

# The City of Guelph’s Community Engagement Charter

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# Proposed Table of Contents for Community Engagement Charter

The revised framework is full of all of the good stuff listed in this draft table of contents however, we are still writing some of those parts and we want to get your feedback on the parts that were most heavily influenced by what the community told us. Specifically, this includes elements of the section entitled Our promise that are bolded, below.

1. Acknowledgements
2. Introduction
3. Why is community engagement important?
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  - a. When we will engage
  - b. When we won't engage
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    - i. **The community engagement process**
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5. Who is responsible?
6. Evaluating community engagement
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# Our promise

We believe community engagement leads to better decisions that help the community realize its vision for an inclusive, connected, prosperous city where we look after each other and our environment.

The City will help create the conditions for meaningful community engagement. To deliver on that, we promise to:

1. Nurture relationships so there's an evolving sense of trust, safety, and cooperation between us, and within the community itself. We do this because relationships are at the heart of community.
2. Build capacity for participation so that you know about and understand decisions, know what the impacts of a decision will be, and know how you can participate in shaping these decisions. We'll help you understand City processes and encourage you to participate. We do this because informed participation is a foundation of democracy.
3. Ensure there are meaningful opportunities to influence City decisions so that decisions reflect what you have indicated is important to you. This means not only ensuring that when we engage there is a true opportunity to influence decisions, but also that we look for ways and means of engaging to allow more meaningful input. We do this because sharing power leads to better decisions.

Our Community Engagement Charter lays out when and how we bring this promise to life.

## How we will engage

### We'll nurture relationships

Constructive, cooperative relationships between City staff, Council and the community are important. Good relationships help foster trust, create space for respectful dialogue, and allow us to hear from a diversity of voices.

You can expect the City to make time to develop relationships with community even when there's no specific ask or project in mind.

- You'll see us around Guelph at places like community events, festivals, gatherings, and meetings
- We'll share, celebrate, and amplify community work that's aligned with the Guelph's community plan, A United Vision, and the City of Guelph's strategic plan, Guelph. Future ready
- We'll facilitate conversations on topics that cross over and lead to collective impacts
- We'll follow up when you reach out

### We'll build capacity for participation

Informed participation requires us to strengthen organizational capabilities at the City and build capacity within the community.

Through professional development, training, and mentorship, we will continue to invest in growing and aligning City staff's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values with community engagement core competencies. These core competencies include:

- Designing and implementing inclusive and meaningful communications and community engagement
- Collecting, analysing and sharing community engagement data and insights
- Developing and stewarding community relationships
- Evaluating and innovating toward continuous improvement

The City and its partners will also work in the community to nurture informed participation by:

- Addressing barriers to participation
- Delivering accessible and inclusive communications that clearly identify what's at stake, explain potential impacts and describe required changes to diverse audiences
- Educating the community about diverse civic participation opportunities
- Developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values required to participate meaningfully

## **We'll ensure there are meaningful opportunities to influence City decisions**

When community engagement is appropriate, you can expect us to engage you in different ways. This may vary from project-to-project or even within a project. It will also depend on individual interest levels and the decision being made.

To guide what's appropriate we use the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Spectrum for Public Participation.

The Spectrum reminds us that not every project or part of a project needs the same type or depth of community engagement.

### **Inform**

At a minimum, and regardless of the decision being made, we will provide you with balanced and objective information to help you understand the problem, options, opportunities, and/or solutions. In these situations, we won't be asking for feedback, but we will communicate what we are doing and why.\*

### **Consult**

Some points of a project have limited options, or we have specific questions we need to ask to inform the decisions. In these cases, we might ask for feedback to understand your opinion or ask you specific questions about the analysis of staff and experts.\*

### **Involve**

Some parts of the decision-making process require us to make time and space for deeper back-and-forth with you. In these situations, the City works directly with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are consistently understood by asking you questions, answering yours and continuing the conversation until we understand each other.\*

### **Collaborate**

Some parts of the decision-making process involve collaborating on a path forward with community members. In these situations, the City collaborates with the community to frame the issue, develop options, and/or identify solutions together.\*

## **Empower**

Sometimes you're better positioned to make decisions at certain parts of the process. In these situations, the City supports establishing an appropriate process for you to make the decision.\*

\*Adapted from IAP2

# **What will community engagement look and feel like?**

## **The community engagement process**

Meaningful engagement takes time, people, and other resources to design and deliver. We take a staged approach to creating meaningful, rigorous, and effective community engagement. Sometimes these stages seem to go in order, while other times we might need to move back and forth between stages.

### **Stage 1 – Define**

We will establish the scope of the decision and determine if community engagement makes sense

As early as possible in the process you can expect us to:

- Communicate the goal of the project
- Assess the level of impact the project will have on you
- 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
- Identify who we need to engage

### **Stage 2 – Create**

We will develop community engagement plans that align with the engagement objectives set in stage 1

You can expect us to:

- Determine the most effective tactics for reaching and engaging you
- Identify timelines that align with your needs and the project goals
- Establish criteria for success
- Coordinate engagement across projects when it makes sense

### **Stage 3 - Deliver**

We will deliver community engagement as outlined in stage 2

You can expect us to:

- 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, techniques, communications, and marketing as needed throughout a project
- Shift communications and community engagement efforts in real time as needed
- Evaluate our efforts

### **Stage 4 – Share**

We will share data and insights from community engagement

You can expect us to:

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

## **The community engagement design principles**

The decisions that get made at City Hall affect your day-to-day lives. These decisions can affect the way you live, the way you move around, and the way you relate with one another. They can also affect how you participate in the local economy, what you buy and throw away, and what gets built or made.

You need meaningful opportunities to weigh in on these critical decisions.

We'll take a human-centred approach to making that happen.

We have established community engagement design principles (the Principles) to help us do this. The Principles help us to align our actions with our community engagement promise. They also help us measure how we're doing.

The Principles work together like instruments in an orchestra. Just like when an instrument is removed and the music changes, community engagement that misses even one of these Principles might feel incomplete.

## **We will proactively identify and address barriers to participation**

We know that a range of everyday things create **barriers** that may stop you from participating. We strive to design engagement to be accessible to a range of community members from the start. We will empathize with your needs. We will think about, for example, different lived experiences, different kinds of families and relationships, age, physical and cognitive abilities, environmental needs, economic impacts from participating, levels of literacy, education, and language preferences. Then, we'll do our best to meet your needs and remove barriers.

You can expect us to:

- Use a **human-centred design** approach to address barriers to participation
- Check the accessibility of event locations, digital files, webpages, and other resources and do our best to eliminate barriers
- Check our communications for **plain language** and readability level
- Translate key communications into languages other than English
- Where appropriate, cover costs that you incur while participating (e.g. parking, transit fare, refreshments, child and/or eldercare)
- Use an equity lens to compensate equity-denied individuals for their time, unique **lived experience**, and **emotional labour**

## **We will focus on the needs and experiences of equity-denied groups**

We know that the negative impacts of City policies, plans, programs, and services disproportionately affect people who experience structural and systemic oppression. We also know that when we make things better for equity-denied groups, we make them better for everyone in the community. We're committed to understanding how new or changing policies, programs, projects, and services will affect you and insist that this knowledge shapes decisions. We'll also design engagement with an

awareness that you have **intersecting identities**—only some of which may be apparent.

You can expect us to:

- Engage in ongoing education related to:
  - Indigenous reconciliation
  - The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action
  - The United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act
  - Inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility;
  - Anti-racism and systemic oppression;
- Use an equity lens to compensate equity-denied individuals for their time, unique **lived experience**, and **emotional labour**
- Make space for trust- and relationship-building with individuals from equity-denied groups both within and outside of projects
- Plan engagement that's mindful that people have many **intersecting identities**

### **We will engage early and evolve our approach as we go**

We know that asking for input too late in a project can feel inauthentic and as though important decisions have already been made. That's why when we engage, we'll do so as early as possible. We'll also take what we learn early on from you and use that to go deeper or adjust our approach wherever possible.

You can expect us to:

- Consider early points of a decision and challenge ourselves to bring your voice in earlier
- Engage with you at different phases of a project
- Let you know how your feedback from earlier phases has shaped later phases and decisions
- Ask questions to help define the problem or to hear your vision of how things might be, before looking at options
- Be open to changing our communications or engagement approaches if they aren't working

### **We will connect dots**

Many City decisions have very specific and technical considerations. Some decisions are set out in previously approved plans or relate to a policy direction that may not be clear to you. We need to tell you the whole story in plain language so you have the right context. We must be transparent about what we know and how a decision today comes from or will influence other decisions. We will balance gathering new information to make decisions with input you've already shared during past community engagement and be transparent about all the data we use to inform a decision.

You can expect us to:

- Communicate why a decision or request for input is framed the way it is and how it may impact you
- Share how a decision is connected to past decisions or approved policy and how it may inform future ones

- Use visuals, diagrams, posters, videos, and images to communicate (in addition to words)
- Look at engagement data from other projects to see what we can build on when designing new engagement opportunities

### **We will meet you where you are**

We know that meeting you where you are increases the likelihood you will contribute your feedback and ideas. We also know that doing so helps balance the conversation and get more diverse participation and perspectives. This means starting conversations in places you already are, at physical locations you frequent or that are convenient for you, and connecting through channels and means that make sense for you, whether digital or print. It also means being present and listening when there are important community conversations being led by others.

You can expect us to:

- Host engagement at geographically diverse locations including schools, parks, community centres, libraries, businesses, festivals, events, on busses, and through digital channels you use
- Join other community groups' events and community conversations

### **We will deliver diverse engagement opportunities**

We heard that the community engagement approaches that work best for you are as diverse as our community is. That's why when we design and deliver engagement, we'll consider different levels of previous knowledge on a topic; plan opportunities for participation based on different levels of interest; use different channels, means, and tools to get your input; and accommodate different schedules. We know you are more likely to participate when we provide a variety of ways to do so and that participation from different people makes engagement more representative.

You can expect us to:

- Ask you how, when and where you would like to have conversations with us
- Plan engagement opportunities that you can do on your own time and ones that bring people together (in-person and/or virtually)
- Host events at times when you are available (this may mean evenings or weekends for some people and daytime for others)
- Use visuals including diagrams, posters, videos, and images to communicate (in addition to words)
- Engage across the IAP2 spectrum

### **We will spark curiosity and joy**

We know that your lives are busy, getting by is a growing challenge, and that you're surrounded by overwhelming amounts of news and information that competes for your attention. We will design engagement with your experience in mind. Guelph has a vibrant human spirit and tapping into it means making space for joy, creativity, and laughter as we engage. When we're navigating complex issues, we'll be sensitive and thoughtful while looking for opportunities to build community together.

Where appropriate, you can expect us to:

- Offer incentives for participation

- Create interactive engagement exhibits (physical and digital)
- Communicate beyond news releases and notices
- Gamify engagement
- Co-create community art installations
- Create opportunities for you to bring your own projects to life
- Use popup placemaking strategies
- Talk to people at creative, fun and engaging spaces and events
- Not take ourselves too seriously

### **We will report back**

Telling you what we heard and how it informed a decision is part of being transparent; it's part of demonstrating that we're really listening. By sharing the larger story of what we heard from you and explaining how your feedback shaped a recommendation, or why it couldn't be considered or addressed, we hope to improve your understanding of recommendations and decisions and strengthen your trust in local government.

You can expect us to:

- Share community engagement findings with you through different channels
- Share the other considerations that have influenced recommendations or decisions
- Ask what we might have missed or not heard when sharing community engagement findings
- Be clear with elected officials about what we heard, from who, and how that shaped a recommendation or decision
- Focus more on the quality and diversity of our engagement than how many people we spoke with

# Glossary

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 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms, A Reference Tool, January 2022, from [ccdi-glossary-of-terms-eng.pdf](#)

may vary based on factors such as geography, sociocultural context or the presence of specific subpopulations.<sup>2</sup>

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, 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.

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.<sup>3</sup>

Lived experience - expertise gained through direct, first-hand exposure and involvement in events, experiences, and systems versus representations constructed by other people.<sup>4</sup>

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

People with 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Government of Canada, P. S. and P. C. (2022, August 4). *Guide on equity, diversity and inclusion terminology*.

<sup>3</sup> 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>

<sup>4</sup> 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>

<sup>5</sup> Feige, S., & Choubak, M. (2019). *Best Practices for Engaging People with Lived Experience*. Guelph, ON: Community Engaged Scholarship Institute.