

Purpose & Scope: As outlined in the City's **Public Engagement Strategy**, the purpose of the Public Engagement Policy is to improve consistency for planning and reporting on all public engagement initiatives designated as medium or high impact/risk (*as determined by the Needs Assessment Worksheet – **Appendix A** and/or identified by Council / senior leadership in consultation with the Public Engagement team*).

The policy provides clarity for all City staff – and the New Westminster community – on standards and expectations for public engagement activities delivered by the City of New Westminster. The policy applies across all City of New Westminster departments, as well as engagement work carried out by contractors and consultants on behalf of the City.

Note: While consultation is often required for external development applications, the policy is not intended to apply to these projects. Sound engagement approaches and best practices should be implemented for external development consultation; however, the Needs Assessment and formal Engagement Plan are not required, for example.

Definition: Public engagement is based on the principle that those impacted by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process. Engagement – which can also be called public participation, community consultation, or participatory decision-making – is a process of gathering input from those who may be affected or perceive to be impacted, to help influence a decision or outcome. It can be described as purposeful listening, with the intent of decision-makers to meaningfully consider public or community input as one of the factors in decision-making. Engagement requires a two-way conversation, with a commitment to incorporate the public's contributions – within the parameters of the engagement initiative – to the maximum degree possible. Communications and engagement are related, and effective communication is a key component of every engagement process; however, only sharing information out should not be considered engagement and is not covered by this policy.

Roles:

- **Community Members, Residents, and Members of the Public:** Participate respectfully and genuinely in public engagement opportunities that impact and interest them. Help share information with neighbours and other residents about opportunities to provide input and participate. Share feedback that can act as an early warning sign

for public concern. As possible, assist the City's efforts to reach and include seldom-heard voices in public engagement activities.

Participate in evaluating the City's engagement activities, and provide feedback to help us improve. Recognize that public engagement involves participation by choice, and there are many barriers to participation the City is working to address. This often means key perspectives are missing from the discussion. Understand that public engagement is one factor of many in decision-making, and engagement is not intended to be a vote. Other limitations of public engagement include:

- There is often a diversity of perspectives, and input may not result in a clear direction for decision-makers.
- There may be times when input cannot be actioned. The City will work to explain why in these cases.

Internal stakeholders who are impacted by a project or decision – i.e. City staff, other departments, etc. – should also be considered as part of this group / participants.

- **City Council and Senior Management Team (decision-makers):** Help identify when engagement is required / beneficial, and champion authentic, meaningful engagement practices across the organization. Help identify the scope of engagement, or elements of the decision that are flexible / open to influence (as well as articulating what aspects are not open for input). Commit to authentic engagement:
 - Do not request engagement when all parts of the decision have already been made / are fixed or when the outcome is pre-determined;
 - Support the time and resources needed to include diverse voices and ensure those with lived and living experience are directly included;
 - Help promote and champion engagement activities in the community and with local contacts and networks;
 - From time to time and as possible, attend City-led engagement sessions in a listening role to hear directly from residents and other stakeholders;
 - When public engagement is undertaken, consider and incorporate input to the maximum degree possible in the decision / final outcome (while taking into consideration the demographics of who participated and what voices and perspectives may have been missed).
- **Public Engagement Team:** Provides oversight, strategic advice, support, training and assistance to all City Departments as they plan and deliver engagement processes. This includes:

- Meeting with the project lead / team to discuss the need for engagement and what elements are open for influence, reviewing draft engagement plans and providing feedback, providing facilitation and engagement session support as needed, etc.
 - Developing templates and examples of engagement tools and materials, such as engagement plans, “what we heard” reports, online engagement components, etc.
 - Providing a City-wide perspective on engagement activities that are upcoming and anticipated, in order to identify opportunities to coordinate and avoid engagement fatigue / overload.
 - Providing staff training, oversight, overall maintenance and participant management for the Be Heard New West online engagement platform.
 - When required, taking a lead role in planning, implementing and reporting back on City-wide engagements that do not directly relate to a specific City Department.
- **City Departments:** Responsible for considering the need / requirement for public engagement in the early planning stages / initiation for all new projects, initiatives, policy development, etc. When engagement is appropriate, departments integrate the time, resources and budget for engagement within their project plan.

With support from the Public Engagement team, departments plan, implement and report back on public engagement activities related to the department’s work. This includes:

- developing materials and engagement questions,
- building, maintaining and updating online engagement pages,
- conducting outreach and promotion to encourage participation – including drafting content and coordinating with the Corporate Communications team,
- addressing potential barriers to engagement,
- responding to public questions,
- reviewing and analyzing input,
- reporting back, etc.

When working with consultants or contractors who undertake engagement on behalf of the City, departments are responsible for ensuring the standards set out in this policy are achieved.

- **Corporate Communications:** Supports City-wide communications activities related to public engagement processes, working with draft content and messaging provided by

Department staff. For example, helping to promote engagement events and opportunities to provide input through social media posts, CityPage notices, paid advertising, etc.

Requirements for Planning City Engagement Processes

- 1. Determining the Need for Engagement:** To help identify projects/initiatives/decisions that are medium or high impact/risk, project leads are required to complete the Needs Assessment worksheet, attached as **Appendix A**. The completed form should be submitted to their direct supervisor and the Manager of Public Engagement. This worksheet should be completed as part of early project planning / project initiation and documented along with the Project Charter or other project details.
- 2. Outlining the Purpose of the Engagement & Developing the Engagement Plan:** If an engagement process is identified as required / recommended, the project lead will begin an engagement plan document, working through the City's Public Engagement Toolkit, and collaborating with the Public Engagement team as needed.

As part of the engagement plan, the project team must clearly identify and outline the purpose of the engagement. Aspects that should be considered and documented in the plan include:

- **Context**, such as background, related policy, related decisions, etc. for the engagement
- The **intended outcome** of the overall project / pending decision (i.e. establish a new program, build a new facility, develop a new policy, etc.)
- **Potential impacts** of the project, and **what groups** may experience the impacts. Don't forget about internal stakeholders (i.e. Council, City staff, specific departments, etc.) in addition to community members and groups
- What elements or aspects of the project/decision are **open for influence** by the community/stakeholders (put another way, what questions are we asking the public?)
- **How input** from the community/stakeholders **will be used** in determining the project outcomes / decision-making process / influencing the design or implementation
- What are we **trying to achieve** through the engagement process (**objectives**)
- **Evaluation measures** that will be tracked to **assess the success** of the engagement process
- **Outreach strategies** to ensure those impacted are aware of the engagement and how they can participate

- Strategies to **address barriers** to participation and include the voices of those historically excluded from public processes and people with lived/living experience relevant to the engagement topic. Avoid tokenism or relying on proxies / advocates to speak on behalf of seldom-heard groups.
- Engagement **activities and timeline**, allowing for adequate time for Engagement Plan review, time to develop materials and schedule any events such as workshops, promote the engagement, conduct outreach, etc. Keep in mind that a best-practice is to allow approximately three weeks for collecting input / active engagement (i.e. a survey should be open for approx. three weeks). A combination of online and in-person engagement activities should be included for most projects
- Available **budget** for the engagement and promotions, and what expenses are anticipated

It's important to note that each public engagement initiative may have unique needs and considerations. Not all elements will be required for every Engagement Plan.

3. Submit Engagement Plan for Review: Once drafted, submit the engagement plan to the Public Engagement team for review, feedback and refinements. For high impact/risk projects, the engagement plan should also be submitted to Council and/or SMT for review and endorsement. Again, the Needs Assessment worksheet results will help identify high impact/risk projects. Seek guidance from the Public Engagement team if you are not sure.

The public engagement team will provide feedback on all draft engagement plans within one business week, or sooner. In many cases, work to develop draft materials, schedule sessions, etc. for engagement can proceed during the Engagement Plan review process. When in doubt, check with Public Engagement staff.

Department staff will use the engagement plan as a guide to implement the engagement – seeking input from the community and stakeholders through various methods – with support from the Public Engagement team.

Requirements for Reporting on Engagement

1. Reporting “What We Heard” as a Distinct Project Step: After a period of active engagement has concluded – i.e. feedback on a specific project or decision has been collected, and the input period has closed – it is a priority to report back in a timely way to participants and the community. The timeline for reporting back will vary depending

on the amount and type of input received, but staff should plan for no later than one month after the input period has closed. Reporting on engagement should be treated as a distinct step in the project process, and not bundled together with the next decision point.

- Residents' contributions should be acknowledged, and given full consideration in being applied as much as possible to the project or decision.
- If a project or initiative includes multiple phases of public engagement, reporting back should occur promptly following each phase.
- Do not wait until engagement results are included in a Council report to share engagement findings with the community; however, ensure that Council is notified when input from a high impact/risk project is shared.

2. Standards for Reporting Back: For all City engagement processes, across all Departments, the following should be completed after each phase of active engagement:

- Compile all input: Gather all different forms of input (i.e. survey responses and other online inputs, workshop notes, any direct emails, etc.).
- Analyze: Review all input and identify key themes / findings.
- Summarize: Prepare a summary of the engagement process, participant input, demographic information about participants with analysis about representation, engagement evaluation results, and next steps. Aim to include graphic elements in the summary.
- Publically provide both summary and detailed reports, as applicable, as well as the verbatim input (i.e. full survey reports, workshop notes, etc.). Verbatim input should be screened for personal information before sharing. (Contact Legislative Services for support with this as needed.) Offensive and/or discriminatory language will also be screened and removed, based on the **moderation rules** outlined on the Be Heard New West online engagement platform.
- Share the engagement results widely, posting to the Be Heard New West online engagement platform, and also reaching out to key stakeholders, participants who have provided their email address, etc. Be proactive – approach reporting back with the same importance as promoting the engagement opportunity.

3. Reporting on Outcomes: In addition to reporting back on the engagement process, the input received, and the key themes / findings, we must also report back on the **eventual outcomes and how the engagement impacted the final decision**. This typically comes at a later date than reporting “what we heard”. To demonstrate transparency and accountability, participants and the public must understand how their input was used, and how it influenced the related decisions.

Principles for Public Engagement in New Westminster (from the *Public Engagement Strategy*)

Public Engagement by the City of New Westminster:	
Diversity	Involves community members who reflect the diversity of interests and opinions in the community.
Accessibility & Inclusion	Achieves accessibility for all community members, recognizes their right to participate and values the knowledge and experience they contribute.
Respect	Creates a respectful environment that builds trust and maximizes the contributions of community members and staff.
Informed Discussion	Provides community members with accessible and timely information on City matters and processes.
Partnership	Works in partnership with community members and builds on community initiative and ownership.
Transparency	Actively communicates transparent information about process and outcomes for each public engagement initiative.
Responsiveness	Acknowledges and responds to community members' input and requests for information.
Commitment to Learning & Improvement	Continuously improves public engagement practices through measurement and evaluation, and the use of innovative methods and technologies.

Additional Components of Policy / Appendices:

(These are identified as actions in Public Engagement Strategy and will be developed and added to the policy or as companion documents over time)

- Plain language guidelines
- Accessibility policy
- Checklist of minimum corporate standards – notification periods, formats, accessibility requirements, information provided, etc.
- Engagement expectations for third-parties – i.e. property developers, other government agencies