Engaging Ethnocultural Communities:
A Guide for Municipalities

Templates and Tools for Alberta's Municipalities

Engaging Ethnocultural Communities:
A Guide for Municipalities
Templates and Tools for Alberta's Municipalities (2014)

Compiled by Zenev and Associates
In partnership with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association

The Welcoming & Inclusive Communities Initiative
Alberta Urban Municipalities Association
Alberta Municipal Place 300, 8616 - 51 Ave Edmonton, AB T6E 6E6
Email: wic@auma.ca
Phone: 780-433-4431

Contents

Introduction

Purpose of the Guide

AUMA is pleased to present **"Engaging with Ethno-cultural Communities: A Guide for Municipalities"**. The purpose of this Guide is to provide a practical and easy to use resource that municipal staff can use to engage with ethnocultural (EC) communities. The Guide is part of a suite of resources that AUMA has created over the years to support municipalities in their efforts to create welcoming and inclusive communities.

As municipalities well know, meaningful engagement with EC communities requires a commitment to citizen engagement, time and sustained effort. As a municipality, you will need to determine what areas of municipal activity would benefit from citizen and community engagement; which engagement strategies might best meet your purposes and circumstances; and the needs and interests of the EC communities you are working with. This Guide will provide you with a starting point to help you think about and plan for ongoing and effective engagement with EC communities.

Background

The impetus for developing this Guide was a two-day workshop held in July 2013, organized and hosted by AUMA. Thirteen representatives from the municipalities of Brooks, Calgary, Cold Lake, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Lac La Biche County and Lethbridge came together to talk about how engaging with EC communities can contribute to a more inclusive municipality. Workshop participants felt that with the changing demographics of Alberta municipalities, it was imperative to have a proactive plan in place to reach EC communities, and that issues of respect, cultural differences and language barriers could be addressed with thoughtful and thorough planning. The workshop provided participants the opportunity to discuss the following topics:

- The importance of engaging with EC communities, and the different levels of engagement that are possible.
- How municipalities and citizens are currently engaging with EC communities, some of the challenges encountered and areas for improvement.
- Ideas and good practices for meaningfully engaging with EC communities.

The perspectives and views that participants expressed during the workshop have been incorporated into this Guide, supplemented by research on promising practices and processes for EC community engagement that are relevant to municipalities of all sizes.

We hope that this Guide will help you to develop an effective engagement plan that you can put into place to build trust and relationships with the diverse EC communities in your municipality, with a view to creating a welcoming and inclusive community for all people.

What is an Ethno-Cultural Community?

An ethnocultural community is a group that has one or more shared characteristics such as ancestry, language, religion, geographical region of origin or national identity. These characteristics are the basis on which the group distinguishes itself from another.

Your municipality may have many different ethno-cultural communities; some may be newcomers to Canada, and others may have lived in your community for a longer period of time.

In the municipal context, some ethno-cultural communities may face barriers such as unequal access to services, perhaps due to language barriers or because available services and programs don't address their unique needs. This may be exacerbated by other factors such as lack of employment opportunities, poverty and social exclusion. Keep in mind, however, that not all ethno-cultural communities will encounter these barriers, or experience exclusion in the same way.

Adapted from Canada Revenue Agency, Applicants Assisting Ethnocultural Communities. http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/chrts-gvng/chrts/plcy/cps/cps-023-eng.html#N101F5

What is Community Engagement?

At the municipal level, community engagement is a set of processes that can be used to build relationships between the municipal organization and citizens and to ensure that citizens and communities are involved and included in all aspects of municipal life. These processes can be used to make sure that communities receive information they need can voice their opinions on issues of concern to them, have an opportunity to provide input into municipal decisions and work collaboratively with municipalities on projects of mutual interest.

Municipalities may have the best intentions of engaging citizens whenever possible, but there may be norms and processes that inadvertently exclude or marginalize certain communities whose needs and concerns differ from those of majority or dominant groups. A comprehensive and effective engagement strategy that takes into account the interests of diverse communities can contribute to the goal of creating a welcoming and inclusive community.

Why engage ethnocultural communities?

Engaging EC communities can benefit municipalities in the following ways:

Better knowledge of community issues and solutions	▪ Creates a channel and mechanism to become aware of issues faced by specific communities and neighborhoods (e.g. safety, service accessibility) ▪ Challenges (or validates) assumptions about the needs of EC communities ▪ Ensures that community expertise and knowledge are incorporated into problem definition and problem solving processes ▪ Strengthens decision making and planning processes by incorporating the perspectives of diverse communities
Effective service delivery	▪ Enhances ability to deliver effective services that meet the unique needs of EC communities ▪ Creates a more proactive and responsive service delivery model that can adapt to changing demographics ▪ Facilitates appropriate use of service delivery resources through proactive anticipation of changing needs ▪ Provides a channel for contacting and communicating information to EC communities during emergencies and disasters such as floods and fires
Strong economy	▪ Assists with attraction and retention of newcomers to supplement available workforce ▪ Makes your community more competitive nationally and internationally, and contributes to a more vibrant economy ▪ Encourages greater participation of EC communities in the economy of your region ▪ Creates champions within communities who will assist in attracting other newcomers
Vibrant social and cultural life	▪ Enhances the cultural life of your municipality through greater participation in arts and culture activities and events ▪ Maximizes the social and cultural knowledge of the municipality by incorporating diverse world views and knowledge (e.g. traditional ecological knowledge, a variety of artistic traditions) ▪ Reduces marginalization and creates more equitable social relationships between all communities ▪ Fosters openness to diversity, learning and innovation
Greater public confidence and	▪ Creates a better overall image of your municipality as being welcoming and inclusive

trust	▪ Enhances community confidence in municipality's desire to engage with EC communities ▪ Engenders trust in civic engagement processes and increases EC communities' confidence and capacity for engagement in civic life ▪ Increases willingness of communities to collaborate in municipal initiatives
Community well-being	▪ Prevents long-term effects of exclusion and contributes to safer communities for all residents ▪ Revitalizes sense of community through equitable and inclusive participation, and contributes to overall community well-being ▪ Encourages full participation of all citizens, and honours their right to have a say in decisions that impact their lives

" ..community engagement is primarily a vehicle for empowering formerly marginalized groups and for giving a voice to those who are affected by policy decisions"

Engaging the Migrant Community outside of Canada's main Metropolitan Centres: Community Engagement—the Welcoming Community Initiative and the case of Greater

"There is also a strong link between higher levels of community engagement and the ability of the community to respond to, manage and survive "shocks" such as floods, economic downturns and health crises"

Community engagement and systems change

Before you start.....

Whether you are just beginning the process of engaging EC communities, or want to strengthen your current engagement processes and relationships, it may be useful to take some time to clarify your goals, your current situation and your desired outcomes. Here are some questions to use as a starting point. Your responses to these questions will help you to begin to formulate your engagement plan.

Goals

- What are your specific reasons for wanting to engage with one or more EC communities?
- Is there an issue or opportunity you are trying to engage around? Are there any specific projects, plans or policies that would benefit from engagement with EC communities?

Current situation

- Which EC communities would you like to focus on? On one or two communities, or on all of them?
- How much information do you have about these communities? Where are the gaps in your understanding and knowledge?
- What is your current relationship with these communities?
- What avenues of communication already exist to reach these communities (e.g. ethnic media, municipal staff who are part of these communities)?
- Do you have any connections with key contacts within these communities (e.g. respected elders, faith group leaders, community workers, community animators, health or cultural brokers)?
- Are there any EC organizations that you can connect with for information, or partner with?
- Are there other organizations and levels of government that provide services to EC communities that you can partner with or ask for information (e.g. non-profit, schools, health institutions)?

Create a profile of the EC communities in your area

As a starting point, it may be useful to create a profile of each EC community in your municipality. You may want to check census data and neighborhood profiles and consult with EC organizations, service providers, funding organizations and other levels of government.

What do you know about…

- Demographic and other current data on the EC communities in your area? (e.g. languages spoken, religion, length of time in Canada, diversity within the community)?
- Community leaders/representatives, their roles within their communities, whether they represent the entire community or a sub-group within the community?
- Community gathering places such as community halls, places of prayer, ethno-cultural organization spaces?
- Organizations or levels of government that have relationships with these communities?
- Social/economic issues or barriers that these communities face?

- Within your municipality, who is currently working with EC communities? Are there staff, for example, in areas such as Family and Social Services that already have some knowledge of and relationships with EC communities? What are their roles and how much time do they spend on these roles?
- What resources (financial and staff time) are available for this work? What resources do EC communities have to participate in an engagement process with you?
- What level of support do you have for this work from your management and Council?
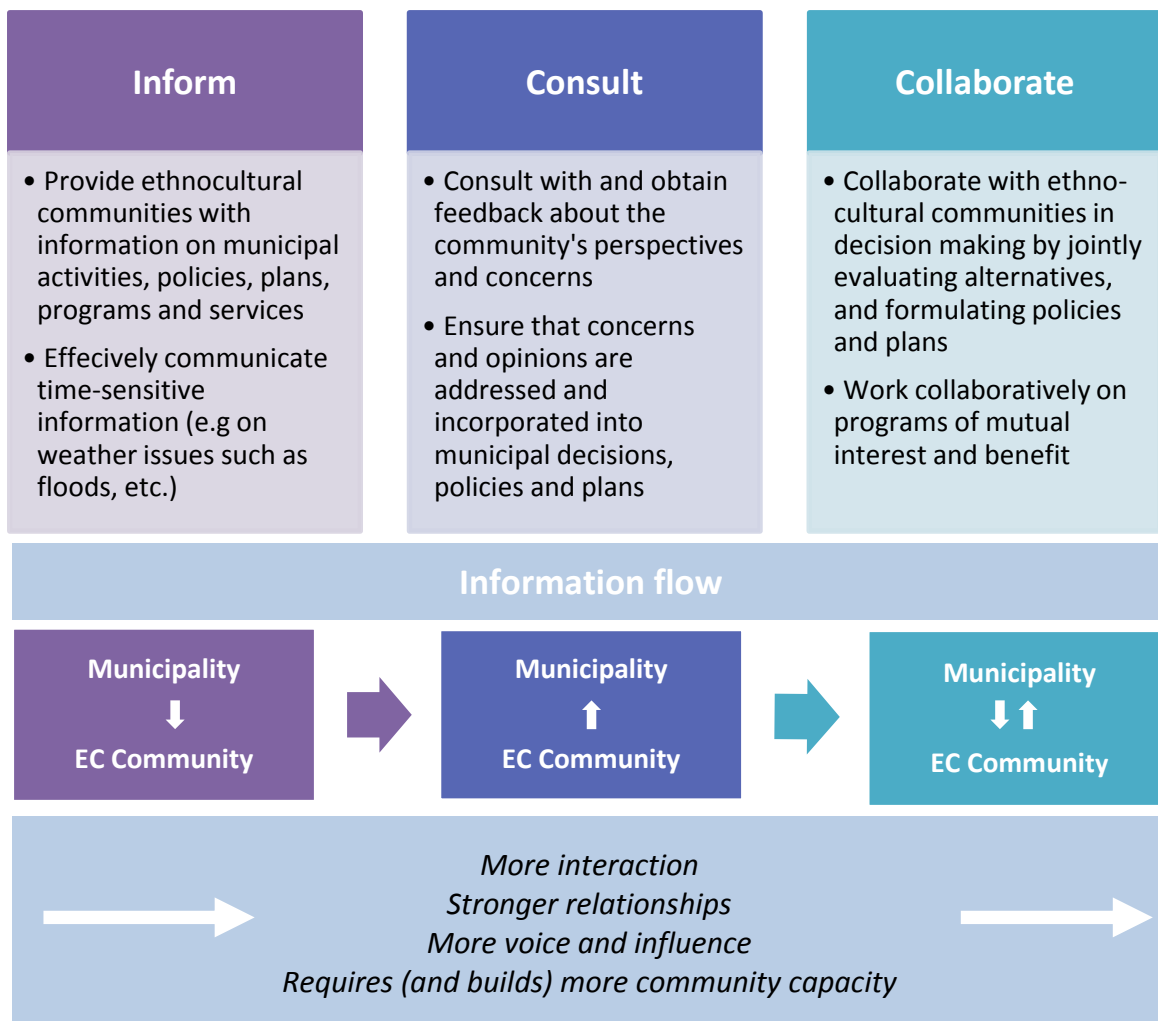
Outcomes

- What are your expectations of the EC communities you want to work with? What kind of responses are you expecting from them?
- What are the expectations and interests of the EC communities? What do they want to get out of the process? Remember that engagement is a two way street.
- What kind of ideal relationship/s with EC communities do you envision? What level of engagement would you like to achieve and maintain? What level of engagement are the communities interested in or available to participate in?
- What is your timeline for this work? Is this a short-term project for a specific task, or part of an ongoing effort over several years?
- What short, medium and long-term outcomes are you looking for?

Spectrum of Engagement Approaches

A number of different approaches can be used to engage EC communities depending on the level of engagement you want to achieve, the specific issues you would like to address, the profile of your municipality and the interests and profile of the EC communities you will be engaging with.

Some approaches will be short-term to achieve a specific goal, such as sharing information on a time-sensitive issue such as a potential disaster or consulting with a specific group about development in their neighborhood. Others will be more long term, for example, engaging in a collaborative process for designing a new program, and will require consultation, dialogue and joint decision-making. In all cases, it's essential to determine the goals and capacity of both the municipality and the EC communities you're working with before you decide which level of engagement to use.

Inform	Consult	Collaborate
• Provide ethnocultural communities with information on municipal activities, policies, plans, programs and services • Effecively communicate time-sensitive information (e.g on weather issues such as floods, etc.)	• Consult with and obtain feedback about the community's perspectives and concerns • Ensure that concerns and opinions are addressed and incorporated into municipal decisions, policies and plans	• Collaborate with ethno-cultural communities in decision making by jointly evaluating alternatives, and formulating policies and plans • Work collaboratively on programs of mutual interest and benefit

Information flow

Municipality ↓ EC Community	Municipality ↑ EC Community	Municipality ↓↑ EC Community

More interaction
Stronger relationships
More voice and influence
Requires (and builds) more community capacity

Adapted from the International Association of Public Participation's IAPP2 Spectrum of Public Participation,
http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/imported/IAP2%20Spectrum_ver tical.pdf and A Typology of Public Engagement Mechanisms Gene Rowe and Lynn J. Frewer

Strategies to Inform

Create customized brochures and newsletters and place them in areas frequented by EC community members such as community centres, colleges, schools, places of prayer etc.	Create formal connections and establish liaisons with EC organizations that can help you quickly and effectively disseminate information to people. Maintain an updated database of these connections and keep in touch regularly.
Use notice boards at EC organizations, drop-in centres, places of worship and other community spaces.	Make use of ethnic and language-specific media such as newspapers and radio stations to post messages, information and press releases.
Ask EC organizations to include your information on their websites.	Create a 'hotline' that community members can use to access information on important events and issues.
Go to where EC communities are already gathering and schedule information sessions in tandem with other events to reduce the use of resources and maximize audience size.	Establish a group of community liaison workers trained in emergency disaster who can communicate essential information and support to their communities when required.

Remember to….

- *Determine what information needs to be translated/interpreted and have a plan in place to regularly update translated materials.*

- *Vet the materials through a key informant in the community to ensure cultural appropriateness.*

- *If required, provide support and resources to EC organizations to help keep their member databases current.*

- *Plan information sessions with input from or in collaboration with a community liaison to minimize barriers to attendance and access. Ensure that there is adequate time set aside for translation (if needed) as well as questions and discussion.*

- *Compensate community liaison workers for their time and expertise.*

- *Provide training for community liaison workers on the topics about which they will be disseminating information so they can accurately relay it to community members.*

- *Keep in touch with community liaisons and leaders, even when there's nothing specific going on. An open door policy can also help to build trust and mutual understanding.*

Plain language guidelines for communication materials

Literature concerning effective communication with EC communities stresses the importance of using plain English to communicate key messages. Use language that the audience is familiar with – you need to know your audience to get this right! You can also use these guidelines for translated resources (not sure what 'for translated resources' means).

- Address the reader / listener.
- Put the main idea first.
- If something is difficult to explain, consider whether you really need to include it.
- Use examples or diagrams to replace or clarify text.
- Explain concepts or programs that may be unfamiliar to newcomers (e.g. Neighbourhood Watch, Meals on Wheels).
- Don't include too much information.
- Use short, clear and easily understood sentences, with one idea per sentence.
- Avoid long words wherever short ones will do.
- Use the active rather than the passive voice. For example, say 'our staff can help you find work' rather than 'help with finding work is provided by our staff'.
- Avoid jargon, metaphors, colloquialisms and culturally specific humour.
- Avoid highly specialized terminology and acronyms, or provide an explanation in brackets.
- Avoid lengthy titles – try to keep them simple or break them up.

Adapted from Best Practice Guidelines: Engaging with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

Strategies to Consult

Attend community events and programs to informally chat with community members, gather feedback or complete surveys.	Ask community workers and liaisons to help you gather information on a specific topic, or to distribute surveys. Have them create or approve the wording of the questions.
Organize an open community meeting, either as its own event or as part of an existing community activity, to elicit feedback on issues of concern to the community.	Organize a focus group on an issue (e.g. the need for youth recreation or after-school programs) to allow community members to share their knowledge and discuss their perspectives.
Identify and interview community representatives that you can consult with to get feedback on broad issues of concern to the community.	Elicit feedback from staff and volunteers of EC organizations and other service providers on broad issues of concern to EC communities.
Use social media such as websites or blogs to collect information when appropriate (e.g. for younger members of the community or when you know that community members are comfortable with and likely to respond to this approach).	Use online surveys and notify community members about the survey through posted flyers. Include information on how surveys can be accessed (e.g. public use library computers).

Remember to…

- *Learn about the protocols of the community you are trying to consult with (e.g. gifts to elders, traditional ways of beginning gatherings, providing prayer spaces).*

- *Be cognizant of any cultural/religious holidays or other community events that might impact event attendance.*

- *Ensure that consultations are held well in advance of timelines for decision making. A lack of time to incorporate feedback will erode trust and make your next consultation less effective.*

- *Honestly communicate the intent of the consultation, whether you are gathering feedback to use in decision making, or rallying support for a decision that's already been made.*

- *Make sure that communities know how their feedback was used, and reasons why it might not have been. Acknowledge the time and effort that was given by communities to provide feedback.*

Strategies to **Collaborate**

Design and deliver workshops of interest to community members (e.g. employment seminars). Build in adequate time for discussion and dialogue about the needs of the communities related to the topic.	Ensure that all citizen advisory committees and boards have some representation from EC communities. Work to make representation equitable by community, age, gender etc.
Organize a meeting to discuss a specific issue that is of relevance to community members, identify alternatives and develop recommendations.	Engage in a visioning exercise with a specific community or sub-group to determine a desirable future state or a long term plan related to a need or interest (e.g. a safe community or a new program or service).
Invite members of EC communities to participate in municipal strategic planning sessions to ensure that the current and future needs of the EC communities will be incorporated into the planning process.	If you are planning to provide a new service or program to EC communities (e.g. language classes, grant program, after-school program) ensure that members of the community are involved in all stages of the project, from needs assessment to implementation to evaluation.
Include members of EC communities in the design of municipal plans (e.g. Municipal Sustainability Plan) as well as in the implementation of specific aspects of plans (e.g. a beautification project or waste reduction initiative).	Ensure that EC communities are aware of your intent and commitment to collaborate by sharing information on materials, websites, when talking to individuals, and at group events. Provide information on specific projects that communities can get involved in.

Remember to…

- *Have a clear agenda and jointly determined outcomes for collaborative activities.*

- *Used skilled facilitators who have knowledge of and expertise in working with EC communities.*

- *Try to ensure that the diversity within the EC community is represented in the participants, and ensure that over time, a variety of community members participate in engagement activities.*

- *Provide background information on the issue being deliberated either ahead of time or as part of the collaborative process. Members of EC communities may be new to the municipality and may not be aware of the history and context of the issue.*

What might get in the way?

Despite your best intentions to build strong and trusting relationships with EC communities, you will likely encounter some roadblocks along the way. You may be able to anticipate some of these, but others may take you by surprise. The barriers may be internal to your organization, such as inadequate resources, but there may also be external factors that you have little or no control over, such as a very rapid change in the demographics of your municipality. EC communities may also face barriers to participating in engagement processes, for example language barriers, suspicion of authority, or simply not enough time to participate in engagement activities. Don't be daunted by these barriers, however. Being aware of them will help you to proactively create a plan and adjust your processes to minimize their impact. The following are some examples of roadblocks you may encounter, but the best way to predict and work through barriers is to consult with the EC communities themselves.

Barriers for municipalities

- Insufficient commitment to engaging with EC communities from leadership or staff

- Lack of clarity about who should take responsibility for engagement

- Insufficient demographic and other information about EC communities; rapid changes in demographics and the profile of communities

- No relationships with or mistrust from key informants in the communities

- Not enough staff, resources or expertise to reach EC communities and involve them in decision-making processes, or to compensate them fully for their expertise

- Inability to meet EC communities' expectations about the degree to which their input will be used

Barriers for EC communities

- Lack of trust in engagement processes, or the belief that feedback provided to municipalities won't actually be used

- Lack of translated materials; the use of jargon or technical terms in communication materials

- Lack of familiarity with municipal decision making processes or terminology

- Inability to participate in processes that require written input because of language barriers or lack of time

- Accessibility barriers due to a lack of transportation, child care, or the cost of attending events

- Little or no access to technology (e.g. for online surveys, event information)

- Not enough time to provide feedback

Principles for engagement

The following principles can be used to remove or reduce the barriers you may encounter as you engage with EC communities.

Commitment

Develop municipal leadership support for ongoing engagement and relationship building. Communicate the benefits of engaging with EC communities to management and other groups in your organization.

Inclusion

Ensure that all community members, not just sub-groups within communities, have equal opportunity to participate in engagement processes. Make every reasonable effort to reach as many people as possible.

Accessibility

Reduce barriers to accessibility such as language, lack of transportation or child care, cost of attending events, physical accessibility, etc.

Clarity

Clearly and honestly communicate your motivations, desired outcomes and strategies for engagement. Regularly share relevant information with the communities you are engaging with.

Accountability

Ensure that everyone involved can stay accountable to joint decisions by setting realistic expectations, tracking discussions and decisions and generally implementing good record keeping practices.

Shared Knowledge

Ensure that processes recognize and build on the diverse knowledge and expertise of individuals and communities. Validate what everyone brings to the table. Reciprocate and compensate people for their time and knowledge.

Shared Power

Be aware of and open about existing power and resource imbalances between your organization and communities. Try to have ongoing conversations about how best to mitigate these in your relationships.

Evaluation

Take the time to check whether your engagement process are working for you, and for the communities. Have an evaluation mechanism in place to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of your engagement activities.

Responsiveness

Be open and follow up on feedback about how effective your engagement processes are, and work to strengthen them over time. Adjust your goals, expectations and strategies as needed.

Steps for engagement

Here are steps you can follow to design and implement effective engagement strategies.

1	**Initiate your project**	▪ Get buy-in from leadership and make sure they understand the larger vision so that their support continues even when challenges occur. ▪ Evaluate your current engagement practices in terms of effectiveness and cultural appropriateness. ▪ Decide which level(s) of engagement make the most sense: Inform, Consult or Collaborate? ▪ Create an engagement action plan based on identified gaps and needs. ▪ In collaboration with communities or key informants, develop a process for respectful consultation and dialogue.
2	**Provide information and training**	▪ Provide your staff with information on the demographics and characteristics of local EC communities. ▪ Train staff on effective engagement strategies, best practices for consultation and collaboration, and for working across cultural difference.
3	**Allocate resources**	▪ Ensure that there are adequate resources available to implement the engagement plan. ▪ Include resources to pay or provide honorariums to community liaisons/brokers.
4	**Implement and evaluate your plan**	▪ Put your engagement plan into action. ▪ Evaluate how successful your strategies were in meeting your desired outcomes, and adjust your plan as necessary.

Evaluate your progress

At each stage of the engagement process, assess which strategies were effective, which ones need to be adjusted, and how. Here are some evaluation questions to use as a starting point.

1. **Did you have a plan?**
   - Did you a have an engagement plan that included: a goal, intended participants and their roles, a process, a timeline, staff/volunteers, a budget, and a way for feedback to be integrated into decision making?
   - Was your plan part of a broader municipal public engagement plan?
   - Did you elicit input into the plan from the EC communities and/or key informants?

2. **Was there adequate participation in each of the strategies or activities you used?**
   - To what degree did your target groups from the EC community participate in the activities?
   - Was the degree and nature of the participation of EC communities appropriate for the issue?
   - Did you make efforts to ensure that the community's diversity of views and population were engaged?

3. **Was there a good process in place?**
   - Was sufficient background information provided to participants?
   - When collaborating, were there sufficient opportunities for the exchange of views, consideration of alternatives, and the formulation of recommendations?
   - Were differences within the EC communities such as language, literacy, gender, age and culture taken into consideration in the design of the activity?
   - If a consultant/facilitator was used, did they provide a safe and well-managed environment for people to participate effectively?

4. **Was talk linked to action?**
   - Were the ideas or recommendations that came from the engagement process adequately considered?
   - Did the engagement process result in more informed and/or better decisions?
   - Was there greater support for the new policy or action as result of your strategies?
   - Was feedback provided to the community about how their recommendations were or were not used and why?

5. **Were participants satisfied?**
   - Were participants satisfied with the engagement process?
   - Did they feel their input was welcomed, heard and considered?
   - Would they be more or less likely to participate in other such processes in the future?

6. **Was municipal capacity enhanced?**
   - Did the public engagement process provide participants with additional skills, knowledge and experiences?
   - Have participant names been added to appropriate databases for future engagement opportunities?

Adapted from "Measuring the Success of Local Public Engagement www.ca-ilg.org/MeasuringPESuccess, July 2012

Resources

Reports

[Best Practice Guidelines: Engaging with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities in Times of Disaster](). Christchurch City Council, 2012.

[Effective Engagement: Building relationships with community and other stakeholders](). State of Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment.

[Engaging Ethno-cultural Communities Toolkit](). Ethnocultural Council of Calgary

Organizations and Websites

[Edmonton Multicultural Coalition Community Animators](). Community animators can help EC communities articulate their needs and aspirations, and act as a bridge between communities and institutions

[Statistics Canada Ethnic Diversity and Immigration.](in) Information on ethnic groups, visible minorities, immigrants, including statistics on size, geographic distribution and other demographic characteristics.

[Tamarack Institute](). A charity that develops and supports learning communities that help people to collaborate, co-generate knowledge and achieve collective impact on complex community issues.

Sources of Funding

[Alberta Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Fund](). The Human Rights Education and

Multiculturalism Fund (the Fund) supports the Alberta Government's efforts to foster equality, promote fairness and encourage the creation of inclusive workplaces and communities. The Fund supports the human rights and diversity work of community organizations and educational initiatives undertaken by the [Alberta Human Rights Commission]().

[Alberta Culture Community Initiatives Program](). The program provides funds to enhance and enrich community initiatives throughout Alberta. The program is intended to reinvest revenues generated from provincial lotteries in communities, to empower local citizens and community organizations to work together and respond to local needs.