

Corporate Policy and Procedure



Policy	Community Engagement Policy
Category	Corporate Policy
Authority	Strategic Communications and Community Engagement
Related Policies	Community Engagement Honorarium Policy
Approved By	Click to insert name of approver and date approved
Effective Date	Click or tap to enter a date.
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Policy Statement

The City of Guelph (the City) believes community engagement—**involving the public in the decision-making process related to matters that affect them and that they can meaningfully influence**—leads to better decisions that help the community realize its vision.

Input collected through community engagement—in concert with intergovernmental, social and cultural, environmental, technical, and financial considerations—is a key component of City decision-making.

Purpose

This policy ensures the City has a consistent, coordinated, and outcomes-centred approach to engaging the community. This means:

- City staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources to deliver meaningful community engagement;
- The community understands the factors that drive City decision-making, know why their participation is important, and have what they need to participate;

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All departments of The Corporation of the City of Guelph;
- All full-time, part-time, and casual employees responsible for the design and/or delivery of formal and informal community engagement;
- Elected officials participating in engagement processes related to specific City projects;

- All consultants or external organizations that undertake community engagement on behalf of the City of Guelph;

This policy does not supersede the requirements of any current legislation that governs public consultation by the City and its departments. It is designed to complement legislated requirements and ensure legislated public consultation also satisfies internal standards.

Policy guidance

The City's community engagement promise

The City is committed to creating the conditions for meaningful community engagement. The City will

- nurture relationships;
- build capacity for participation with City staff and within the community; and
- ensure meaningful opportunities exist to influence City decisions.

When does the City engage?

In an ongoing way, the City invests in nurturing relationships in the community and building capacity for participation. These are critical foundations to deeper, more meaningful engagement.

When there are specific matters that affect the community and that the community can meaningfully influence, the City engages the community directly to

- identify community needs and aspirations;
- inform the creation of a new policy, program, project, or service;
- evaluate an existing policy, program, project, or service;
- fulfill a Council resolution or legislated requirement; and/or
- respond to a community-led request.

When will the City not engage?

The City may not engage the community when

- it's a matter of immediate public safety;
- change is legislated from other levels of government;
- there's little community interest;
- the City cannot to do so meaningfully; and/or
- community input has a low likelihood of influencing the decision because of other considerations at play

The process for engaging the community

When the City engages the community, it follows an established process.

Stage 1 – Define

The City will establish the scope of the decision and determine if community engagement makes sense. It will

- communicate the goal of the project;
- assess the affects the project will have on the community;
- assess what opportunities exist for meaningful engagement given timelines, resources, and community interest;
- assess what community data and insights already exist and may be relevant to the decision;
- determine if engagement is appropriate;
- set engagement objectives; and
- identify who needs to be engaged.

Stage 2 – Create

The City will develop community engagement plans that align with the engagement objectives set in stage 1. It will

- determine the most effective methods for reaching and engaging those it intends to engage;
- identify timelines that align with community needs and the project goals;
- outline what success looks like; and
- where possible, coordinate engagement across projects.

Stage 3 - Deliver

The City will deliver community engagement as outlined in stage 2. It will

- promote community engagement over the course of the project using a variety of channels;
- host engagement activities in the community and/or online;
- collect and carefully analyse all community engagement data;
- refine engagement goals, methods, communications, and marketing as needed throughout a project; and
- evaluate communications and engagement.

Stage 4 – Share

The City will share data and insights from community engagement. It will

- share data and insights in plain language;
- tell the community how community engagement, along with other key considerations, informed a recommendation or decision;
- tell the community if, when and why community feedback did not inform a decision; and
- tell the community about the successes and challenges associated with the community engagement opportunity.

The principles for designing and delivering community engagement

In all engagement, The City strives to

- practice inclusive design and address identified barriers to participation;
- focus on the needs and experiences of equity-denied groups;
- engage early and evolve its approach as it goes;
- connect dots;
- meet people where they are;
- deliver diverse engagement opportunities;
- spark curiosity and joy; and
- report back.

Roles and responsibilities

Community engagement is by its very nature, a relational commitment. Multiple audiences must work together to achieve the community's vision.

The City's engagement staff

- engages community, staff and Councillors with respect;
- works with leadership and administration to ensure appropriate resources and systems are in place to deliver meaningful community engagement;
- help make determinations about when community engagement is appropriate;
- reviews Requests for Proposals and Tenders to ensure they include appropriate community engagement scope;
- develops community engagement plans and support City project managers to deliver community engagement that aligns with the City's community engagement promise, process, and design principles;
- liaises with consultants to ensure consultant-led community engagement aligns with the City's community engagement promise, process, and design principles;
- takes action to identify and remove barriers to equitable participation;
- engages in regular, relevant professional development related to community engagement core competencies;
- maintains a centralized database of community engagement data;
- designs and deliver relevant community engagement training for staff;
- maintains a repository of community engagement resources, tools, and supports for staff;
- provides regular performance reporting related to community engagement; and
- evaluates and updates the City's Community Engagement Framework.

City project managers

- approach community engagement and makes decisions with an understanding that each decision and change have an impact on people in the community;
- are aware of and understand their responsibilities related to the City's Community Engagement Policy and ensure consultants and external organizations leading engagement on behalf of the City are as well;
- engage community and Councillors with respect;

- takes action to identify and remove barriers to equitable participation;
- acknowledges the role bias plays in decision-making and is responsible for using community engagement data with rigour and transparency;
- communicate how community engagement has shaped decision-making; and
- balance community engagement with other intergovernmental, social and cultural, technical, financial, and environmental considerations when making recommendations and decisions.

Community members

- recognize the City strives to listen to many voices and takes all input into consideration;
- remember community engagement is one part of good decision-making and must be held in balance with other considerations including; intergovernmental, socio-cultural, technical, financial, and environmental
- let staff know if you or someone else experiences barriers to participation that have not been addressed (if you feel comfortable doing so);
- interact with staff, Councillors, and other engagement participants with respect;
- listen and look to understand other viewpoints and perspectives;
- provide input and feedback within project timelines;
- encourage others to participate; and
- provide feedback to the City about their engagement practices.

Elected officials

- ask about the Community Engagement Framework and its application on City projects;
- interact with City staff, the community, and engagement participants with respect;
- let City staff know when you become aware of barriers to equitable participation;
- encourage community to participate in community engagement opportunities;
- connect City staff with relevant community members, organizations, and businesses;
- apply the community engagement design principles when engaging with community;
- acknowledge the role bias can play in decision-making, review information gathered through community engagement and balance it with intergovernmental, social and cultural, technical, financial, and environmental considerations when making decisions; and
- ask about and support realistic timelines and appropriate resources required to deliver meaningful community engagement.

Evaluation and continuous improvement

The City adopts a continuous improvement mindset and embraces innovation as it relates to community engagement. The City is committed to

- trying new things, evolving tired approaches, and investing in community engagement innovation;
- regularly inviting and using community feedback to make community engagement practices better;
- using the community engagement design principles to measure and report on community engagement; and
- continuously evolving the Community Engagement Framework to respond to the changing needs of the community and the context of the world at large.

Definitions

2SLGBTQ+ - is an acronym that stands for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning. The plus sign indicates the inclusion of identities not explicitly included in the acronym.¹

Barrier - an obstacle that keeps an individual or group from participating fully in society. A barrier can be visible, invisible, environmental, physical, economic, social or political. Barriers can prevent full communication, working together, progress and/or achievement.

Community - a group of people with shared interests or values or who share an environment. This term may refer to members or groups from the public or City of Guelph employees.

Community engagement - involving the public in the decision-making processes related to matters that affect them and that they can meaningfully influence.

Compensation - recognition in a form that has financial value for an act or service provided by someone who is contributing their time under specific circumstances.

Emotional labour - the process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfill the requirements of participation. More specifically, engagement participants may feel as though they are expected to regulate or suppress their emotions during interactions with the City, Council, or other community members. Additionally, participation may bring up feelings of struggle or trauma which the participant may have to process after the interaction.

Engagement activity - a specific approach to collecting input from community, for example, interviews, charettes, roundtables, surveys, working groups, citizens juries.

Engagement event - a specific engagement opportunity that takes place during an established date and time in person or online. Multiple engagement events may occur as part of broader consultation related to a single policy, program, project, or service.

Engagement fatigue - a tiredness which results in people not participating in political, democratic and community engagement processes. Often the result of

¹ Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms, A Reference Tool, January 2022, from [ccdi-glossary-of-terms-eng.pdf](https://www.ccdi-ccdi.ca/glossary-of-terms-eng.pdf)

previously unmet expectations, a feeling that participation won't impact decisions, a view that outcomes are pre-determined, or too many engagement opportunities.

Equity - where everyone is treated according to their diverse needs in a way that enables all people to participate, perform, and engage to the same extent.²

Equity-denied - individuals or groups that, because of systemic discrimination, face barriers that prevent them from having the same access to the resources and opportunities that are available to other members of society, and that are necessary for them to attain just outcomes. In Canada, groups generally considered to be equity-denied groups include, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, women, people who are part of 2SLGBTQ2+ communities, people living in poverty, religious minority groups and racialized people. The types of equity-denied groups may vary based on factors such as geography, sociocultural context or the presence of specific subpopulations.³

Honorarium (plural: Honoraria) - a type of compensation that is understood as a form of nominal financial recognition that may be used to honour one-time or non-routine contributions of knowledge, skills, living and lived experience, and emotional labour.

Human-centred design - a problem-solving approach that puts real people at the centre of the decision-making process enabling the creation of policies, programs, projects and services that resonate and are tailored to the people in question.

Inclusive design - a practice where products and services are designed in a way that they are accessible and can serve as many people as possible, regardless of their age, gender, or ability.

International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) - an international organization advancing the practice of public participation (community engagement). Their mission is to promote and advance public participation (community engagement) globally through targeted initiatives that are guided by culturally adaptive standards of practice and core values.

Intersecting identities - the concept that an individual's identity consists of multiple, intersecting factors, including but not limited to gender identity, gender expression, race, ethnicity, class (past and present), religious beliefs, sexual identity, and sexual expression. These intersecting factors are what make people multi-layered individuals.⁴

² Ibid.

³ Government of Canada, P. S. and P. C. (2022, August 4). *Guide on equity, diversity and inclusion terminology*.

⁴ Bolding, Pharoah (2020, October 27-29). *Intersectionality vs. Intersecting Identities* [Conference presentation]. 2020 Oregon Statewide Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Conference, Virtual. Available - <https://www.oregon.gov/deiconference/Documents/Pharoah%20Bolding%20-%20Intersectionality%20vs.%20Intersecting%20Identities.pdf>

Living and lived experience - expertise gained through direct, first-hand exposure and involvement in events, experiences, and systems versus representations constructed by other people.⁵

Plain language - Clear, concise communication designed so the audience will understand the message

People with living and lived experience - individuals or groups who understand the issues that are relevant to their communities and have perspectives which may not be known to outsiders. They have critical vantage points about community needs, what aspects of services are working, and what needs to be changed.⁶ They are technical experts as it relates to their own experiences of, for example, homelessness, addictions, mental health, trauma, poverty, chronic illness, systemic discrimination, disability, etc.

Safe spaces - a space where people feel psychologically safe and can express honest impressions, thoughts, and attitudes without fear of ridicule. A safe space is one that doesn't incite judgement based on identity or experience – where the expression of both can exist and be affirmed without fear of repercussion and without the pressure to educate.⁷

Social listening - the practice of monitoring conversations taking place across various online platforms to understand what people are talking about. Social listening helps the City understand, beyond its own social media and community engagement platforms, what people are interested in, concerned about, and hopeful for.

⁵ Suicide Prevention Resource Centre. (n.d.). *Engaging people with lived experience: A toolkit for organizations*. Engaging People with Lived Experience: A Toolkit for Organizations | Suicide Prevention Resource Center. Retrieved August 26, 2022, from <https://www.sprc.org/livedexperiencetoolkit/about>

⁶ Feige, S., & Choubak, M. (2019). *Best Practices for Engaging People with Lived Experience*. Guelph, ON: Community Engaged Scholarship Institute.

⁷ Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms, A Reference Tool, January 2022, from [ccdi-glossary-of-terms-eng.pdf](https://www.ccdi.ca/glossary-of-terms-eng.pdf)