a strong facilitator at every meeting.

## Community Representatives

This approach involves working closely with a small group of representatives—either from a neighborhood most impacted or from organizations representing specific communities. These representatives often serve on steering or advisory committees that guide decision-making. While this can increase efficiency and bring in deep local knowledge, it comes with its own complexities. Not all community members may agree on who speaks for them, and the process must be intentionally inclusive. Representatives also need to remain accountable to the broader community they serve, which requires clear expectations, transparency, and feedback loops. This decision-making approach works best when it is paired with additional public participation and a willingness to ask Community Representatives to be reflexive around the input and feedback gathered at the engagement activity.

## Leader or Work Group Decides

In this model, final decisions rest with the leader or internal work group. While community input may be invited through feedback sessions or surveys, the decision-makers ultimately determine what is applicable or feasible based on project constraints or design standards. This can be appropriate in certain contexts—particularly when clear boundaries are communicated upfront. Yet, this decision-making approach does not fully align with the principles of co-creation. Instead, it may work best at the Involve stage.

### Work Group Milestones: Clear Engagement Expectations

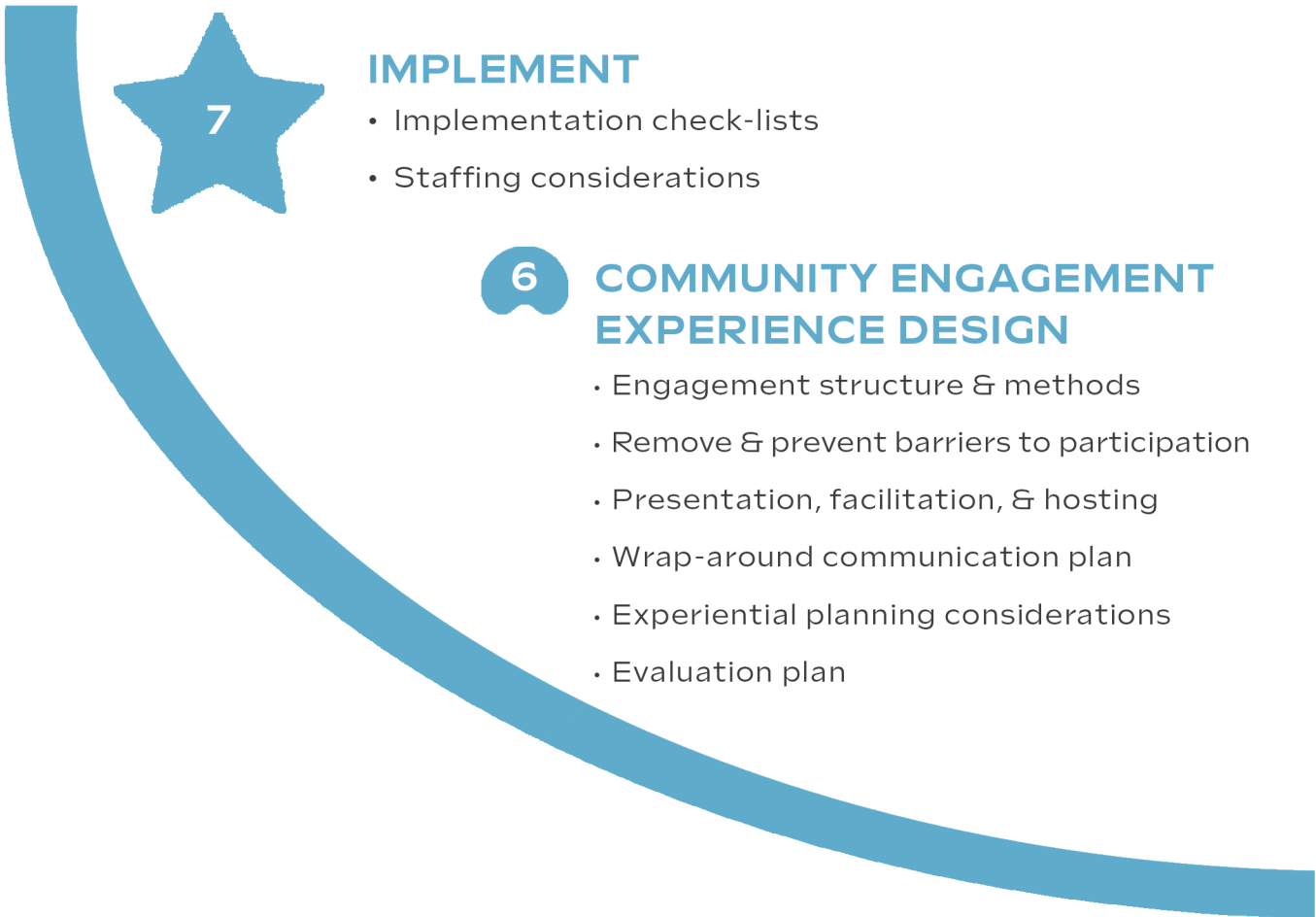
- Work group member roles and accountabilities are clearly defined
- Refined description of the purpose, goal, and threshold of engagement.
- Refined project summary one pager that includes
  - Project Description
  - Project Purpose
  - Identified Threshold of Engagement with potential activities



**Thoughtful Experience  
Design**

# Thoughtful Experience Design

Thoughtful Experience Design refers to creating meaningful and accessible engagement experiences that reflect the values of our City and the philosophy of this framework. In this part of the process, the work group and partners have developed communication and collaboration strategies as well as determining the Threshold of Engagement for the effort. The next step is to design and implement the specific methods and practices for public participation and how the work group plans to communicate the insights and feedback gained from participation to City officials and the greater community.





## Community Engagement Experience Design

Now that you have developed your work group, set clear expectations for said work group, and determined the appropriate Threshold of Engagement for the project, it is time to design the community engagement experience which may be an event or activity. Please note that your work group may use this model for multiple events or activities throughout the project or effort.

It is essential that the work group reaches a common understanding of the event objectives and the process needed for design and development. Here are some basic considerations that will help you and your work group approach the design of the engagement experience.

### Initial Stages of Design

This Initial Stage of Design incorporates past work from prior stages of the process (Proactive Relationships and Clear Engagement Expectations) as the initial foundation for designing the engagement activity.

#### Step 1: Engagement Structure & Impact

- Describe the event.
- Identify the Threshold of Engagement
- Based on the Threshold of Impact, define the outcomes, deliverables, and metrics.
- What is the agenda/run-of-show?
- Who is the audience?
- What role does each staff have in the event?
- What data do you need to gather?
- How will the work group share out findings and next steps from the engagement experience?

## Step 2: Context and Expectations

How does this project connect or build upon additional/past efforts or goals?

- What decisions can your work group make?
- What approvals do you need?
- What processes need to be followed? Why?
- What processes can have some flexibility to make space for community input and shared decision-making?

## Step 3: Budget and Resources

Item	Estimate	Allocated
Communication, Promotion, and Marketing Materials		
Consultants		
Data Development & Analysis		
Food / Snacks		
Staff Capacity/Labor		
Stipends for Community Connectors		
Swag & Engagement Materials (paper, markers, etc.)		
Technology (speaker, microphone, etc.)		
Venue		
Additional		

*Please note that the Community Engagement Manager has provided additional resources for staff on ideal venues. Also, The Communications Department can assist with offsetting cost through designing promotions and engagement materials, marketing, and engagement technologies (Go Kit)*

#### **Step 4: What do you need from the community? (select all that apply)**

*Note: If you do not know the answers, your work group may need to gather for a brainstorming or information session.*

- Preferences/priorities on pre-selected options
- Acknowledgment of receiving information
- Complete a survey or questionnaire
- Attend a public or open meeting
- Feedback on decisions made by staff
- Approval of decisions
- Permission to conduct project/study
- Input throughout the entire process
- Steering committee/advisory group
- Shared decision-making
- Resources or points of contact

#### **Step 5: What do you think the community will need from you? (select all that apply)**

*Note: If you do not know the answers, this might be an indication that your group needs to get to know the community before making decisions or bridging the community together.*

- Information
- Ensure information is available to all
- Updates
- Examples
- Models from similar cities
- Resources
- Funding
- Review staff decisions
- Provide/Deny permission
- Preferences/priorities on pre-selected options
- Feedback on decisions made by staff
- Input throughout the entire process
- Shared decision-making
- Resources or points of contact
- Possibilities for additional pathways/options
- Ask questions
- Create events or meetings for community to gather

### Engagement Methods & Opportunities

Below are some examples of engagement methods and opportunities. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. Instead, it is designed to provide you with some pathways for engagement experiences.

Method	Description	Audience	Threshold of Engagement
Lunch & Learn/ Seminar			
Resource Tabling			
Host a Meeting			
Convene a Steering/ Advisory Committee			
Host a Focus Group			
Request Feedback via Survey			
Present at a forum and receive feedback			
Canvassing (Door to Door)			

### Presentation, Facilitation, and Hosting Skills

Presentation, facilitation, and hosting are three skills that are frequently required to implement an exceptional engagement experience. We differentiate them here to emphasize their importance and to highlight their differentiation.

Often, when designing an event or project, we plan the “what” (example: lunch & learn, focus group), scope the agenda, but fail to do an inventory of the human-centered “how” skills necessary to ensure an exceptional experience.

- **Presentation Skills:** Presentation refers to public speaking in its most traditional sense. Presenting information to a group.

- **Facilitation Skills:** Facilitation is the skill of eliciting and guiding responses from others. While facilitators need to have presentation skills, they are also adept at asking the right questions, problem-solving in the moment, guiding and pivoting conversations, and bringing people and groups back to the group objective(s). It is important to note that a person can be an excellent presenter but not a skilled facilitator. Community engagement situations often, if not always, require some degree of facilitation.
- **Hosting Skills:** Hosting is the skill of making people feel welcome in a space. Think about hosting a dinner party at your home. Hosting is not just a greeting; it is paying thoughtful attention to your guests (community members) through their entire experience. Hosting includes providing a warm greeting, informing guests on how to navigate the space (where to sit, where the bathrooms are located, etc.), noticing if someone is uncomfortable or has an unforeseen need, maintaining the ongoing tidiness of the space, and thanking them as they depart.

When your work group is assigning roles, it is crucial to discuss who will take on these roles. Lastly, even if your work group is using a consultant or outside facilitator for the engagement effort, City staff should still be present and acknowledge their role in the engagement experience.



## Implementation: Strategies & Guided Questions

In the next section, resources and guided questions are provided to support the work group on implementing the event.

### Removing and Preventing Barriers to Participation

In upholding our core value of Equity, we must always consider accessibility in experience design. In every community engagement experience design process, time should be spent considering potential barriers to participation. This includes everything from how people are learning about the event/project (pre-event) to the logistics and accessibility of communication methods and the physical space of an in-person gathering.

Below are some initial considerations. The list is not exhaustive and is meant to be a starting place for your planning and conversations.

- Communication Accessibility (Pre-Event)
  - How are community engagement events being advertised and socialized?
  - What platforms and methods are being used?
  - What languages and translations are available?
  - What strategies will be used to remind and follow up?
- Communication Methods (During Event)
  - Are there sufficient microphones to ensure everyone can be heard?
  - Are there ways for community members to give feedback without making a public comment?
  - Are there translators available?
  - Will there be a welcome table to greet people, encourage sign-in, and provide name tags?
  - What wayfinding will be provided to help attendees find locations, restrooms, etc?
- Physical Space Accessibility (During Event)
  - Is there adequate parking?
  - Is the venue ADA accessible?
  - Are there adequate restroom facilities?
  - Is the venue/event child-friendly?
- Cultivate an Atmosphere of Belonging
  - Demonstrated and intentional ways to show that you are welcoming all people and valuing their perspectives.
    - Document all perspectives / opinions
    - Ensure that you have documented accurately
    - Allow them to see the notes being documented
    - Provide opportunity for them to respond to each other and not just with staff
    - Provide materials in English and Spanish and consider additional languages based on group or area.
    - Provide worksheets or materials for attendees to complete (create a working session)
- Communicate how the input and perspectives was used to enhance a project
- If not used, why it was inappropriate at a given time.

## An Example Run of Show

This example can be adapted based on audience and threshold of engagement.

Doors open:

- Socialize
- Get food or snacks
- Pass out agenda or materials

Welcome

- Provide context
- Offer staff introductions
- Discuss Community Agreements and ask for consent regarding agreements

Community-Building Opener

- Designed to bring people together, set the tone of the event, and establish a commonality

Activities such as:

- **Presentation:** providing engaging and relevant material with milestones built in for discussion and questions.
- **Gallery Walk:** visually receive information; staff may be present at each station.
- **Pop-up walls/posters:** opportunities for attendees to provide feedback or suggestions
- **Table conversations:** attendees can dialogue with staff and each other about topics. Attendees may rotate tables based on topic or topics will shift throughout the meeting.
- **Innovation Challenge:** solving a problem / case study together
- **Story mapping:** providing photos or stories related to a space, point of time, or group of people

Closing:

- Provide reflection / close the space
- Share next steps
- Explain where to receive more information
- Administer post-engagement survey

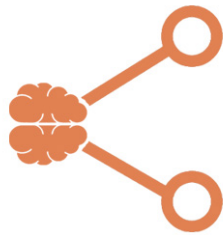
## How to be a good guest

Often, when we hold an engagement event or activity, it is in a neighborhood or community space. As city staff, we are invited as guests to this space and should act as a guest even when we are hosting an event. Please consider the following suggestions:

- Leave the venue / space better than when you received it
- Respect the custodian staff and event coordinator
- Provide clear and timely communication regarding start /stop times and additional needs
- Acknowledge to attendees that you are visiting them.

## Work Group Milestones: Thoughtful Experience Design

- Informing community or providing updates on the effort and how/if their feedback has been included
- Design team has used **wise practices** to create opportunities for community to participate/collaborate
- Managing expectations regarding the role of community in shared decision making
- Clearly explaining the process and intended product to community and gauge their acceptance/enthusiasm of either
- Identification of partners and subject matter experts' roles in the design, implementation, and engagement process



**Shared  
Learning**

# Shared Learning

Shared learning refers to a systematized effort of evaluating the engagement and its design to create transparency regarding the decision making process and identify areas for growth for next time. This part of the process is iterative. The work group may create multiple formal and informal opportunities for feedback during public participation and after the effort has concluded. Shared Learning represents the experiences that both the work group and community undergo while evaluating the process and reporting out the findings.



The Community Engagement process is intentionally cyclical. It should begin and end with relationships. The practices and values of shared learning is in service of nurturing the relationships the work group formed throughout the engagement experience. By inviting feedback and being transparent about decision making, we build and maintain trust. We invite accountability.

## **8** Evaluate & Learn

Admittedly, evaluation can feel intimidating. However, this manual encourages a shift in perspective—viewing evaluation not as punitive, but as a shared learning process that fosters growth, transformation, and lasting relationships.

Asking for feedback—especially about how an engagement process unfolded or what lessons emerged—can be uncomfortable. Still, it is a highly recommended practice for several important reasons.

First, it supports individual and collective learning and growth as practitioners. Second, it signals a culture of accountability, where the work group is open to reflection and committed to improving its impact. By inviting feedback, we show that we're not only prepared to take responsibility, but also willing to adapt and evolve. There are many effective strategies for requesting both formal and informal feedback, including:

- One-on-one conversations
- Focus groups or facilitated group discussions
- Post-engagement surveys

### **Making Meaning of Engagement**

Once the public meeting has ended, the steering committee has concluded their work, or the big event is over, there is still work to do and more to learn. Data gathering and analysis is one way that we can tell the whole story of the engagement efforts, understand its impact and success, as well as make adjustments for next time.

Early in the engagement design, the work group should decide what information is necessary to gather and how you plan to share it out. There are many ways to gather data: qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of both.

We seek qualitative data when we want to know perceptions, experiences, or beliefs. For example, your work group may be interested in questions like:

- What are the perceptions that a neighborhood has on a topic?
- What has been prior experience partnering on an effort?
- Why does a community group express a particular belief about a space?
- What advice might a leader give to a work group while planning a meeting?

**Examples of gathering qualitative methods are:**

- Asking open-ended questions
- Designing a focus group or conducting an interview
- Journey mapping

We seek quantitative data when we need to count, measure, or track. For example, your work group may be interested in questions like:

- How many people attended an event?
- Who is represented at a meeting?
- What topics were addressed?
- How many voted for a particular decision?

**Examples of gathering quantitative methods are:**

- Census / demographic data
- Survey / questionnaire
- Ask a close-ended question

Regardless of the kind of data gathered, it is crucial to identify and understand relationships, trends, or themes presented to gain insights.

**Gathering Demographic Information**

Demographic information is an important and necessary data set that should be collected. As stated on the Office of Equity and Engagement web page,

*The first objective in the City's Strategic Plan is to "embed equity throughout government operations" with a mandate for all City departments to "disaggregate all data, to the extent possible, by race, ethnicity, gender identity and geography.*

Requesting demographic information can be a sensitive topic. It should also be made optional so participants do not feel pressured to disclose sensitive information to a government entity.

## Data Gathering and Data Analysis: what's the difference?

All data analysis is meaning making. It is a multiple step process that occurs after the data is collected. Meaning making refers to what we do with the data to identify themes, trends, and relationships. After the data is analyzed, the work group and partners need to identify how to communicate the information in accessible and meaningful ways to different audiences.

### Process of meaning making

- Download: report, describe, and tally
- Organize: categorize and sort for themes, trends, and relationships
- Interpret: to gain insight, understand, and analyze
- Evaluate & Act: prioritize options for next steps and decide implementation process

It is recommended that the work group create time to analyze the data and understand its significance.

## Close the Loop

Closing the loop refers to ensuring that all parties who participated in the engagement receive information on decisions that were made and any rationale as well as next steps. This practice demonstrates how shared learning is an interactive process and a form of accountability. Closing the loop may occur multiple times throughout the process or just once. Yet, what's crucial is that the communication is accessible, consistent, and timely. Some examples are:

- Written summaries
- Visual reports
- Follow-up meetings
- Public communications

It also provides an opportunity to invite continued involvement, clarify remaining questions, or reinforce trust and transparency in the process.

## Tell the Full Story

Regardless of where your effort falls on the Threshold of Engagement, it is important for the work group to tell the story of how decisions were made related to the effort. It's valuable to show what decisions went into the effort. It also allows City staff to communicate transparently. By telling the full story of how the effort came to be, it also ensures that the communication is consistent.

Early in the engagement design, it is recommended that the work group create a page on EngageGR to explain the project and the engagement process. EngageGR is a public participation tool that all City staff have free access to. All engagement efforts with the following activities should have a page on EngageGR:

- Survey
- Public meeting (in-person or virtual)
- Input or feedback gathered

To learn more about EngageGR, contact the Community Engagement Manager.

Additional strategies to tell the story of both the effort and the engagement are

- Short-form videos
- Consistent updates on social media
- Presentations for City staff and officials and in community spaces

## How to Report

Reporting the engagement process and effort should be a discussion that occurs with guidance from the Project Sponsor. Each effort is different and will need different information for recommendations or approval. While considering what should be included in the report, consider these areas:

- How the engagement experience supported the decisions made for the effort or project
- How the engagement design and effort addressed identified Key Performance Indicators or Strategic Priorities.
- What policies, codes, or laws impacted decision-making regarding the Threshold of Engagement

## **10** Encourage Shared Learning

Regardless of the method, it's essential to document feedback and share a summary with participants to ensure transparency and shared understanding. Below are key focus areas to guide feedback requests at different stages of the engagement process:

### **Before a Meeting or Engagement Experience**

- Request guidance or consultation to inform planning
- Clarify expectations and goals for the session

### **During a Meeting or Engagement Experience**

- Confirm agreement and shared understanding of what is being documented
- Ask what might be missing or what needs to be added
- Identify areas of disagreement or uncertainty
- Request input or guidance on next steps, especially during decision-making

### **After a Meeting or Engagement Experience**

- Request modifications or clarifications to what was documented
- Reaffirm agreement or a shared vision, particularly during data analysis
- Ask what participants found successful or valuable
- Inquire about challenges faced during planning or implementation
- Ask for suggestions on what could be improved in future efforts
- Explore interest in continued or future collaboration

### **After Action Review**

Your work group should also come together to reflect and evaluate the engagement design and its success. This is a useful practice to refine roles and responsibilities as well as collaboration approaches. During an After Action Review, this may be where the work group can strategize regarding what was expected or unexpected.

- What was successful about the event?
- What were some unanticipated challenges?

- How should we go forward next time?
- What resources or support do we need to anticipate or request for next time?
- Do we need to shift any roles or strategies for next time?
- What are our next steps?

Following this, the Project Sponsor and Project Lead should discuss the report and consider what changes or resources will need to be considered for next.

### **Nurturing Relationships**

By providing opportunities for feedback and reflection, your work group shared learning as a part of collaboration. Externally, your work group demonstrates that they value participant perspectives beyond the product but also how to improve the process or experience for next time. Internally, the team fosters continuous growth by strengthening collaborative practices and deepening relationships among colleagues. In doing so, we invite the broader community to influence how engagement evolves over time. Through this collective approach, we all learn and grow together toward a shared goal: enhancing the quality of life in the City of Grand Rapids.



We have provided a robust library of supplemental tools and resources to support your community engagement planning process. This includes worksheets, checklists, exercises, and directions to other supplemental resources. This library is by no means exhaustive, and is provided as a starting point for your own creativity and innovation. The tools are organized by the three areas of consideration utilized in the CGR Community Framework and Process Planning Map.

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### Shared Learning

Formal materials to come. Please reach out to the Community Engagement Manager who has a myriad of tools and tactics to share with staff.

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# Setting the Stage Worksheet: Project Summary One-Pager

Project Lead	
Project Sponsor (Person & Department)	
Project Purpose	
Project Outcomes (as initially assigned)	
Existing Information & Resources	
Work Group Brainstorm	
Additional Notes	

# Knowing Your Why: Project Reflection Tool

The following guided questions are designed to aid you in the reflection component of the Community Engagement process.

Topics	Guided Questions	Responses	Goals
Assumptions and Beliefs	<p>What assumptions do I carry while working with City residents?</p> <p>How would I describe the emotions of community-based relationships as a public servant?</p>		
Role and Responsibility	<p>What is your role and responsibility in this organization and in the community?</p> <p>What KPIs, metrics, or values are you responsible for?</p>		
Identifying gifts	<p>In community-engaged spaces, I would describe my role and presence as...</p> <p>In community-engaged spaces, one would find me (at the podium, at a table, in the background, behind the camera, or fill in the blank).</p>		
Experience and networks	<p>From prior engagement efforts, what feedback have you received about the process and experience?</p>		

# Work Group Needs Assessment

<p><b>Size:</b> What is the optimal work group size that maximizes collaboration and prioritizes the relevant relationships, and is functional and agile? (3-8 people recommended)</p>	
<p><b>Internal Relationships:</b> What inter-departmental and cross-departmental knowledge sharing and collaboration maximizes the talent and knowledge resources of our institution?</p>	
<p><b>External Relationships:</b> Are there obvious external relationships that should be considered in the formation of the work group?</p>	
<p><b>Multiple Work Groups:</b> For more complex and high-impact engagement projects, multiple work groups might be needed. Do we need to consider both an internal and external work group?</p>	
<p><b>Work Group Expectation Setting:</b> Are the roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities of the work group members clear? See <a href="#">pg. 80</a> Clear Engagement Expectations for more information and resources.</p>	

## City Committees and Collaboratives to Consult (pg 1 of 2)

Who to consult	Role of committee / collaborative
<p>Community Engagement Collective</p> <p><i>Contact The Community Engagement Manager</i></p>	<p>This group of City staff meet regularly to discuss community engagement efforts, practices, and projects. The primary goal is to foster relationships among staff and share resources. Please contact the Community Engagement Manager if you would like to join the group or seek guidance from these staff. This group might be an ideal place to seek additional partners for a work group or guidance while Partner Mapping.</p>
<p>Community Relations Commission</p> <p><i>Contact The Office of Equity and Engagement</i></p>	<p>This Commission gives advice and assistance to elected officials in adopting measures to keep order and harmony among citizens. They also provide education on community resources. This group is useful to consult when you are seeking to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform and update</li> <li>• Ask for collaboration</li> <li>• Outreach and communication</li> </ul>
<p>Employee Resource Groups</p> <p><i>Contact The Office of Equity and Engagement</i></p>	<p>The Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are an inter-departmental resource. These groups can be an invaluable resource to foster community relationships and develop belonging. They can also serve as additional connectors both internal and external to the organization.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michigan Local Government Latino Network (MLGLN) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is dedicated to growing Latino government employees by promoting professional, leadership, and cultural excellence.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• West Michigan Chapter of National Black Public Administrators (NFBPA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The principal and most progressive organization dedicated to the advancement of Black public leadership in local and state governments.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Prism GR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formed to advocate for employees with minority gender, sexual and romantic identities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## City Committees and Collaboratives to Consult (pg 2 of 2)

Who to consult	Role of committee / collaborative
<p>Neighborhood Association Collaborative</p> <p><i>Contact The Office of Equity and Engagement</i></p>	<p>This Cross-departmental and external collaborative consists of Neighborhood Association leadership. City staff and community organizations are also invited to attend and participate. It is recommended to reach out to the Office of Equity and Engagement when interested in participating or presenting. Ideally, one would address this Collaborative when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informing and updating</li> <li>• Asking for collaboration</li> <li>• Outreach and communication</li> </ul>
<p>Office of Communications</p>	<p>The City of Grand Rapids has dedicated staff with expertise regarding outreach, marketing, digital communication, production, and graphic design. This staff can advise and assist you with your needs or direct you to the proper channels. Additionally, staff have inter-department work groups on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Media wise practices</li> <li>• Public Input / EngageGR</li> </ul>
<p>Public Input Publishers Group</p> <p><i>Contact The Community Engagement Manager</i></p>	<p>This group of City staff meet regularly to learn about using the online public participation tool, Public Input. Staff share upcoming and ongoing projects and receive technical assistance and guidance. This group is an ideal place to seek guidance when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanting to use EngageGR</li> <li>• Understanding wise practices around public participation</li> <li>• Preparing outreach and communication for an effort or project</li> </ul>

## City Organizations and Collaboratives

Formal materials to come. Please reach out to the Community Engagement Manager who has a myriad of tools and tactics to share with staff.

# Work Group Roles & Accountabilities

**Step 1:** What is the project?

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**Step 2:** Identify your work group:

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**Step 3:** Identify roles and responsibilities

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Role: Project manager / Designer

Responsibilities:

- Identified as the person(s) who keep the group on track with scope and goals
- Point of contact

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Role: Facilitator / Activity Development

Responsibilities:

- Identified as the person(s) who develop experiences for work group to get to goal and scope
- Curates meetings for inquiry and innovation

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Role: Logistics

Responsibilities:

- Identified as the person(s) who will reserve spaces, orders food or swag, and sends invitations

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Role: Documentarian

Responsibilities:

- Identified as the person(s) who will take notes, share out information, develops Public Input site
- Supports data collection and analysis
- Designs or collaborates with graphic designer and social media and website coordinators

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Roles: Subject matter experts

Responsibilities :

- Has expertise in the subject matter related to the scope and goals
- Provides institutional information and context to guide project

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Roles: Lived experience experts

Responsibilities

- Has network, lived experiences, social/cultural understandings and information vital to the scope and goals

Additional folks we might consult:

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# Creating Community Agreements

What are community agreements? A shared vision and approach to collaboration.

Begin with broad thinking about shared resources, identifying needs, and preferred ways of collaboration .

Example Questions: What resources, expertise, or networks are you willing to share?

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Example Questions: What kind of energy do you want to bring to this effort?

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Example Questions: What do you value in a collaborative partner?

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Example Questions: What are your concerns or are you curious about?

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## Activity Option:

### Materials needed:

- Large chart paper with example questions as topic headers
- A version of this template
- Writing utensils
- Sticky notes
- Candy/toys (optional)
- Music for vibes (optional)

**Step 1.** Ask team members to complete the above worksheet or use sticky notes on their own (5 minutes).

**Step 2:** Ask team members to take sticky notes or their ideas and place/write on large chart paper (5 minutes).

**Step 3.** Ask team members to review each other's contributions. Using sticky notes, affirm, modify, or enhance. (5 minutes)

**Step 4:** You will ask team to come back to table and invite discussion on the following:

- What ideas do you think are important to highlight?
- What concerns do we need to address?
- What is missing/needs to be addressed?
- Is there anything off the table that needs to be talked about?

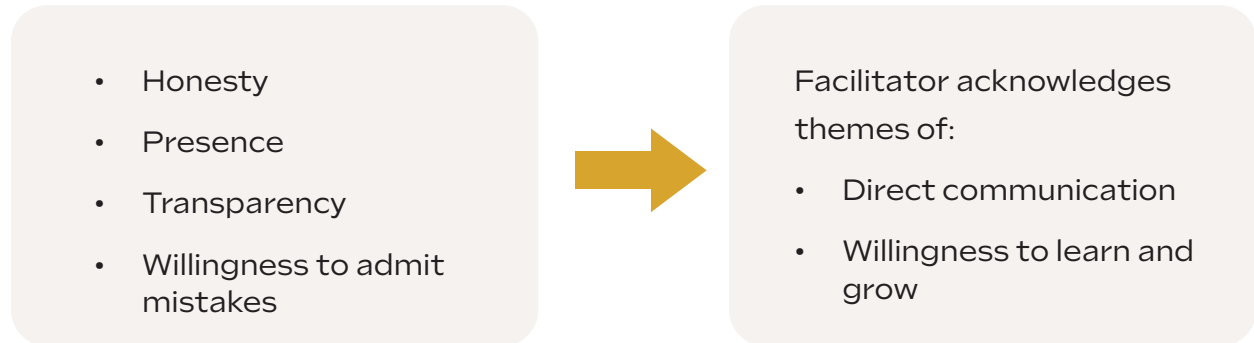
**Step 5:** As facilitator, you will transcribe notes and share With the group in the following meeting to revise/modify and agree on.

### Facilitator Notes:

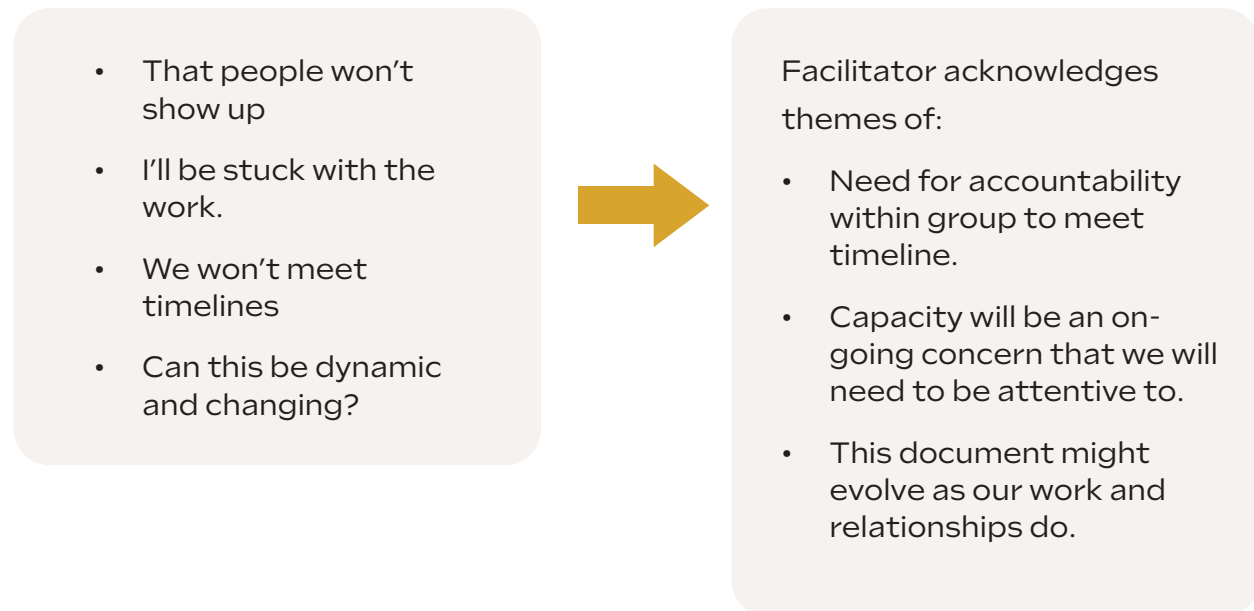
You should be reviewing these materials with the team and taking notes. You should have a few observations prepared for Step 4.

## Process of notes to product

Example Questions: What do you value in a collaborative partner?



Example Questions: What are your concerns or are you curious about?



## Example of Community Agreements

### Community Engagement Collective Values

This document was co-created by the community engagement specialists and community engagement manager. We understand it as a living document that we will return to and revise as our work and relationships develop. This set of shared values serves as a lens for how we collaborate and practice engagement with each other and communities.

#### **We work towards equity which entails:**

- Bearing witness to each other
- Valuing lived experiences
- Addressing implicit bias
- Honoring and drawing from community expertise

#### **We honor relationships which entails:**

- Making space for disagreement and compromise
- Encouraging fun, laughter, and relationship building
- Assuming good intentions and valuing everyone in the room

#### **We strive to be lifelong learners and teachers which entails:**

- An openness for professional development
- Willingness to share knowledge, networks resources, and institutional wisdom

#### **We come to collaborate with each other which entails:**

- Transparency
- Direct communication including:
  - Open-mindedness: Listen to & respect all points of view
  - Acceptance: Suspend judgement as best you can
  - Curiosity: Seek to understand rather than persuade
  - Learn: Question assumptions, look for new insights
  - Sincerity: Speak from your heart and personal experience
  - Brevity: Go for honesty and depth – don't go on and on
  - Dialogue: Speaking to each other directly about our projects when curious

- Presence
  - Attendance and attention
  - Follow through or follow up

**Collective Goals (or, why we commit to meeting)**

- Connecting KPIs for engaging with community
- Learning from and collaborating with community
- Cross-departmental collaboration
- Meeting/event planning and accessibility
- Developing official city engagement best practices and identifying flexibility
- Professional development
- Resources to serve communities and our skill set as practitioners
- Understanding data
- Navigating the complexity of understanding what community wants and needs and our roles as public servants
- Developing trust and relationships with community

**Resource Sharing**

We are committed to sharing the following with each other. We understand this list is the beginning of our expertise, skills set, and networks. This list will continue to develop and is not inclusive.

**Topics:**

- Community Master Plan
- Road Construction
- Vital Streets
- Age-friendly activities
- Community networks (with groups of population based on identity or culture)
- Police related topic
- Climate plan
- Environmental health topics

*continued top of next page*

- Housing/building
- Water related topics (Lead Line Replacement Program, water/sewer rates, Water Quality Report, Water Career Program)

### **Technology:**

- Umbrella easel
- Projector and screen
- Booking Chambers
- Creating project groups / Public Input

### **Skill sets:**

- Public speaking/facilitation
- Procedure or executive communication
- Community connectors
- Think tank sessions
- Data analysis

### **Finished Product Example for Community Meetings**

- **Open-mindedness:** Listen to & respect all points of view
- **Acceptance:** Suspend judgement as best you can
- **Curiosity:** Seek to understand rather than persuade
- **Learn:** Question assumptions, look for new insights
- **Sincerity:** Speak from your heart and personal experience
- **Brevity:** Go for honesty and depth – don't go on and on
- **Presence:** Attendance, Attention, and Check In

### **Conflict Resolution Protocols**

"Yes, and..."

"Help me better understand..."

"What did you mean by..."

Talk directly to the person, not through others.

## Creating a Memorandum of Understanding

Depending on the community partner or project, a MOU might be a useful tool when formalizing a relationship during a long-term project. The MOU can be an activity that leads to productive and transparent discussions. Consider the MOU as the product and result of the discussion. In the MOU, the following information could be included:

Description	Example	Your Turn
Who is involved	Garfield Park Neighborhood Association  Parks and Rec project manager	
Roles and responsibilities	GPNA: facilitate 4 community conversations.  P/R: provide content and materials	
Goals and purpose of collaboration	GPNA: to request feedback, educate community on impact in GPNA. Strive to include at least 25% of area to attend meetings.  P/R: to provide opportunity for neighbors to educate each other and provide feedback without persuading.	
Stipend or recognition of labor	GPNA: \$35 per hour	
Timeline expectations of deliverables	May-July, one meeting per month	
Explanation of accountability	Payment will not be delivered until meetings completed;	
Explanation of how relationship is mutually beneficial or reciprocity agreement	GPNA feels that it is best for information to be provided on impact.  P/R identifies issues of trust and want to create space for feedback to occur.	

## Creating an Agenda

Agendas can be useful as a method to organize meetings and provide transparency. Agenda development is one opportunity for co-creation.

### Approach 1: Agenda development as brainstorm or inquiry



#### **Tip: Embrace the working meeting!**

Working meetings can lead to feeling productive or contributions. Leave space for activities, small group discussion, and experiences.

## Approach 2: Co-creating agenda before the meeting

### Pre-Work

- Agenda for review (DRAFT)
- Welcome and Check In
- Consent items:
  - TBD
- Questionnaire development
  - Questions to review
- Implementation
  - Outreach
  - Communication
  - Explain impact
- Finalize decision-making
- Next steps / assigned tasks



### Communication to group

Please review this draft agenda. Our goal is to develop a survey to request feedback. Consider:

- Does this agenda best reflect our discussion from the last meeting
- What else needs to be considered in the implementation stage?
- Are you ready to approve any items ahead of time?
- What additional info do you need to make a decision or provide feedback? If there is consensus, I will add it under the “consent” sub-heading.



### Agenda (final version)

- Welcome and Check In
- Consent items:
- List here
- Questionnaire development
- Questions to review
- Implementation
- Outreach
- Communication
- Explain impact
- Modality of delivery
- Access and literacy
- Finalize decision-making
- Next steps and assigned tasks
- Check out and reflect

### Follow up communication to accompany agenda and notes

- Explain what occurred in meeting
- Summarize major ideas and contributions
- Highlight ongoing questions and concerns
- Summarize your tasks as convener/facilitator
- Provide information for next meeting and topic.

### Tip: Embrace community time

Include extra time at beginning and end of meeting for socializing and tardiness. Build a run of show agenda for organizers that includes time/schedule. Include community agreements on each agenda.

## Threshold of Engagement Tools

Formal materials to come. Please reach out to the Community Engagement Manager who has a myriad of tools and tactics to share with staff.

## Threshold of Engagement Tools

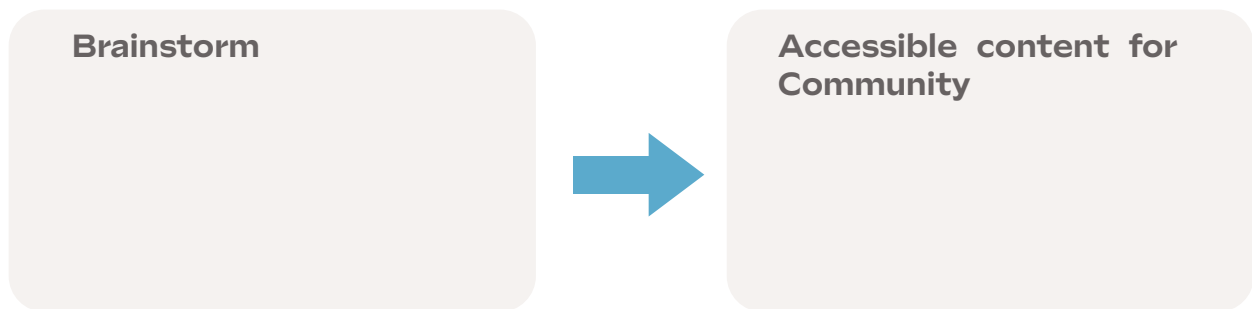
Formal materials to come. Please reach out to the Community Engagement Manager who has a myriad of tools and tactics to share with staff.

## Initial Stages of Design

Now that your work group is developed, it is essential to come to a common understanding of the project and the process needed for design and development. This template aids your decisions. Each department has its own unique decision-making culture and restraints around collaboration and shared decision making. As a team or on your own, work through the following questions to understand how you would approach the Involve component of the process.

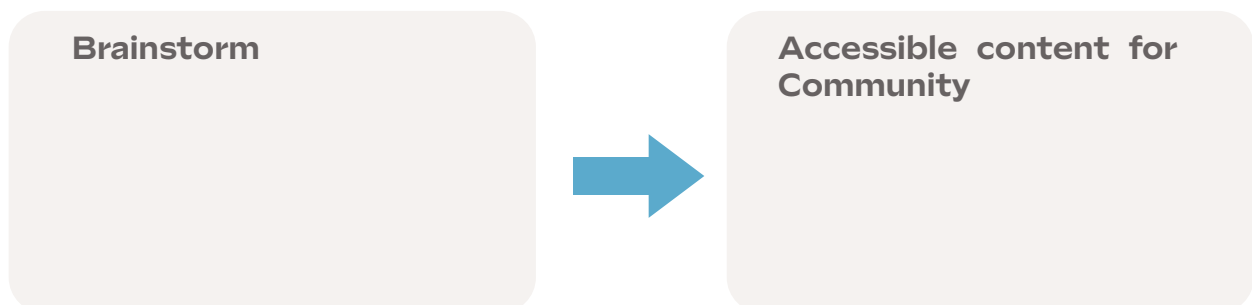
### Step 1: Project Clarification and Impact

- Describe the project
- Who will this project impact?
  - Direct impact on neighbors and businesses
  - Indirect impact
  - Unknown



### Step 2: Context and Expectations

- How does this project connect or build upon additional/past efforts or goals?
- What decisions can your work group make?
- What approvals do you need?
- What processes need to be followed? Why?
- What processes can have some flexibility to make space for community input and shared decision making?



### Step 3: Budget and Resources

Item	Anticipate	Allocated
Communications and promotional material		
Space		
Community stipends		
Swag & engagement materials (paper, markers, etc.)		
Staff capacity / labor		
Data development and analysis		
Consultants		
Additional		

### Step 4: What do you need from community (select all that apply)?

- Preferences/priorities on pre-selected options
- Acknowledgement of receiving information
- Complete a survey or questionnaire
- Attend a public or open meeting
- Feedback on decisions made by staff
- Approval on decisions
- Permission to conduct project/study
- Input throughout the entire process
- Steering committee/advisory group
- Shared decision-making
- Resources or points of contact

#### Tip:

If you do not know the answers then your work group might need to gather for a brainstorming/information session

**Step 5:** What do you think community will need from you (select all that apply)?

- Information
- Ensure information is available to all
- Updates
- Examples
- Models from similar cities
- Resources
- Funding
- Review staff decisions
- Provide/Deny permission
- Preferences/priorities on pre-selected options
- Feedback on decisions made by staff
- Input throughout the entire process
- Shared decision-making
- Resources or points of contact
- Possibilities for additional pathways/options
- Ask questions
- Create events or meetings for community to gather

**Tip:**

If you do not know the answers, this might be an indication that your group needs to get to know the community before making decisions or bringing community together.

**Notes**

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## Implementation of Engagement: A Check List

In this section, wise practices are shared to guide moderate to high threshold engagement sessions and events. When making considerations, there are both the logistical components and the purpose and goal of the session.

### Top Tips

1. Do a walk-through of the space
2. Accessibility is a responsibility and not an afterthought
3. Less is more
  - Go for substance
  - When trying to do everything, nothing gets accomplished
4. Rely on the expertise and experience of staff and community
5. Put in the care work prior and post the event
  - Communicate expectations, share materials, and provide reminders
  - Offer amenities such as parking validation and directions, bring snacks, and
  - Follow up with notes, materials, and next steps within 24-48 hours
6. Make it fun and interactive
  - Less slide decks, more post its and chart paper

### Timeline of Engagement Planning

2+ Months Out:

#### Logistics and Space

1. Contact Community Engagement Manager for input or support
2. Organize work group of staff and community partners:
  - Decide on invitations to community partners, organizations, and stakeholders
  - Develop meeting schedule
  - Create roles and responsibilities
  - Identify planning /organizing tool
3. Begin logistical planning:
  - Finalize date and time of meeting
  - Finalize a space
  - See this list for spaces for community meetings
  - Conduct a walkthrough
  - Determine needs for space
  - Confirm security, facilities needs, and event insurance if applicable
4. Reserve your Go Kit

## Communications and Outreach

1. Contact Communications Department for support with the following:
  - Marketing and publicity
    - What's the message?
    - Who is your audience?
    - What is your budget?
  - Graphics and social media
    - What is the subject matter?
    - What kind of energy or message do you want to convey?
    - Do you have images that you prefer to use?
  - City of Grand Rapids website and calendar
    - Ensure that your meetings do not conflict with other events
  - Photography and video
2. Secure translations resources
  - See this resource for additional support
3. Create Public Input page
  - See this resource for additional support and guidance

### 6 weeks out

1. Meet with work group to address the following:
  - Implementation of communications and outreach
  - Sharing information post-meeting
  - Age-friendly activities
  - Accessibility planning
  - Vendors and payments
    - Ensure vendors are in system (see link)
    - Identify who makes payments and notify them of requests
  - Coordinate and check in with speakers
  - Swag or giveaways

### Three weeks out

1. Continue communications and outreach
2. Technology walkthrough
3. Convene staff and volunteers to discuss:
  - Training and onboarding
  - Roles and responsibilities
  - Run of show
4. Review and finalize meeting materials
  - Order printing
  - Discussion of storage and backing up of materials
  - Presentation to Top Management or Cabinet (if applicable)
5. Confirm logistics and space with vendor, facilities staff etc.
6. Order additional supplies such as:
  - Chart paper
  - Writing supplies
  - Fidgets

### Week of

1. Confirm attendees (if applicable)
2. Finalize layout and design of space
3. Send out final media pushes
4. Print materials
5. Pick up rentals and Go Kit
6. Organize supplies and materials
  - Pack swag bags or giveaways

### Day of

1. Pick up food and drinks
2. Bring materials (Go Kit/Tech, swag, table covering, presentation/engagement materials, etc.)
3. Pre-meeting presentation and run through
  - Connect with staff, volunteers, and speakers
4. Take photos and videos

### Post-event

1. Celebrate with work group
  - Schedule time for post-event snacks and conversation
  - Debrief and reflect
  - Connect with CEM to debrief and reflect (optional)
2. Store/document/back up all meeting materials
  - Compile and analyze surveys and evaluations
3. Send thank you notes
4. Publicly share promised information through depending on relevancy:
  - City of GR
  - Public Input
  - Facebook
  - Email
5. Send out post-event survey (if applicable)
6. Complete self-assessment form
  - See this resource in work book

### **Tip: Demonstrating Presence**

- Limit cell phone and computer use when community members are speaking
- Introduce yourself and your role in the City
- Explain and limit use of acronyms
- Demonstrate active listening through
  - Asking questions
  - Repeating back information to confirm understanding and accuracy
  - Explain how community partner's lived experiences provide you with insight, understanding, and new realizations
  - Taking notes
    - Display or share notes and use this to model transparency and effective listening
- Clearly explain follow up communication and next steps

## Process of requesting feedback

### Ask

"We want to hear from you."



### Affirm

- Did I accurately document your perspective?
- Is there anything that should be modified or added?

Affirm that you understand its value from that person's perspective.



### Close the Loop

- Explain how you can or why you cannot implement feedback.
- Share the feedback provided.
- Offer additional options or pathways to get a compromise, live with it, or neutrality.

## Process for providing feedback

### Ask

Can I share my perspective?  
I am curious about something...



Recognize contributions and all perspectives

Yes and ...

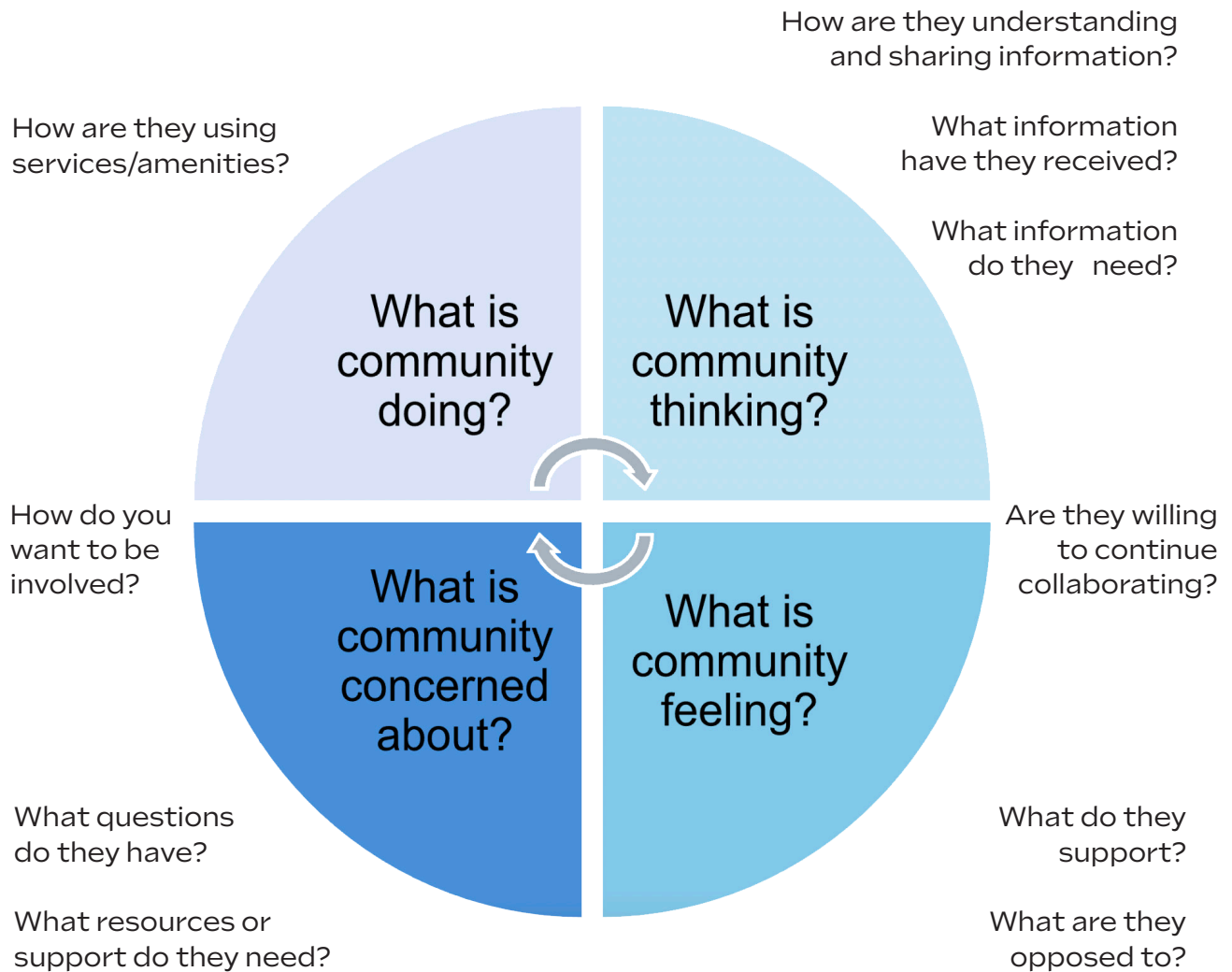
I wonder if we could examine this pathway...



### Strive for the best outcome

- Avoid Devil's advocate arguments/"thought exercises"
- Be prepared to follow through on action item or proposed solution
- Contribute for the good of the while.
- Admit your own limitations and knowledge.

## Determining the Purpose of Feedback



## Steps for requesting and understanding feedback

Step 1	Explanation	Purpose and Impact	Review and Consult	Affirm and Enhance
<b>Ask:</b>	"We want to hear from you"	"This is how we plan to use your feedback to impact decisions"	"Can you review this feedback or report to add additional insights or enhance the document?"	"Does this feedback represent the community?" "What additional information do we need to tell our story?"
<b>Your Turn:</b>				

Step 2	Explanation	Methods	Modalities and Circulation	Permission Types
<b>Collect:</b>	"We want to hear from you"	Form/ Questionnaire Focus group Interview Modality (paper, digital, social) Statistical/ Numerical Qualitative/ Lived experiences & perspectives	Paper Digital Social media In-person/door knocking	Anonymous Personal Information requested or required Demographic information requested or required
<b>Your Turn:</b>				

Step 3	Summary	What you might still be curious about	Additional Information
<b>Review to understand:</b>	What information was shared?	What was not shared that you still have questions about?	Identify information that is not in scope of project  What information does this provide?
<b>Your Turn</b>			

Step 4	Organize and group	Develop themes	Context, history, and policy	Prioritization
<b>Analyze:</b>	Organize by shared topics (e.g. trash)	What insights do you glean from these topics?  What is the broader story that is being told through the topic?	What context provides the framing for the information?  How do these results compare to additional studies / outreach?  Asset-based and strengths-based framework	Majority  Location/ neighborhood  Within scope of project design
<b>Your Turn:</b>				

Step 5	Summary	What you might still be curious about	Additional Information
<b>Report:</b>	<p>Access, literacy, and language</p> <p>include visuals, models, and quotations when applicable</p>	<p>Share the process and the product</p> <p>Differentiate between summary of results and analysis</p>	<p>Connect back to project scope and goals</p> <p>Address the gaps, the unknown, and what was learned.</p>
<b>Your Turn:</b>			

## Shared Learning

Formal materials to come. Please reach out to the Community Engagement Manager who has a myriad of tools and tactics to share with staff.

## Glossary

**Access:** Considering multiple subject positions, lived experiences, and the needs of physical bodies when making decisions. To ensure that everyone has the option to participate.

**Accountability:** a purposeful elaboration of our strategic values that includes taking active and ongoing responsibility for decisions, events, or relationships. Identifying one's role and power and how that impacts relationships and perceptions with communities. Accountability requires one to be transparent and communicate their responsibility to collaborative partners.

**Collaboration:** purposeful elaboration of our strategic values that describes a collective effort to build something; this includes everyday practices to strategic planning and strategizing. Relationships are recognized as a vital component to successful collaboration.

**Community-engagement paradigm:** is a model for forming and maintaining relationships with community members whether the intention is to collaborate, develop, share information, or gather data. This model provides a standardization of community-based relationships through key concepts, values, and practices. It also offers individualization through defining goals, providing options, gathering data, and self-assessment.

**Consensus:** When all parties agree to a decision. This decision was made without threat or retaliation (even perception of possible retaliation). Within this decision, there can be disagreement or tension but these feelings are acknowledged and all parties are willing to go forward.

**Consent:** Asking for permission before a decision is made. Permission is presented without threat, coercion, or intimidation.

**Cultural Community:** a cultural community is any group that is formed due to subject position, beliefs, values, practices, or sharing of space. Often, when referring to communities, identity-based communities are emphasized (race, gender, religion, etc.). This document extends how one considers culture and community. Each community has their own set of wise practices rooted in context and relationships.

**Democratic Deliberation:** Acknowledging that disagreement occurs when making decisions and throughout collaboration. Disagreement is a part of the process and potentially productive (Roberts-Miller).

**Lived Experience Expert:** a person who has knowledge, resources, or skills that are gained through lived experiences and community relationships. They may or may not have credentials to authorize their experience.

**Mutual Beneficial Relationships:** Examining what all parties receive and contribute to a collaborative relationship. Taking the time to reflect on the role of power in the relationship and how that impacts how one acknowledges and engages with the other party. Promoting mutual beneficial relationships is practicing an ethics of care.

**Reciprocity:** In collaborative relationships, there is an exchange of knowledge, resources, labor, or gifts that reflects the appreciation and power dynamics of that relationship. Some communities expect a gift or exchange of resources when requesting a relationship or asking for collaboration, knowledge, or resources. Reciprocity should be ongoing and not just at the beginning or end of a relationship. Reciprocity is not about giving and taking but about sharing and exchanging.

**Respect:** A component of a relationship where all groups identify that each person's lived experiences are rooted in their reality and subject position. To engage in respectful relationships is to practice trust, affirmation, validation, and accountability.

**Responsibility:** an obligation rooted in cultural, historical, social, and political awareness that one takes into account when making decisions and forming relationships. For example, an Indigenous person may identify their responsibility as a water protector.

**Stakeholder:** This is a historically and culturally complicated term. Typically, this term is used to describe those with financial investment in a project. It has also been used as a catch all to describe all parties institutions need to consider when making a decision. For some communities, this term has violent and mercenarial connotations. Consider alternative phrasing like knowledge sharer, working partner, or community partner.

**Universal Design:** Universal design means that rather than designing your facility and services for the average user, you design for people with a broad range of abilities, ages, reading levels, learning styles, languages, cultures, and other characteristics.

**Wise Practices:** an intentional shift away from the phrase “best practices” that acknowledges each cultural community has their own traditions, values, and approaches rooted in culture and history. Wise practices are culturally situated. When using this phrase, we are intentionally addressing that we are invested in drawing upon a community’s strengths.