

RMA | ALBERTA MUNICIPALITIES

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT GUIDE



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Public engagement is your approach to involving people in your municipality's decision-making process.

It starts with having a good set of criteria to decide when it is helpful to involve members of the public in your decision-making process and extends to letting people know how you used their input as well as evaluating how well public engagement supports your decision-making.

This Public Engagement Guide offers a step-by-step look at how to fulfill the requirements of your Public Engagement Policy and make public engagement work for you. It is supplemented by a Public Engagement Workbook that provides easy to use templates to help you develop your approach to public engagement, as well as plan and implement it. There are references throughout the workbook, indicating where you will find templates that correspond with the content in this guide.

As of July 2018, every Alberta municipality is required to have a publicly available Public Participation Policy. The policy must be reviewed and, as required, updated every four years.

Public engagement is more than people sharing input with you through activities such as open houses and surveys. It's all the steps you will take to *effectively* involve people in your decision-making process. ([See Section 2.0](#) for an overview of municipal public engagement.)

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The value of public engagement

There is a symbiotic relationship between public engagement and decisions.

You need to know what decision(s) you have to make in order to decide if there is benefit to involving the public in your decision-making process.

You may choose to proceed with public engagement to feel more confident that you have a well-informed and, as much as possible, well-supported decision. There will also be times that public engagement is mandatory.

Whether its voluntary or mandatory, the value of public engagement is rounding out the information that your municipality has available to make one or more decisions.

When you choose to engage people, it should be because you genuinely believe that their input will help you make a more-informed decision.

When your municipality's Council or Administration makes a decision, it is most likely going to consider three things:

1. **Municipal policy and programs** *e.g., By-laws, strategies and plans, budget*
2. **Technical requirements** *e.g., Guidelines, standards, best practices*
3. **Public input** *e.g., Expertise, ideas, and impacts shared by either affected or interested members of the public*

When is public engagement not public engagement?

There is a difference between communication, relationship building, community development, advocacy, and public engagement. Public engagement is when you deliberately involve people in your municipal decision-making process. This can range from asking them for input to giving them the authority to make a decision on behalf of the municipality. (See [Section 3.0](#) for the relationship between decision-making levels and public engagement levels).

There are many examples of activities where elected officials or members of administration meet with or share information with people that are, in most circumstances, outside of the realm of public engagement. These can include:

EXAMPLE	REASON
Coffee chats	These informal chats are a great way to build relationships, share information, and hear what is on people's minds. They typically are not clearly linked to or communicated as an opportunity to be involved in a decision-making process.
Social media comments	Social media is live 24/7. Unless you are specific about the when, where, and how you are asking people to be involved in a decision-making process then it is hard to determine when social media comments should be used to support decision-making.
1:1 meetings with stakeholders	Transparency is one of the most commonly cited values for good public engagement. Members of the public typically want a transparent view of who else is involved in a municipality's decision-making process and what they are saying. 1:1 meetings with stakeholders can be public engagement if you are transparent about who you are meeting and, as part of aggregating your public engagement input, reflect their input.



TIP There are times when public engagement is mandatory, especially when decisions relate to statutory plans and changes in land-use. These mandatory requirements, including when Council must hold a public hearing as well as provide public notifications, are documented within the *Municipal Government Act*.



TIP Good public engagement manages people's expectations. It's important that the people you involve in your decision-making process understand that their input is, in most situations, one of several things that you consider. There is, of course, the odd time (i.e., plebiscites, municipal voting system) that public engagement is the only variable in decision-making.

1.2 Public engagement in government vs administrative governance

It's important to recognize that both elected officials and administration get value from public engagement.

Elected officials are elected as local government. They are granted authority to make binding decisions on behalf of members of the public. This is the foundation of representative democracy.

Elected officials benefit from having a good understanding of the public's views, ideas, and needs as they make decisions.

On the other hand, administration is in place to help inform and deliver elected officials' decisions. It benefits from involving members of the public in its work to help ensure that a local government's work:

- Follows legal requirements.
- Demonstrates competence, by using accepted processes, procedures, and practices to make the decision(s).
- Demonstrates legitimacy, by basing decisions on good evidence, information, and input.
- Demonstrates accountability, by virtue of transparency, integrity, and honourable conduct.

THE ROLE OF ELECTED OFFICIALS:	THE ROLE OF ADMINISTRATION:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify decisions that will benefit from public engagement, either directed by Council or by reviewing recommendations from Administration. • Respect and support governance models that include members of the public in decision-making. • Promote and encourage public participation in engagement opportunities. • Attend and observe, without contributing to or influencing, public engagement activities. • Review and consider public input as part of the decision-making process. • Recognize and understand that meeting with advocates or lobbyists can impede public faith in the legitimacy and transparency of public engagement and its role in the decision-making process. • Support increasing the capacity of the municipality to advance its public engagement competencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the municipality's public engagement policy, identify decisions that will benefit from public input. • According to the public engagement system, lead the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public engagement strategy/plan. - Public engagement implementation, including activities, reporting, and activities-related evaluation. - Systemic evaluation. • Collaborate with the project team to ensure that they have the right public input to support the municipality's decision-making process. • Support the project and public engagement-related communications, learning and development, and community and stakeholder relations requirements.



2.0

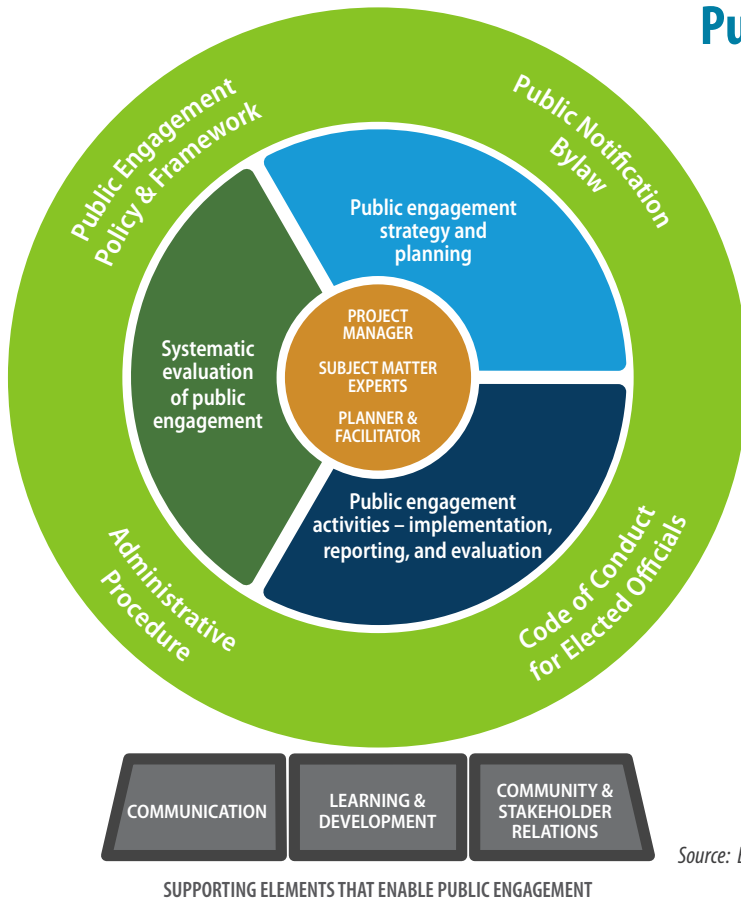
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

It's common to think of public engagement as the activities that you use to involve people in your municipality's decision-making process (e.g., focus groups, surveys, workshops). These activities are definitely core public engagement pieces, but there's also a lot more involved.

The following diagram showcases the key elements of a public engagement system. The system simply demonstrates how different pieces of a municipality's public engagement work and fit together.

This section provides a brief description of each piece of the system. Sections 3.0, 4.0, and 5.0 provide detail on how each piece contributes to successful public engagement.

Public Engagement Overview



Source: Emerge Solutions, Inc., 2018



Alberta's *Municipal Government Act* requires all municipalities

to have a Public Participation Policy and Code of Conduct for Elected Officials. It also broadens the suite of tools available to advertise and provide notice to the public about proposed bylaws, public hearings, resolutions and meetings, among other things. If the municipality wishes to use alternate advertising methods, such as a municipal website or social media, an authorizing Public Notification Bylaw must be passed.

2.1 The Outer Ring

The outer ring focuses on documents to guide your public engagement work.

Public Engagement Policy and Framework: directs the purpose and application of public engagement within a municipality and describes when and how it will add value. A framework describes the structures and key elements that underlie a municipality's preferred approach to public engagement.

Public Notification Bylaw: describes how a municipality will give official notice when it advertises a bylaw, resolution, meeting, public hearing, or other municipal business. In addition to newspaper advertising, mail, or delivery to residences, the bylaw may now include electronic advertising.

Code of Conduct for Elected Officials: describes how municipal councillors' conduct is governed and outlines a municipality's complaint system. This code of conduct helps to support integrity in elected officials' actions, including decision-making, which is the foundation of public engagement.

Administrative Procedure: provides an objective set of rules to govern municipal administration's approach to public engagement.



You must update your Public Notification Bylaw if you want to use

electronic media, such as your website or social media, to officially notify the public. Section 606.1 of the *Municipal Government Act* details the requirements to make this update.

2.0 Public Engagement Overview

2.2 The Middle Ring

The middle ring focuses on public engagement work that may be adapted to the context of the decisions that you want to make.

Public Engagement Strategy and Planning:

Strategy describes why public engagement will or will not add value to one or more decisions. Planning maps out the most effective and efficient approach to public engagement.

Public Engagement Activities – Implementation:

Implementation is the delivery of one or more public engagement activities, in accordance with your strategy and planning. It can include in-person and digital activities.

Public Engagement Activities – Reporting:

Reporting is how you communicate to the public what you heard through implementation of the public engagement activities. You can also report what you decided and how you used public engagement and other types of input to make your decision(s). You may produce one or many reports, depending on whether your public engagement implementation includes one or more phases of activities.

Public Engagement Activities – Evaluation:

Activities-focused evaluation sets performance goals and collects information to ensure that your public engagement activities are well-received by members of the public and meeting their intended purpose.

Systematic Evaluation of Public Engagement:

Systematic evaluation sets goals and collects information to ensure that, overall, your municipality's approach to public engagement effectively and efficiently supports its decision-making.

 **TIP** Depending on the size of your municipality and project, your public engagement activator(s) may be:

- One person fulfilling multiple roles.
- Different people who specialize in project management, project disciplines, public engagement, and communications.
- Consultants.

2.3 The Bullseye

At the heart of the diagram are the people who initiate and deliver your public engagement. It's typical to have a public engagement team that includes:

- A **project manager** responsible for the leading the work related to the decisions that the municipality needs to make.
- **Subject matter experts** who can share credible information about the project stakeholders, location, or subject matter.
- A **planner and facilitator** responsible for planning, delivering, and, often, reporting back to the community on and evaluating public engagement.

Public Engagement Overview

2.4 The Supporting Elements

Below the ring diagram are three elements that create a strong foundation for public engagement and, with ongoing effort, help to ensure your public engagement is successful. The work associated with these three elements can take place before, during, and after the work in The Middle Ring.

Communication: informs people about your project and associated decision(s), your public engagement approach and their opportunities to participate in public engagement activities, input collected through the public engagement activities, and, as a best practice, what you decided and how public engagement played a role in your decision-making process.

Learning and development: creates opportunities to build the competencies of people who plan, deliver, report on, and evaluate public engagement. There are some municipalities that also offer learning and development opportunities to people who participate in public engagement activities.

Community and stakeholder relations: focuses on building trust, credibility, and overall good relationships amongst and with members of the community and stakeholders.



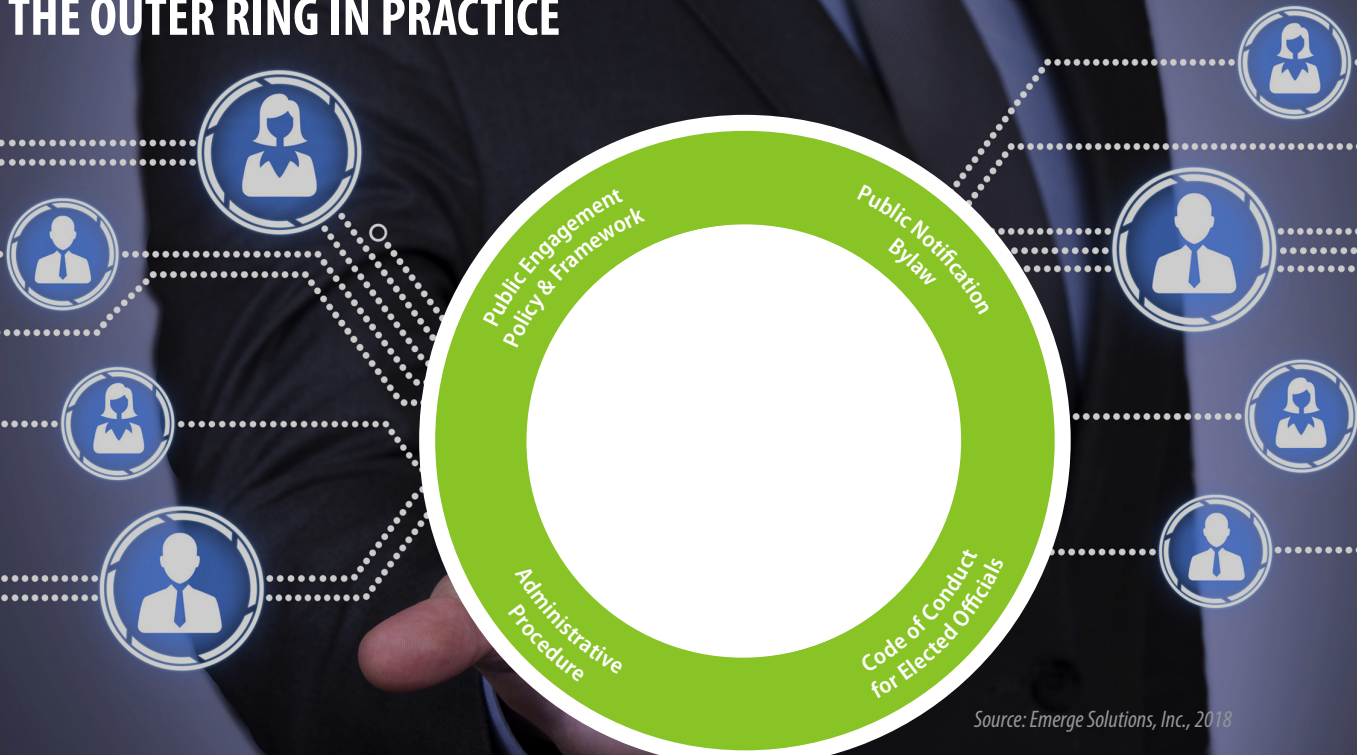
Good relationships truly are foundational to public

engagement. They make it possible to share information freely, generate interest and involvement in public engagement opportunities, and have open and honest conversations.



3.0

THE OUTER RING IN PRACTICE



Source: Emerge Solutions, Inc., 2018



Alberta's
Public Policy
Regulation
(i.e., Alberta
Regulation

193/2017) requires your municipality to:

1. Identify the types or categories of approaches the municipality will use to engage municipal stakeholders.
2. Identify the types or categories of circumstances in which the municipality will engage municipal stakeholders.
3. Make your Public Engagement Policy available for public inspection (e.g., post it to your municipality's website).
4. Review your policy at least once every four years.

The sturdiest and most concrete things around us have good structure. The same is true with public engagement. The four elements of the outer ring are best described as your public engagement infrastructure. They give your public engagement solid form. They provide clear direction on the purpose of your municipality's public engagement, when to use it, who plays which roles, and what it should look like to support your decision-making process.

3.1 Public Engagement Policy

As an Alberta municipality, you must have a publicly available Public Engagement Policy.

Your policy is important because it encourages and empowers your staff to use engagement as a helpful, empowering, and positive tool to advance and help achieve your municipality's goals.

The Outer Ring in Practice

This encouragement and empowerment is typically encompassed within seven standards and, depending on your municipality, two optional policy elements:

1. **Policy statement** (i.e., purpose and approaches): Why you do public engagement and what value does it add to your municipality's work.
2. **Public engagement principles:** What you expect to see or experience as part of good public engagement.
3. **Definitions:** How you define public engagement and other terms related to your public engagement system.
4. **Policy responsibilities:** Who makes decisions about the different pieces of your public engagement system and a description of their roles.
5. **Public engagement circumstances:** When you will use public engagement.
6. **Public engagement approaches:** How members of the public and stakeholders can play a role in your decision-making process.
7. **Policy expectations:** How existing legislation and policy governs your public engagement policy, and how your public engagement policy affects other municipal policies.
8. *[Optional]* **Public engagement plans:** What you want captured in a public engagement plan.
9. *[Optional]* **Public engagement reporting and evaluation:** What you want captured in public engagement reports and evaluation.

Check out the [Public Engagement Policy Template](#) in the [Public Engagement Workbook](#) for a step-by-step template to develop or update your own Public Engagement Policy.

Four tips for developing great policy:

1. Your policy should offer a clear picture of why you value public engagement and how you will approach it. It should be directive enough that people know what to expect and flexible enough to give you choices as part of your implementation.

The definition in this guidebook aligns public engagement with municipal decision-making. Every other choice that you make as you develop your policy should both bolster and align with your definition of public engagement.
2. There's no need to start from scratch. There are lots of great public engagement resources available to help you out. That being said, it is critical that you carefully select ideas that align with your municipal context.
3. The most important step to creating a good public engagement policy is having a clear definition of public engagement.
4. The clearest way to present your policy responsibilities is by describing the role(s) of elected officials (i.e., as decision-makers) separate from those of administration (i.e., as civil servants). Remember that elected officials provide strategic direction and make policy choices and administration coordinates the governance system and delivers programs and services.



When you're looking at policy responsibilities, consider whether you want your policy to apply to consultants, Council Boards or Administrative Committee volunteers, and/or community volunteers.

3.0

The Outer Ring in Practice



Sample policy statement:

Why we do public engagement >

We value public engagement for the information that it provides our decision-makers to make well-informed and well-supported decisions about our policies, programs, services, and initiatives.

The value that it adds >

This policy will ensure that our public engagement is:

- Consistent
- Outcomes-driven
- Adherent to the *Municipal Government Act*
- Efficient and effective

Source: *Emerge Solutions, Inc., 2018*

Other resources for principles:

- [IAP2 Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation.](#)
- [Institute for Local Government's Principles of Local Government Public Engagement.](#)
- [National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation's Core Principles for Public Engagement.](#)

Sample definitions of public engagement:

Option 1:

Public engagement is any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision-making and uses public input to make sustainable decisions.

Source: *International Association of Public Participation, n.d.*

Option 2:

Public engagement creates opportunities for people to be involved in a decision-making process and for them to help inform decision-making.

Source: *Emerge Solutions, Inc., 2018*

Sample public engagement principles:

Council recognizes that good governance includes engaging people by:

- Creating opportunities for people affected by a decision to influence that decision.
- Promoting sustainable decisions by recognizing various interests.
- Providing people with the appropriate information and tools to engage in meaningful participation.
- Recognizing that although councillors are elected to consider and promote the welfare and interest of the municipality as a whole, and are generally required to vote on matters brought before Council, facilitating public engagement for matters beyond those where public input is statutorily required can enrich the decision-making process.

Source: *Adapted from the Government of Alberta, Alberta Municipalities, and RMA's [Public Participation and Public Notification – A Guide for Municipalities.](#)*



There are lots of great ideas already in print that you can review and,

where relevant, reflect in your policy. Just remember to give credit to the author if you directly reflect someone else's work or idea!



Consider your local context and customize a definition that works for

you. What purpose will your public engagement fulfill? Will all your public engagement tie into decision-making? Can you commit to sustainable decisions? Your definition lies in your answer to these questions.

The Outer Ring in Practice



Sample overview of policy responsibilities:

Both your elected officials and administration have important roles to play in public engagement.

They each have a responsibility to ensure that public engagement provides them with the best understanding of the public's views and perspectives and consider this input as part of their decision making process.

They also have a responsibility to recognize that, depending on the decision at hand, public input will have more or less influence relative to existing policy, programs, and technical requirements.

Within the public engagement system, Council has a responsibility to:

- Enhance its understanding of people's interests, values, and perspectives.
- Work with administration to determine when public engagement will add value to the decision-making process.
- Promote and encourage participation in public engagement opportunities.

- Carefully consider public input as part of decision-making.
- Adhere to the Code of Conduct for Elected Officials.
- Inform the public of its decisions and, where possible, how it used public input as part of its decision-making process.
- Review and approve the public engagement policy, and all future amendments.

Within the public engagement system, administration has a responsibility to:

- Lead the municipality's public engagement planning and implementation.
- Lead the municipality's public engagement reporting and evaluation.
- Communicate to Council and the public the findings of public engagement.
- Adhere to the Public Engagement Policy and administrative procedure.
- Assess the policy and make recommendations to Council about all future amendments.

Sample circumstances:

Public engagement will be considered as part of decision-making processes to add, change, or discontinue a policy, program, service, and/or initiative.



Smaller municipalities often assign specific decision-making roles

within their public engagement policy. For example, they may identify the Chief Administration Officer as the decision-maker responsible for reviewing and approving public engagement plans, including relevant resourcing.



You may choose to also reference your approaches within your public

engagement policy statement. Your approaches emphasize the type of decisions that you will make when you consider a role for public engagement.

3.0 The Outer Ring in Practice

Sample approaches:

We will align our public engagement opportunities with our decision-making opportunities.

The following spectrum demonstrates four types of decisions that involve varying degrees of public engagement.

Increasing public engagement and increasing influence in the decision-making process

Type of Decision	Consultative	Deliberative	Participatory	Citizen-led
Level of Engagement	Consultation (Including visioning, ideation, and refining ideas)	Involving	Collaborating	Empowering
Explanation	The municipality makes the decision. It invites people to share ideas and input or, if a concept is already developed, provide feedback to help improve or refine it.	The municipality makes the decision. However, it wants the public's help in assessing and understanding the possibilities as well as the impact and possible trade-offs associated with the possibilities.	The municipality makes the decision. However, the municipality and the public take a shared or joint approach to coming up with, assessing, and prioritizing possibilities. The municipality is committed to working through various scenarios to understand the preferred solution(s).	The municipality authorizes its citizens to make the decision. The citizens lead the consultation, involvement, and/or collaboration, make a decision, and report its decision back to the municipality.

Source: Emerge Solutions, Inc. 2018

Sample policy expectations:

- All public engagement will be undertaken in accordance with the *Municipal Government Act*, the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, and any other applicable legislation.
- All public engagement will be undertaken in accordance with all existing municipal policies.
- This policy shall be available for public inspection and may be posted to the municipality's website.
- This policy will be reviewed at least once every four years.

Source: Adapted from the Government of Alberta, Alberta Municipalities, and RMA's [Public Participation and Public Notification – A Guide for Municipalities](#).

Note: The [Public Participation and Public Notification – A Guide for Municipalities](#) includes two optional sections. For the optional public engagement plans section, please refer to Public Engagement Plan Template in the [Public Engagement Workbook](#) to decide which elements should be mandatory for your municipality, if any.

For the optional Council reporting and evaluation section, please refer to your standard Council reports and determine what information related to public engagement will be most relevant and should be mandatory, if any.

3.1.1***Elected officials and administrative policy***

You have the option of developing an integrated policy that applies to both elected officials and administration, separate policies, or just an administrative policy.

The benefit of an integrated policy is that everything is reflected within one document.

The benefit of separate policies is that your policies will be shorter, clearer, and reflect that elected officials and administration play very different roles in public engagement.

The benefit of just an administrative policy is that you can still appropriately guide elected officials by touching on their roles in the “policy responsibilities” section and ensuring it aligns and supports the expectations in your “Code of Conduct for Elected Officials.”

3.2**Public Engagement Framework**

A public engagement framework is entirely optional.

It’s helpful because it provides an integrated view of your municipality’s public engagement system.

The base of your framework is your policy. You can expand your framework as you develop other guiding documents and standardized templates and approaches to planning, implementing, reporting on, and evaluating public engagement.

A complete framework typically includes six elements:

1. **Public engagement policy** – A guiding document that describes why you value public engagement and how you will approach it.
2. **Administrative procedure** – A guiding document to direct administration to initiate and implement the Public Engagement Policy making use of the components of the public engagement framework.
3. **Public engagement approaches** – An overview of the different ways that members of the public can participate in your decision-making.
4. **Public engagement planning** – A step-by-step approach to ensuring your public engagement activities align with your policy and support decision-making.
5. **Public engagement reporting** – A clear and consistent way to let the public know what you’ve heard and/or decided as you progress through or following your public engagement activities.
6. **Public engagement evaluation** – A clear and consistent way to learn from your public engagement and support continuous improvement.

Check out the Public Engagement Framework Template in the [Public Engagement Workbook](#) for a step-by-step template to develop or update your own public engagement framework.

3.0

The Outer Ring in Practice

Looking for a template to develop or update your Public Notification Bylaw?

Check out the Government of Alberta, Alberta Municipalities, and RMA's [Public Participation and Public Notification – A Guide for Municipalities](#).

3.3 Public Notification Bylaw

A municipality must, at certain times, notify people about upcoming meetings and events, proposed changes, or, directly related to public engagement, opportunities to be involved in a decision-making process.

The *Municipal Government Act* says you have two choices about how to do this:

- Provide notice by newspaper advertising, mail, or delivery to every residence in the area to which the bylaw or other matter related applies
- OR, if you prefer to ONLY use electronic communication channels,
- Develop or update your Public Notification Bylaw to indicate that you will solely use electronic advertising (i.e., website, social media).

It's important to remember that your Public Notification Bylaw is your commitment to how you will share mandatory information with people, as required by the *Municipal Government Act*. It's not necessarily a comprehensive or even the most effective approach to public notification.

Most public engagement opportunities benefit from a comprehensive communications plan, where you go beyond compliance and do your best to identify and use the most effective communications methods to reach and share information with people.

[See Section 6.1](#) for more information about public engagement communication check out the Communications Plan Template in the [Public Engagement Workbook](#) for a step-by-step template to develop your own communications plan.

3.4 Code of Conduct for Elected Officials

Your Code of Conduct for Elected Officials describes the commitments that your elected officials have made to each other and your municipality. It reflects how they govern themselves within and when doing business on behalf of the municipality.

It also has an important connection to public engagement.

Your elected officials are responsible for the strategic direction and policy of your municipality. Every decision has significant implications and, many times, people are just as interested in how decisions are made as in the decision itself.

Look to your municipality's code of conduct to understand and help members of the public understand how your elected officials will:

- Respect your municipality's decision-making process.
- Engage in respectful interactions with other councillors, municipal staff, and members of the public.
- Be held accountable if a staff person or member of the public has a concern about an elected official's actions.

Want to know more about codes of conduct?

Check out the Government of Alberta, Alberta Municipalities, and RMA's [Councillor Codes of Conduct – A Guide for Municipalities](#).

3.5 Administrative Procedure

Your administrative procedure is an excellent supplement to your Public Engagement Policy. It goes beyond the policy by establishing the appropriate ways for your administrative representatives to initiate and execute it.

In one sense your administrative procedure translates your Public Engagement Policy into a set of rules for municipal staff. In another sense, it acts as the staff equivalent of the Code of Conduct for Elected Officials in the context of public engagement.

The goal of your administrative procedure is to ensure that your administrative representatives approach public engagement:

- Efficiently
- Consistently
- Responsibly

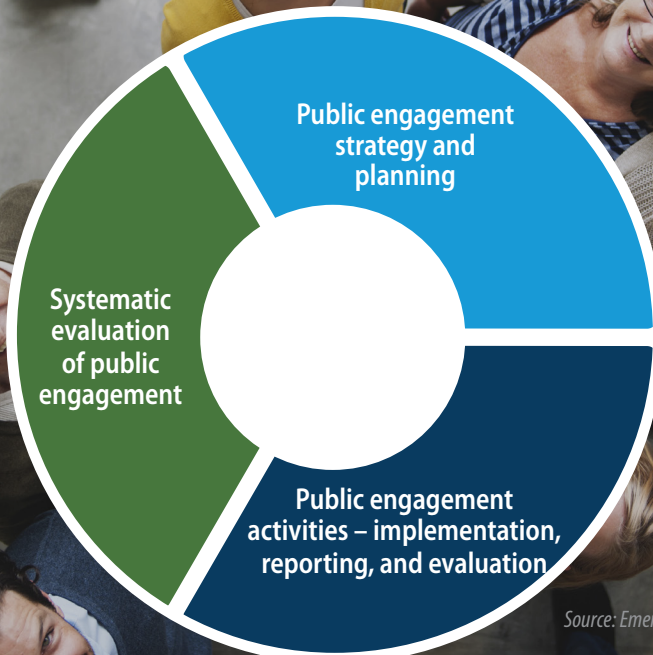
Your public engagement administrative procedure will typically include six elements:

1. **Legislative and administrative authorities** – An overview of the relevant legislation and policy governing the procedure as well as how the administrative procedure affects your municipality's other procedures.
2. **Public engagement definition** – Your municipality's definition of public engagement; please align it with the policy statement in your Public Engagement Policy.
3. **Purpose** – The reason for having an administrative procedure governing public engagement; please align it with the policy statement in your Public Engagement Policy.
4. **Procedure statement** – A description of what you want to achieve through public engagement; please align it with the policy statement in your Public Engagement Policy.
5. **Application** – An outline of who the administrative procedure applies to, including, municipal employees and, as desired, consultants and volunteers.
6. **Roles and responsibilities** – A description of who, according to the titles in your organizational structure, will be responsible for different aspects of your public engagement system; please align it with the policy responsibilities in your Public Engagement Policy.

Check out the Administrative Procedure Template in the [Public Engagement Workbook](#) for a step-by-step template to develop or update your own public engagement administrative procedure.

4.0

THE MIDDLE RING IN PRACTICE



Source: Emerge Solutions, Inc., 2018

The middle ring is where most of the action happens, at least as far as your interactions with members of the public. It's ignited by the realization that your municipality is facing a decision and it may, according to your Public Engagement Policy, benefit from public engagement. If it will, then it's your work to plan, deliver, report on, and evaluate your public engagement activities and how they are contributing to your municipality's decision-making. All of this work can be sequential or iterative. Regardless, it's always interesting.

4.1

Public engagement strategy

The goal with public engagement is to ensure that your municipality can make well-informed and, as much as possible, well-supported decisions.

The goal with public engagement strategy is to be able to articulate whether or not it's beneficial to use public engagement as part of your decision-making process, and why.

Sometimes it's obvious, such as when public engagement is required to fulfill legislation or regulation, or when it is mandated by Council.

Other times, you'll want to understand:

1. What decision(s) your municipality wants to make.
2. What input (e.g., policy, programs, technical, public) is required to help your decision-makers make a well-informed decision.
3. Who will be interested in or affected by your decision and why.

The Middle Ring in Practice

Why use public engagement?

- Legislative requirements.
 - Mandated by Council.
 - Align internal (project team and decision-makers') expectations with the public's.
 - Consider public input as a complement to other inputs, including policy, programs, and technical requirements.
- There is public interest, and
 - The public has expertise or perspectives to offer.
 - There are community values in play and it is helpful to explore different options, trade-offs, preferences, and priorities.
 - There is interest in empowering members of the public to make the decision.

Creating a stakeholder list and conducting an analysis

When you are thinking about who will be interested in your decision and why, ask yourself:

- What and who will your decision affect?
- Who is best positioned to make the decision?
- How big will the impact be?
- Has there already been engagement related to this or a similar decision, and who was interested then?
- Has anyone made any commitments to engage people (e.g., Council)?
- Are there different views or opinions related to the topic?
- Is it important for people to help explore, improve, or identify options for the decision?
- Do people have an expectation to be involved in your decision-making process, and if so, where did this expectation come from?
- Are there people who will be able to add expertise or perspective to help make a better decision?

The key question to answer:

Will we arrive at a better decision or feel more confident in the decision if we invite public input? Why is this the case?

If you answer **yes** relative to the key question and have a strong rationale and sound reasoning then you have a case for public engagement.

If you answer **no**, then you should feel confident that you have enough information to make your decision(s) without public input.



It's helpful to document your decision as to why you will or will not proceed with public engagement. You may be asked to explain this to Administration, Council, or a member of the public.

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4.2

The public engagement plan

Once you decide that your decision(s) will benefit from public engagement, you need to decide how to get the right input from the right people and as efficiently as possible.

These choices will make up your public engagement plan.

The size of your plan depends on a lot of factors.

You might want to make a decision related to one program change that will affect a few people in a small way. Your plan could be very short and straightforward.

You might have a multi-phase project to design a new public facility in your municipality. This plan is likely to be more comprehensive and involve a lot more thinking and detail.

Regardless of the size of your plan, it should touch on 11 elements as part of six sections:

Section one:

1. Project background
2. Project decision(s)
3. Project team
4. Project stakeholders

Section two:

5. Purpose of public engagement
6. Public engagement goals
7. Public engagement input, level of engagement, and timeline

Section three:

8. Public engagement activities and schedule

Section four:

9. Required resources

Section five:

10. Input management

Section six:

11. Evaluation

Check out the Public Engagement Plan Template in the [Public Engagement Workbook](#) for a step-by-step template to develop your own public engagement plan.

4.2.1 **Project background, decision(s), team, and stakeholders**

The first section of your public engagement plan will cover four of the 11 public engagement plan elements, including:

- Project background
- Decision(s)
- Team
- Stakeholders

A lot of this information can be pulled from other documents. While it might feel like you're duplicating some of the information, the purpose is to have everything that you need to consider to plan your public engagement aggregated within one easy to reference document.

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4.2.1.1 Project background

Your project background is intended to provide anyone unfamiliar with your project a good understanding of where it came from, its purpose and goals, why it is important to your municipality, what input you will consider as part of your decision-making process, and why public engagement will add value to your decision-making process.

The key questions to answer:

- *What is the purpose of the project?*
- *What are the project goals?*
- *Why is this project important to your municipality?*
- *What input will you consider as part of your decision-making process?*

4.2.1.2 Decision(s)

The first section of your public engagement plan also requires you to map out your project decisions, who will make them, and when they will make them.

The key questions to answer:

- *What decisions will be made as part of this project?*
- *Who will make each decision?*
- *When is the deadline to make the decision?*

Documenting your project decisions, including who will make the decisions and the timeline to make them, is a critical part of your planning. Your public engagement is intended to support decision-making, so you will want to align your public engagement activities and timeline with your project decision-making milestones and timeline.

4.2.1.3 Team

Section one of your public engagement plan also asks you to clearly identify your project team and, accordingly, assign roles and responsibilities to people. The purpose of this section is to make it very clear to everyone involved in the project who has the decision-making authority and who will play a support role to plan, implement, report on, and evaluation public engagement. It's also important to identify who will lead and take accountability for the supporting activities, including communication, learning and development, and community and stakeholder relations.

The key questions to answer:

- *Who will be part of the team that will plan, implement, and use the input from our public engagement?*
- *Who will support the public engagement activities by focusing on communication, learning and development, and/or community and stakeholder relations?*



When you are identifying the members of your public engagement project team, don't forget about any consultants or volunteers.

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An overview of different public engagement roles:

COMPONENT OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	ROLE/RESPONSIBILITY	ASSOCIATED POSITIONS
Content	People within the municipal team who provide, receive and analyze public input, including input related to evaluation of your public engagement activities.	Communications coordinator(s), subject matter expert(s), project manager(s), data analysts(s).
Process	People within the municipal team who design and implement the public engagement plan and engagement activities.	Project manager(s), public engagement advisor(s), facilitator(s) or digital moderator(s), logistical coordinator(s), administrative personnel, learning and development specialist(s).
Relationships	People within the municipal team who interact with stakeholders and, as part of public engagement activities, participants.	Project managers(s), facilitator(s) or digital moderator(s), elected official(s), administrative leader(s) or community Elder(s) delivering a greeting, information, or blessing, subject matter expert(s) providing context, community and stakeholder relations coordinator(s), interpreter(s), child care provider(s).
Support	People outside of the team who are invited to play specific and specialized roles.	Technology provider(s), caterer(s), room attendant(s), graphic facilitator(s).

Source: Adapted from Schalk, 2014



TIP
In small municipalities, there may be one person responsible

for all aspects of public engagement. From strategy and planning to implementation and evaluation, as well as all the supporting elements. Your available resourcing will influence your approach to public engagement, including its scope, methodologies, and timelines.

- It's common for one person to fill more than one role.
- One word of caution: **Risk**. It's risky to act as both a subject matter expert and a neutral facilitator.
- Subject matter experts are expected to express certain views and values related to a topic.
- Facilitators are expected to be focused on good process, inviting public input without overlaying sentiment or ideology.

4.2.1.4 Stakeholders

The last segment of section one of your public engagement plan asks you to identify your stakeholders.

If you followed section 4.1, you've already done this thinking, as part of your public engagement strategy. You can either choose to copy and paste your stakeholder list into your public engagement plan or make reference to your full stakeholder list and analysis. The important part is that you consider your stakeholder list and analysis as you plan.

Your stakeholder list is important to every part of your public engagement plan: from choosing the best people to interact with them as part of your public engagement team, to setting your goals, to choosing the tools and tactics that will help you reach your stakeholders and get the input that you need.

The key question to answer:

Who do we want and need to engage to help achieve a well-informed and well supported decision?

Identifying your stakeholders

If you're feeling unsure if you have a comprehensive stakeholder list:

1. *Start by brainstorming a list of organized groups and individuals who might be interested in the potential impacts or concerns related to the issue or decision. These can include:*
 - *People living near any proposed actions.*
 - *Local activists.*
 - *Local community groups and associations.*
 - *Youth leaders.*
 - *Indigenous leaders.*
 - *Non-profit groups with associated interests.*
 - *Potentially responsible parties.*
 - *Local industries or businesses.*
 2. *Ask other people in your municipality or well-known community leaders and people with large networks who they think will be interested in the issue or opportunity.*
-

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To avoid involving the same groups of stakeholders all the time,

identify groups who may be hard to reach or engage and the supports they may require to participate. This can include:

- Going to the participants.
- Using plain language.
- Complying with universal design principles (i.e., choosing your venues with accessibility in mind).
- Providing materials in multiple languages, font sizes, colours, etc.
- Partnering with community leaders and organizations who have trust, credibility and relationships with certain populations to deliver your engagement.
- Providing childcare.
- Hosting online activities that are available 24/7 or planning interactions when your target group is intending to gather or most likely available to attend your sessions.



Attendance at in-person public engagement events often dwindles over

the summer months, around long weekends, and during holiday periods, unless the topic specifically relates to these periods of time.

Engaging Indigenous leaders and communities

Engagement with Indigenous communities should be underlined by a commitment to reconciliation and based on involvement of and input and conclusions from the Indigenous community early in the engagement process.

As such, municipal governments are strongly encouraged to:

- *Commit to implementing the principles of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP); Alberta and the federal government have made the commitment.*
- *Implement the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's \(TRC\) Calls to Action](#) that apply specifically to municipal governments (#40, 43, 57, 64, 75, 76, 77, 87, and 88).*

4.2.2 Public engagement purpose, goals, input, and level of engagement

The second section of your public engagement plan will cover:

- Purpose of public engagement.
- Public engagement goals.
- Public engagement input, level of engagement, and timeline.

The purpose of section two is to provide a clear view of why public engagement will add value to your project and what you want to achieve with public engagement, and then draw a clear line between the decision(s) that you want to make, the type of input that you are seeking, the level of engagement that is best suited to your type of decision(s), and, relative to your decision timelines from section one of your public engagement plan, your public engagement timelines.

4.2.2.1 Purpose of public engagement

Section two of your public engagement plan asks you to draw content from your public engagement strategy ([see Section 4.1](#)) and clearly describe the purpose of your public engagement. The intent here is to describe why public engagement is important to your decision-making process versus, for example, simply relying on a review of trends and best practices.

The key question to answer:

Why will public engagement be used for this project and how will it add value to our decision-making process?

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4.2.2.2 Public engagement goals

Section two of your public engagement plan also asks you to clearly describe what you want your public engagement work to achieve.

Remember that your ultimate goal should be aligned with achieving well-informed and, as much as possible, well-supported decisions.

However, you may want to have other goals.

Some municipalities set corporate goals for all of their public engagement activities. This can be extremely helpful because you can develop standard performance measures and tools that you can use and track across projects.

Some municipalities set project specific goals that relate to desired participation levels or the involvement of specific demographics.

The key question to answer:

What does successful public engagement look like?



If you want to set corporate goals that are standard for all your public engagement activities, consider aligning them with what you want to achieve (i.e., related to good decision-making) and how you want to achieve it (i.e., related to the principles in your Public Engagement Policy).

Tips for successful public engagement

- Involve people who have an interest in or will be affected by a decision.
- Involve enough people to consider your idea from many different angles.
- Tell people:
 - What decision you are trying to make.
 - Who will decide.
 - Who you are asking to provide input into the decision.
 - What other information will be considered before the decision is made.
- Explain your idea in the simplest terms possible and using words that are familiar to people (i.e., try to avoid jargon, technical language, and acronyms).
- Offer easy-to-use tools to collect input (e.g., Use stickers on maps to pinpoint locations, use numbers to rank preferences, capture ideas or comments on sticky notes so that you can easily move them into themes and display them to people).
- If you ask people to meet with you, invite them to a near-by and accessible location.
- Ask people how you can do better engagement next time.

Managing the risks of public engagement

Public engagement sometimes gets a bad rap for “creating expectations” or “not being able to please everyone.” Remember - the purpose of public engagement is to use it as an input into your decision-making processes. The goal isn’t to please everyone. It’s to ask for input when you value it, and be clear with people how you’re going to use their input in context of other decision-making inputs (i.e, municipal policy and programs, technical information). You can’t and shouldn’t please everyone. But you should only engage when you fully intend to consider public input and, where it doesn’t conflict with your policy and program and technical information, put it to use. To build trust with people and manage their expectations, it’s important to be clear about what information you will look at to make decisions, how their input will be used, and, once the decision is made, what you decided, how their input influenced the decision, and, wherever possible, why you made certain choices.

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4.2.2.3 Public engagement input, level of engagement, and timeline

The final part of section two is where you align the decision(s) you want to make with the type of input you need, the appropriate level of engagement, and your deadlines to complete the engagement activities related to the decision(s).

You can accomplish this in three steps:

1. Review the decisions you want to make and, using the chart below, identify the “type of decision” you plan to make.

Increasing public engagement and increasing influence in the decision-making process 

Type of Decision	Consultative	Deliberative	Participatory	Citizen-led
Level of Engagement	Consultation (Including vision, ideation, and refining ideas)	Involving	Collaborating	Empowering
Explanation	The municipality makes the decision. It invites people to share ideas and input or, if a concept is already developed, provide feedback to help improve or refine it.	The municipality makes the decision. However, it wants the public’s help in assessing and understanding the possibilities as well as the impact and possible trade-offs associated with the possibilities.	The municipality makes the decision. However, the municipality and the public take a shared or joint approach to coming up with, assessing, and prioritizing possibilities. The municipality is committed to working through various scenarios to understand the preferred solution(s).	The municipality authorizes its citizens to make the decision. The citizens lead the consultation, involvement, and/or collaboration, make a decision, and report its decision back to the municipality.

Source: *Emerge Solutions, Inc. 2018*

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2. Using the “explanation” underneath the type of decision, describe the type of input you are seeking through your public engagement.

Examples:

Decision	Type of input
Identify the ways that people want to use and enjoy main street.	Share ideas.
Adopt a set of a draft preliminary designs.	Feedback to help refine the draft designs.
Identify and prioritize the preferred design solutions to calm traffic on a busy street.	Provide ideas, review them for their strengths and weaknesses, and then prioritize them.

Source: *Emerge Solutions, Inc. 2018*

3. Using the same table, identify the level of public engagement that aligns best with the type of input you are seeking.

Examples:

Decision	Type of input	Level of engagement
Identify the ways that people want to use and enjoy main street.	Share ideas.	Consultative
Adopt a set of a draft preliminary designs.	Feedback to help refine the draft designs.	Consultative
Identify and prioritize the preferred design solutions to calm traffic on a busy street.	Provide ideas, review them for their strengths and weaknesses, and then prioritize them.	Participatory

Source: *Emerge Solutions, Inc. 2018*

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4.2.3 Public engagement activities and schedule

Once you have a good idea about the type of input you require and the associated level of engagement it's time to identify your public engagement activities and when you will plan, implement, and report on them.

There are many different types of public engagement activities, although each tends to align best with only one level of public engagement. It's also worth noting that with the technology available to us, most activities can be offered in traditional or digital formats.

Public Engagement Activities à la carte

- Blue (for example) = Best fit
- Green (for example) = Good fit

See the Glossary for a brief description of each activity.

Activity	Consultation	Involving	Collaborating	Empowering
Ballot votes				Blue
Brainstorming		Blue	Green	
Circle conversations		Blue	Green	
Citizen juries		Green	Blue	
Citizen panels		Blue	Green	
Consensus- building conference			Blue	
Deliberative polls			Blue	Green
Design charrettes		Green	Blue	Green
Expert panels	Green	Blue	Green	
Focus groups	Blue	Green		
Interactive exhibits, requesting feedback	Blue			
Interviews	Blue			
Learning labs	Green	Blue		
Open houses	Blue	Green		
Open Space Technology		Blue	Green	
Participatory decision-making			Green	Blue
Policy forums		Green	Blue	Blue
Pop-up conversations	Blue			
Pro-action cafes			Blue	
Public debates	Blue			
Public meeting	Blue	Blue	Blue	
Public polling				Blue
Surveys	Blue			
Workshops	Blue	Blue	Blue	
World café	Green	Blue	Green	

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Your activities and schedule are best identified hand-in-hand. This is because time is a key ingredient for successful public engagement. Different activities require different amounts of time to plan and implement so it's important to choose activities that work for your timeline.

For example, it can be fairly quick to write, program, and post an online survey. It may take a week or two to draft, review, approve, and program the survey and then it's good practice to give people at least 10 business days to access it.

On the other hand, it can take much longer to book, design, and appropriately generate interest in a series of in-person community meetings. It may take several weeks to coordinate the logistics and communicate the opportunity to the appropriate stakeholders as well as offer multiple opportunities at various times and places in the municipality.

The key questions to answer:

- *Which activities best align with your preferred level of public engagement?*
- *Will your stakeholders respond better to in-person or digital opportunities?*
- *How much time do you need to plan logistics, communication, and any learning and development or community and stakeholder relations work?*
- *When will you plan, implement, report on and evaluate your public engagement activities?*

Note: You will document your required resources in section four of your public engagement plan. If you discover that resources are a limitation then you circle back and amend your activities as required.

4.2.4 Required resources

The fourth section of your public engagement plan identifies the resources you will require to plan, implement, report on, and evaluate your public engagement activities. It identifies the type of resources that you will require, who will oversee coordination of the resource(s), and required budget considerations.

The key questions to answer:

- *What resources are necessary to implement your engagement activities (e.g., people outside the project team, print materials, online survey tool)?*
- *Who will coordinate these resources?*
- *What will the resources cost?*

Some of the resources that you may require include:

- *Venues that meet the needs of participants and the selected engagement activities.*
- *Costs for digital platforms/services.*
- *Interpretative services.*
- *Audio-visual equipment.*
- *Exhibits/graphics.*
- *Print materials.*
- *Catering.*
- *Advertising.*
- *Child minding services.*
- *Staff for any of the above.*



You've already identified when decisions need to be made. It's helpful to work backwards from this deadline to determine how much time you have available for public engagement implementation, reporting and evaluation.



It's helpful to think about reporting as part of your required resources and timelines. Always consider how much time you will need to review and analyze the data that comes in through your public engagement activities and then turn this into a report. This is work that you will either need to make time to do on your own or you will need to coordinate with other team members/consultants.



Your public engagement budget can vary significantly. It will depend on how many people you intend to involve, the tools that you have available to you, and how many of the resources are available within your municipality or have to be bought, rented, or procured through consultants, suppliers, and/or partners. It is possible to do good public engagement on a tight budget. It's about being creative, making trade-offs, and making every effort to go to where people are already gathered or, used to interacting with your municipality (i.e., in-person or online) to seek their involvement.

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4.2.5 Input management

The purpose of doing public engagement is to capture public input that you can use in your decision-making process. In order to do this effectively, it's important to put some thought into what type of input you're going to receive (e.g., ideas, rankings, preferences) and how you're going to capture, manage, and store it. This is the purpose of section five of your public engagement plan.

When you're recording input, your goal should always be to receive it in the most efficient way for you to analyze and use it as part of your decision-making process.

You will want to consider input management practices such as:

- Handwritten or digital.
- Analyzed by people or algorithms.
- Information privacy legislation.
- Records management.
- Data security.

The key questions to answer:

- *What types of input will you record during your public engagement activities?*
- *How will you record and manage them?*
- *How will you integrate them into your decision-making process?*

4.2.6 Evaluation

You've heard the saying, "As long as it all goes according to plan."

Section six of your public engagement plan is your way to ensure that it does.

Simply put, evaluation is the way that you learn what is working well with your public engagement plan and where there are opportunities for improvement. It should always relate back to your public engagement goals. ([See Section 4.2.2](#)).

The key questions to answer:

- *What are the indicators of success for your public engagement activities?*
- *What will you measure or evaluate?*
- *When and how will evaluation take place?*
- *How will you use your results to enhance your engagement?*

Evaluation is something that you do during your project (i.e., after a public engagement activity) and at the end of your project (i.e., once you've made your decision).

The evaluation that you do during your project will tell you what you need to improve to ensure that you meet your public engagement goals.

The evaluation that you do at the end of your project will help you assess the overall effectiveness of the project.



TIP Sometimes you can do everything according to plan and still

need to make improvements. Remember that changes in the environment, changes in direction from decision-makers, and the sentiment of other participants can have a big impact on how people experience your public engagement.



TIP Good evaluation identifies performance measures, or things that

you will measure to know if you're meeting your public engagement goals. When you write performance measures, think about what you can measure to know how effective or efficient you are with your public engagement.

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Evaluation and Adaption to Achieve Engagement Outcomes – STRATHCONA COUNTY

In 2012, Strathcona County undertook extensive public engagement to develop an informed Mature Neighbourhood Strategy. Within the County lies Sherwood Park, an Urban Service Area which boasts more than 70,000 residents. It includes 11 mature neighbourhoods that, with aging homes, large lots, mature trees, and nearby amenities, have begun to experience redevelopment pressures, including infill homes.

“The introduction of new homes that do not share the original architectural character of a mature neighbourhood can greatly affect the residents of the area,” shares Deanna Cambridge, Planner II, Land Development Planning with Strathcona County. “As part of the Mature Neighbourhood Strategy, we set out to create standards that would maintain the integrity of these beloved spaces. We knew standards affected everyone in the 11 mature neighbourhoods, and we made it a goal to ensure we heard from people living in each of them.”

In the early phases of its strategy development work, Strathcona County offered a multitude of in-person and online public engagement opportunities. The first few sessions were well-attended and people

demonstrated a willingness to offer their time, ideas, and energy to help inform the strategy. The County also realized that some neighbourhoods were strongly represented while others were underrepresented.

“We made sure to track participant numbers and neighbourhood representation across all of our activities,” explains Deanna. “This allowed us to complete and discuss an evidence-based evaluation summary after each activity, as well as to compare and contrast our results across activities as the project proceeded. Based on the outcomes, we adjusted the original project plan to create a citizen-led task force, with fair representation across the mature neighbourhoods, that was actively involved in the review and creation of project materials. The creation of this task force empowered residents to make decisions that would help shape the future of their neighbourhoods.”

Strathcona County’s commitment to flexibility through its project enabled them to meet their project and public engagement goals. It used its engagement activity evaluation process to adjust its public engagement plan and was able to choose the most appropriate engagement activities. As a result, the County achieved increased acceptance and support for its strategy decision-making.

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4.3 Public engagement plan

You've got a plan and you're ready to take action.

Some of the most common elements of an effectively implemented public engagement technique or tool, whether in-person or in a digital environment, include:

- A warm welcome.
- A clear understanding of your project purpose, how people can participate, and how you're going to use people's input.
- A clear understanding of who is going to make your decision(s).
- A means, if relevant, for people to get to know the project team as well as one another.
- Information to help people understand the topic being discussed and the overall project.
- A transparent view of what everyone is contributing for input.

- Clearly identified opportunities and avenues for people to provide input.
- Confirmation that people's input was accurately recorded and received.
- Clear information about next steps for the project.
- Gratitude for people's participation.

If you're hosting more than one public engagement activity within a project:

- Pay attention to what's working well and build on it.
- Identify what needs attention and don't be afraid to course correct.
- Gather your project team before each public engagement activity to do a briefing and discuss key messages.
- Gather your project team after each engagement activity to debrief and identify any "lessons learned".

Planning for Quality Input – TOWN OF COCHRANE

The Town of Cochrane is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Alberta. In March 2018, the Town initiated a multi-year review to update its 2004 Land-use Bylaw. Its goal – to ensure the Town is well-equipped to manage new, diverse, and increasingly complex land-use and development trends.

"We are striving for a 'made-in-Cochrane' approach to addressing our unique land-use needs and challenges," explains Julie Haskill, Communication Advisor for the Town of Cochrane. "This makes it critical for us to have a comprehensive understanding of our public and stakeholders and meaningful ways to share information with and invite input from them."

Before initiating any public engagement on the Land-use Bylaw project, the Town put a new tool, its Public Engagement Toolkit, into action.

The toolkit is designed to help the Town determine when to use public engagement and —when it is deemed beneficial — effectively and efficiently plan for it. The toolkit includes a list of questions to assess the impact that a project will have on the public and stakeholders. It also includes an assessment tool to evaluate the risk of the project and which levels of engagement are most appropriate.

"We use our Toolkit to help identify the project milestones, stakeholders, impacts and risks, and, when beneficial, which levels of engagement are most appropriate. This gives us good information to set clear engagement goals and plan our engagement activities," explains Julie. "Reviewing our Land-use Bylaw is a multi-year and multi-phase project so it's important that we have a clear map for our public engagement, but also a plan that is flexible enough to allow for change as we go."

The Town's focus on flexibility has already served it well. It spent a lot of time up front with known stakeholders asking them how they want to be engaged and who else it should be engaging. With that information, the Town was able to focus its engagement on inviting informed input from people with a keen interest in land-use and development.

"There's a bit of a misconception that good engagement is simply about numbers," shares Julie. "For us, it's important that we specifically make efforts to reach out to diverse stakeholders rather than just hosting or being present at large public events — high quality engagement is more important than just high numbers. We know that some harder-to-reach populations have important perspectives, and that involving them will ensure we arrive at a bylaw that works in the best interests of everyone with a connection to our land and community."

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4.4 Reporting

When people make the time and effort to participate in your public engagement, they generally want to know:

- What input you collected.
- What you decided and what information influenced your decision (i.e., policy and programs, technical, and public input).

There are typically two types of public engagement reports:

1. A *What We Heard* report: This report summarizes what you heard during your engagement activity or activities. While it may include some verbatim comments, it typically reflects an analysis of all the input you receive. You may produce one or more *What We Heard* reports depending on the scope and scale of your project and public engagement activities.
2. A *What We Decided* report: This report summarizes what you decided and, wherever possible, why you made the

decision. It's especially helpful to let people know where you considered and, where possible, reflected public input in your decision(s).

Check out the Public Engagement *What We Heard* template and the Public Engagement *What We Decided* template in the [Public Engagement Workbook](#) for a step-by-step template to develop a *What We Heard Report* or *What We Decided Report*.

Note: There will be times where you have a one-phase project or a mid-project decision (i.e., setting a project vision before getting into project work). These are times when you can combine your *What We Heard* report and *What We Decided*. You can share what was heard and how it helped lead to a clear decision. It must be clear how public input was used in the decision-making process, even if key elements of the input was over-ridden by policy and program or technical requirements.



If you're familiar with the IAP2 Public Engagement Spectrum, you'll

be familiar with the "Inform" category. Inform is equivalent to communication. Reporting is one way that you can keep your stakeholders well-informed as your project proceeds.



Your *What We Heard* report should be focused and concise.

Don't be afraid to use graphs, diagrams, and bullet points to communicate your point. The best reports are easy to scan and highlight the most important information to the audience.

The analysis behind a *What We Heard* Report

When you're holding public engagement activities, you're collecting input. Before you report on what you heard through your input, it is important to do a thorough analysis of it. You should be looking for key themes, priorities, and insights that you can share back with the public.

Worth noting:

Researcher Peter Schalk (2014) found that Alberta municipalities spend 80 per cent of their time planning for public engagement, 10 per cent delivering public engagement, and 10 per cent on post-engagement activities. The limited investment in connecting back to audience post-engagement, particularly to explain how their contributions shaped a decision, can be a significant barrier to future participation.



Don't get behind on your reporting. Timely reporting can help to

build trust and credibility with members of the public. Set your schedule for reporting as part of the schedule in your public engagement plan.

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Increasing Public Trust and Participation Through Reporting – TOWN OF OKOTOKS

In March 2018, the Town of Okotoks invited members of its community to provide input into the location and amenities for an inclusive playground.

Twenty-five people who care for or help to support children living with disabilities attended a one-time workshop to discuss and indicate their preferred playground location and amenities. Following the workshop, the Town developed a *What We Heard* report back to the community.

“We report on all of our public engagement, and every report is posted to Okotoks.ca,” explains Joan Botkin, Communications Manager. “It’s an important step to ensure people know their input makes a difference. We show them – we heard you, we responded to what you told us, and your contributions were integrated into our decision-making work.”

To help people understand how their input would affect the plans for the playground, the Town made sure its report described:

- The focus of the public engagement workshop
- How the public was notified of the workshop

- The number of people who participated in the workshop and their affiliations
- The results of the engagement activities
- The next steps for the project

“We focus on a simple format and plain language for our *What We Heard* reports,” shares Joan. “For the inclusive playground *What We Heard* report, we also included pictures of people’s input. They helped to grab people’s attention at the same time as demonstrating that we accurately reflected participants’ contributions.”

This emphasis on transparency not only helps to build trust in the Town’s projects but also its overall approach to public engagement.

“We engage because we want people to feel more ownership and a stronger sense of belonging in our community,” finishes Joan. “To achieve this, we need to consistently demonstrate that people’s input matters and is considered as part of the Town’s decisions – and our reporting is that evidence.”



TIP You can collect demographic data as part of your public engagement

activities to evaluate how well your participants reflect the people that you want to involve.

Your demographic questions will vary depending on the type of experience, knowledge, background, and characteristics that you want or would expect in your stakeholders. Some examples of demographics include:

- Language(s) spoken
- Race
- Location by neighbourhood/postal code
- Numbers of years living in a neighbourhood/postal code
- Age
- Family income
- Education level
- Gender identity

4.5

Evaluation – activities and systemic

Evaluation can be a tricky topic. This is because there’s so many wonderful possibilities with it.

You can evaluate your public engagement activities and how those activities contributed to your project decision(s) ([see Section 4.2.6](#)). You can also conduct systems-level evaluation, which looks at how well all of your municipality’s public engagement work is serving your decision-making.

The important thing to know is that setting standards and using a consistent set of performance measures is foundational to good evaluation.

We evaluate things to know if we’re doing them right (i.e., effectiveness) and if we can be doing them faster or cheaper (i.e., efficiency).

While it’s helpful to evaluate individual activities and projects it can be a lot more helpful to evaluate many of them to know if you are getting more effective and efficient. This requires developing standardized questions and tools to collect information about how you’re performing. The information you collect can be analyzed once or it can be aggregated with other sets of information to offer a larger picture of how you’re doing with public engagement.

5.0

THE BULLSEYE IN PRACTICE



Source: Emerge Solutions, Inc., 2018

Public engagement work is people-centred work.

It is work delivered by people to involve people in decisions that impact people.

It's work that is very rarely, if ever, delivered by one individual. It's work that benefits from an energetic, organized, and cohesive project team.

Your public engagement team will typically require a minimum of three roles, not including your decision-maker(s). Each role may be filled by one or more people.



Choosing people with the right competencies to fulfill their responsibilities

will improve your public engagement outcomes. It's always a benefit to have people with the right skills planning, implementing, reporting on and evaluating your public engagement.

5.0 The Bullseye in Practice

ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
Project manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures there is a project plan, public engagement plan, and communications plan. • Acts as the liaison between the public engagement project team and the decision-makers. • Takes responsibility for quality control, on-time delivery, and outcomes.
Subject matter expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers questions about technical matters or items related to the issue or decision. • May identify specific limits (e.g., budget, timeline, Council directive, legislation, bylaws) and linkages to other projects, timelines, decisions, or policies. <p>Note: Avoid conflict of interest or perceived bias: this role should never be shared with the facilitator role.</p>
Public engagement planner and facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops the public engagement plan, ensuring the approach and method(s) serve the defined purpose and meet the needs of participants. • Organizes and implements the public engagement activities. • Facilitates engagement activities and records input. • Identifies common themes and insights emerging through the input. • Leads the development of a <i>What We Heard</i> and/or <i>What We Decided</i> report. • Leads evaluation.

6.0

THE SUPPORTING ELEMENTS IN PRACTICE



COMMUNICATION

LEARNING &
DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY &
STAKEHOLDER
RELATIONS

Source: Emerge Solutions, Inc., 2018

Your supporting elements aren't necessarily practices that are specific to public engagement, and yet your public engagement success depends on them. It's this dependence that makes communication, learning and development, and community and stakeholder relations foundational to both your public engagement system and all three components of your public engagement activities - implementation, reporting and evaluation.

There are times when one or more of your supporting elements will play an important role in your public engagement activities even before you start your public engagement planning. There will be times when they will be critical to keeping your public engagement work on track, and there will be times when they will offer helpful follow-up to your public engagement and decision-making work.

6.0

The Supporting Elements in Practice



TIP Your Public Engagement Policy and Framework are excellent tools to help people understand how your municipality views and approaches public engagement.

TIP Developing a Communications Plan that aligns with your Public Engagement Plan is a good way to ensure that you're accounting for all five roles of communication.

6.1

Communication

Communication is important to all different types of work. With public engagement, it plays five specific roles:

1. Sharing information about your municipality's approach to public engagement. It can be really hard for people to understand how to effectively and efficiently contribute to your decision-making process if they aren't familiar with why, when, and how you do public engagement.
2. Sharing information about your project background and the decision(s) that you have to make. People will typically need to know why you're making the decision(s), your timeline to make the decision(s), and what other types of information you are looking at to be able to provide helpful input in your decision-making process.
3. Sharing information about your public engagement activities and when and how people can get involved.
4. Sharing what you heard as a result of your public engagement activities (i.e., distributing your *What We Heard* report) and how it will affect your project or decision(s), as well as communicating any project updates.
5. Sharing what you decided (i.e., writing a *What We Decided* report) and how public engagement input fit into your decision-making process.

Check out the Communications Plan Template in the [Public Engagement Workbook](#) for a step-by-step template to develop your own Project Communications Plan.

The Supporting Elements in Practice

6.2 Learning and development

Public engagement is a practice. It's something that we get better at the more we learn about it and the more we do it. This is true for both your public engagement team and for the people who participate in your public engagement events.

It's becoming more and more common for municipalities to identify the types of behaviours (i.e., competencies) they want to see from public engagement teams and people who participate in public engagement activities to ensure successful engagement.

How to ensure that your public engagement team has the right skills to deliver

1. *Identify how many different roles will be required to plan, implement, report on and evaluate your public engagement.*
 2. *Develop a short set of mandatory competencies (i.e., the behaviours that you want the person in the role to demonstrate) for each role.*
 3. *Talk with your public engagement team members about the competencies and ensure that they feel comfortable accepting the role.*
 - *As part of your conversation, ask your team members where could they benefit from most: support or training.*
 4. *Offer to provide mentor or on-the-job support wherever possible or, as necessary, determine if there are training and development opportunities to help fill knowledge or skill gaps.*
-



Identifying your desired public engagement competencies can help you

choose the right people for your public engagement team or, depending on the nature of your public engagement, group of participants. For example, you might use a set of public engagement competencies as criteria to recruit participants to a citizen jury or advisory group. You might also choose to offer specific types of training and development as part of your public engagement approach.



Consultants can help fill knowledge and skill gaps if there is a temporary need for a specific competency.



It's helpful to integrate small learning opportunities in your public

engagement activities wherever possible. Don't be shy to take a few moments to share your definition of public engagement and how you approach it. It helps people participate and helps to manage their expectations.

6.0 The Supporting Elements in Practice



TIP Public engagement is about taking a transparent and equitable,

although not necessarily equal, approach to involving people in your decision-making process. It's important to differentiate between times when you are working to build a relationship, willing to hear someone's ideas or point of view, or deliberately seeking input into a decision. There can be expectations associated with all of these activities. Good public engagement makes it very clear how and when you will use public input as part of your decision-making process. Public engagement done well can help build cooperation, trust, and, ultimately, a commitment to support current and future decisions.

6.3 Community and stakeholder relations

While public engagement is how you involve people in your decision-making process, there are a lot of other types of activities that involve people in relation to and sometimes to the exclusion of public engagement. These can include communication, relationship building, community development, and advocacy.

The idea of having a clear Public Engagement Policy is that people understand what constitutes public engagement. That being said, having good relationships with people, openly communicating that you are taking a community development approach to a project, and being transparent about how you are interacting with advocacy groups or lobbyists are all important to public engagement. These are all practices that, done well and integrated appropriately, have the potential to increase participation and enhance your public engagement.

Public engagement can help to strengthen community and stakeholder relations and vice versa

Community and stakeholder relations can help your public engagement by:

- *Identifying community leaders who can get involved in your public engagement or encourage the people they work with, serve, or support to do the same.*
- *Developing a comprehensive stakeholder analysis to give you a clear picture of who will hold an interest in your decision-making process and why.*
- *Working with or managing a relationship with an individual or group if they are unhappy with the result of your decision-making process.*
- *Identifying locations, resources, and public engagement activities that will resonate well with the people who you want to involve in your decision-making process.*



Activities

Different ways to engage citizens and gain public participation. The effectiveness of each activity depends on a number of factors including the target audience, the level of engagement being sought, cost, and time requirements.

Administrative procedure

An objective set of rules to govern municipal administration's approach to public engagement.

Advocacy

To support, champion or promote an idea, cause or issue.

Ballot votes

An activity to prioritize ideas. Each participant is offered a small piece of paper to identify their preferred ideas. The paper is submitted in secret and counted by a neutral party. The idea with the most supporters is adopted.

Boards and committees

A group of public volunteers selected by municipal decision-makers (i.e., elected officials or administration) that meets regularly and, usually, on a long-term basis. The degree of decision-making authority for municipal boards and committees will vary depending on the focus of the group and preference of municipal decision-makers.

Brainstorming

An activity to solve a problem or explore a possibility by gathering lists of ideas contributed by people in a group or team environment.

Circle conversations

An activity that gathers people in a circular shape to give deep attention to a topic or idea. Each person is given the opportunity to speak in an uninterrupted manner and everyone can see or hear one another.

Citizen jury

A group of 12-20 randomly selected representatives of a community meets over several days to deliberate on an issue.

Citizen panels

A randomly selected group of 12 people that meets routinely (e.g., four or more times) to consider, discuss and deliberate issues and make decisions or recommendations.

Code of Conduct

Describes how behaviour is governed.

Collaboration

A joint approach between a municipality and the public to come up with, assess, and prioritize possibilities.

Community

A group of people living in the same place or having a common interest. May include the "public" but can also refer to subsets of that group.

Community development

A process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community.

Consensus-building conference

A dialogue between subject matter experts and members of the public regarding an issue or decision that is open to the public and the media.

Consultation

The process of inviting people to share ideas and input or, if a concept is already developed, provide feedback to help improve or refine it.

Decision

A formal conclusion or resolution reached after consideration.

Decision-maker

A person or organization that provides a formal conclusion to an issue after consideration.

Deliberation

Assessing an issue or idea to understand the various possibilities as well as the impacts and possible trade-offs associated with the possibilities.

Deliberative polls

An opinion poll with the addition of deliberation. The polls measure what people think once they are informed and engaged around an issue or decision.

Design charrette

An intensive planning session where members of the public, designers and others collaborate on a vision for development.

THE GLOSSARY

Digital engagement

The use of web-based tools to gather public input as part of decision-making.

Expert panels

A variety of experts debate and discuss various courses of action and make recommendations.

Focus groups

Group interviews to invite input on a topic from a small group (i.e., up to 12) of people.

Governance

Processes to conduct policy and the business affairs of an organization.

Inform

The process of sharing information with people.

Interactive exhibits, requesting feedback

A hands-on experience to learn about or explore a topic or idea and respond to questions about the experience.

Interviews

A conversation where one party asks questions and the other provides answers.

Involve

The process of working directly with the public through an engagement project to ensure concerns, ideas and perspectives are understood and considered by the municipality.

Learning labs

A safe space for people to explore ideas and learn through practice and action.

Open houses

An opportunity for people to drop in, review information, talk to a municipal representative, share their ideas or feedback and, sometimes, identify their preferences.

Open Space Technology

An activity that gives people a topic but no formal agenda or questions; people self-organize to explore the topic in ways that work best for them.

Outcome

A statement describing the desired future state that will arise as a result of engaging the public.

Participatory decision-making

A creative process to give ownership of decisions to the whole group, finding effective options that everyone can live with.

Performance measure

A way to track the efficiency or effectiveness of public engagement activities or the public engagement system.

Plan

Identification of steps and resources to do something.

Program or service

Developing something that addresses a need, gap, or issue in a community.

Policy Development

The act of creating a set of rules to guide government decisions.

Policy forums

A gathering of diverse participants to examine issues and engage in open conversations about policy options and impacts.

Pop-up conversations

Temporary locations to attract and gather people to participate in a conversation.

Pro-action café

A conversation where participants share their questions (i.e., related to projects or ideas) and get input (i.e., knowledge, experience) from others, to help move from questions to action.

Public

The most general and inclusive term for participants of engagement projects in the municipal context. This term includes individuals, not-for-profit groups and organizations, community groups and business organizations who have an interest in, or are affected by, a municipality's outcome or decision.

Public debates

An activity where people consider a topic and present arguments that represent different perspectives.

Public engagement

Opportunities for people to be involved in a decision-making process and help inform decision(s).

Public engagement evaluation

A means to determine what needs to be improved to achieve public engagement goals.

Public engagement framework

A framework describes the structures and key elements that underlie a municipality's preferred approach to public engagement.

Public engagement implementation

The delivery of one or more public engagement activities, in accordance with your public engagement strategy and plan.

Public engagement planning

A framework describes that the structures and key elements that underlie a municipality's preferred approach to public engagement.

Public engagement principles

A set of norms or values that represent and reflect good public engagement.

Public engagement reporting

A written document to communicate to the public what you heard through the public engagement activities and/or what you decided and how you used public engagement and other types of input to make your decision(s).

Public engagement strategy

A description of why public engagement will or will not add value to one or more decisions.

Public Engagement Policy

Guidelines, rules, regulations, laws, and/or principles to direct the purpose and application of public engagement within a municipality and describe when and how it will add value.

Public hearing

The portion of a regular or special meeting of Council during which any person, group or representative affected by a proposed bylaw as per Section 692 of the *Municipal Government Act* shall be heard.

Public meeting

A method of engaging the public through consultation that involves a formal presentation by the organizer on the issue(s). Members of the public are able to ask questions and provide input in a public forum, and a record of the proceedings is kept.

Public Notice

A legislated method of informing people of an opportunity or decision.

Public polling

A type of survey or inquiry designed to measure the public's views regarding a particular topic or series of topics.

Representative democracy

A system of government in which all eligible citizens vote to elect representatives to make decisions for them.

Strategy

A high-level plan to achieve one or more goals.

Surveys

An activity to record information from a sample of people, traditionally with the intention of generalizing the results to a larger population.

Workshop

A meeting at which a group of people engage in intensive discussion and activity on a particular topic.

World café

A structured conversation for knowledge sharing in which groups of people discuss the same topic with a few different small groups of people.

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