

Seniors Engagement Toolkit (SET)

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Seniors Engagement Toolkit

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Seniors Engagement Toolkit (SET) Overview

This toolkit is intended to help City staff when they engage seniors in municipal planning and development processes. Increased and more effective engagement will ensure seniors' viewpoints are addressed and community solutions are responsive to their diverse and changing needs. The toolkit is a dynamic resource, and is open to review and revision. It is written for City staff and includes a resource for seniors who want to be more active in municipal government decision-making (see Part 2, Section 6).

This toolkit is the result of efforts by the City of New Westminster and the Seniors Planning and Action Network of New Westminster (SPAN, formerly SSTF). SPAN is a group of seniors and service providers who coordinate and address the needs of seniors in New Westminster. In 2009, they delivered a panel presentation about "Senior-Friendly Meetings." The presentation revealed a need to increase understanding about how to more effectively engage seniors in community processes.

The Union of BC Municipalities Seniors' Housing and Support Initiative / Age-Friendly Community Planning and Projects Grant provided an opportunity for the City to develop this toolkit. A working group of seniors, including SPAN members and graduates of the Century House LEADS Program, provided their expertise and perspectives.

Working group members participated in content development, offering objective insight from a seniors' perspective about consultation and engagement techniques that do, or do not, work well. The City's Seniors Advisory Committee also contributed significant input.

SET is structured in four parts.

- Part 1: Community Engagement and Seniors:
Provides the reasons and context for seniors' engagement.
- Part 2: Engagement Tools:
Provides practical tools and techniques for seniors' engagement.
- Part 3: Engagement References and Resources
Provides resources for further information.
- Part 4: Appendix
Includes additional data and resource material.

What is a “senior?”

It is ironic that we live in a time of dramatic population aging but cannot agree on how to refer to people of a certain age or life stage. Consider the numbers:

- 50: The age at which you can join many seniors’ centres.
- 55+: The Seniors Canada Online (seniors.gc.ca) definition of senior citizen—and also the age at which you may get “seniors’ discounts” at businesses.
- 60+: The age when low-income seniors might be eligible for government benefits.
- 65+: The age when the Old Age Security program may provide a pension.

In some cases, due to life or health circumstances, a 40 year old may exhibit the physiological age of 75 year old. In other cases, an active 85 year old will declare, “I’m not a senior!” For some people, aging increases their sense of opportunity; for others, it may result in reduced independence and well-being. Academic publications typically use, “older adult,” while other groups use “elder,” or “senior.” ***For consistency, this toolkit will use “senior” and will include people who are 50 and older.***

Part 1: Community Engagement and Seniors

1 | Engagement Overview

What is community engagement?

Strong, democratic communities share an ability to engage people throughout decision-making processes. Successful community engagement is reflected in good information flow and participation between City Council, staff and community members; in better service quality; and in improved project outcomes. Community engagement may involve a range of processes, including one-way information sharing, two-way consultation, or active involvement in decision-making processes.

The City of New Westminster is a dynamic, diverse municipality and is committed to community engagement. However, based on the City's demographics, seniors tend to be under-represented in municipal planning and development processes. This may happen for a number of reasons.

- City staff may be unfamiliar with the benefits of engaging seniors.
- City staff may be unaware of issues that impact seniors' engagement such as lack of transportation, mobility or health challenges.
- City staff may be unaware that certain communication methods and engagement techniques may not be effective when working with seniors.
- Seniors may be unaware of engagement opportunities, unable to access them or have difficulty making a contribution.

Community: *A group of people who live in a specific area, share government and may share common interests.*

Successful engagement yields:

- *Wider perspectives, sources of information and potential solutions.*
- *Productive relationships, improved dialogue and deliberation.*

“My overall impression was that they didn’t really care. It was paying lip service: they didn’t want people’s opinions at all.” (Senior participant evaluation of United Boulevard Extension Open House.)

Reasons for Community Engagement

Effective engagement benefits both the City and community in many ways, increasing and improving:

- access to information, networking and resources,
- decision-making and outcomes based on broad input,
- inclusion of community expertise and understanding of issues,
- awareness of City capacity and processes, and
- transparency, accountability and trust.

Effective engagement involves:

- *Partnerships*
- *Shared Understanding*
- *Clarity of Objectives*
- *Flexibility*

Consultation and engagement might not result in agreement, but should result in better decision-making rationale.

For the greatest benefit, consultation and engagement must be timely to allow community members to:

- express their views,
- provide perspectives on options,
- support and participate in implementation, and
- give and receive feedback throughout the process.

Community consultation and engagement may focus on general policies, programs or services, as well as specific projects. For example, the City might consult with the community about:

1. Major plans and policies (e.g., Official Community Plan or Adaptable Housing Policy).
2. Targeted strategies (e.g., traffic calming or accessibility improvements).
3. Operations and services (e.g., garbage collection or snow removal).
4. Programming (e.g., type, timing and location of a new fitness program).

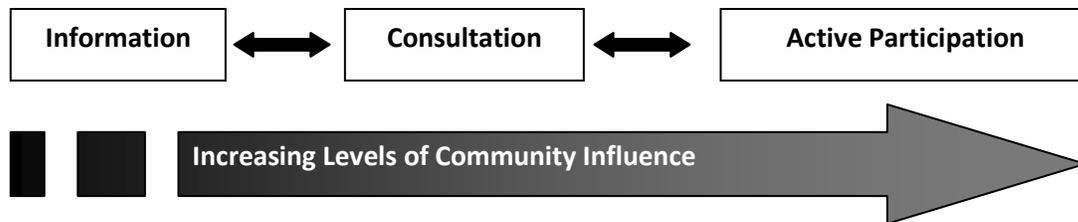
Community engagement can require extensive time and expertise, from both City staff and community members. It can also change community dynamics. Before starting any activity, it is important that everyone involved genuinely supports the objectives and process for successful results.

“It was engaging. It made you think more about different points of view—individual and organizational.” (Senior participant evaluation of Adaptable Housing Policy Meeting.)

City Considerations	Community Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is engagement necessary or recommended?</i> • <i>What are the opportunities for community members to participate in and influence decision-making?</i> • <i>Is there clarity about what the issues are from a community perspective?</i> • <i>What level of engagement is needed?</i> • <i>Can the community have input into the type of engagement activity?</i> • <i>What potential conflicts are there?</i> • <i>Does the City have the resources to complete an engagement activity?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What interest do community members have in what is being asked?</i> • <i>What level of decision-making will community members expect to have?</i> • <i>What information do they need?</i> • <i>Are there community groups or representatives you can consult with to check community feeling?</i>

Levels of Engagement

There are three levels of engagement: sharing information, consultation and active participation. Each level and activity has different strengths and weaknesses. It is important to choose the most appropriate engagement level and provide full support for implementation of all activities. In some cases, there may be no direct contact between City staff and community members. In other cases, as with the development of this toolkit, seniors may directly influence outcomes.



“The ‘fishbowl’ supported inclusion of all participants in the discussion.” (Seniors Engagement Toolkit Working Group activity feedback.)

It is essential that the City defines clear objectives and that participants understand what is being asked of them. If they expect an opportunity for joint decision-making and learn they have limited influence on a final decision, engagement—and trust—will be compromised. Engagement activities must also be appropriate for the number of people involved; some are meant for groups of fewer than 20 people, others are intended for 100 people or more.

Level 1: Sharing Information

Depending on the issue and objectives, you may want to simply share information with community members. Information might be provided to specific groups or neighbourhoods that will be impacted by the issue, or to the whole community. Information sharing activities include:

- Posting a notice on CityPage and the City website.
- Printing and distributing a brochure in different locations such as recreation centres, the library or community agency offices.
- Sending a media release to local press.

Level 2: Consultation

Consultation is a two-way process, with the City sharing information and seeking community members' views. It may be used for specific issues that will affect a small segment of the community, or for larger planning or policy decisions. Consultation may occur at different times in a planning process, to clarify an issue, to identify options, or to evaluate programs or services. Consultation activities include:

- Discussion groups and workshops.
- Interviews with key community representatives or stakeholders.
- Open houses or presentations to specific groups.
- Surveys or forums using traditional and web-based tools.

Level 3: Active Participation

At the highest level of engagement, the City might share information, conduct consultations and actively involve community members at specific points in a project or throughout a full process. When developed and delivered well, this level of engagement is the most inclusive and can result in the most effective outcomes. Active participation activities include:

- Action research which supports collaborative exploration of issues with a focus on developing understanding.
- Advisory committees such as the Seniors Advisory Committee.

-
- Working or focus groups representing a specific segment of the population interested in a specific issue or project.
 - Fishbowls, which support active listening and dialogue.
 - Photovoice, which support community members taking photos to illustrate parts of their neighbourhood that are related to the issue or project.

For more information and resources about other engagement activities, refer to Part 3: Engagement References and Resources.

2 | Benefits and Challenges of Engaging Seniors

Why is senior engagement important to New Westminster?

On a community level, senior participation is linked to:

- increased quality and responsiveness of services,
- stronger intergenerational relationships,
- increased project support, and
- enhanced access to specialized skills and knowledge.

On an individual level, senior engagement is linked to:

- empowerment,
- better physical and mental health,
- improved social connections and sense of well-being, and
- increased intergenerational interaction and activities, which benefits both age groups.

Seniors also value the recognition and appreciation for their contributions to community. They want to support programs that are important or of interest and participate in policy planning and decision-making activities. They also recognize their capacity to influence political change.

The City has engaged seniors in several projects, resulting in tremendous benefits to the City, the participating seniors and the general community. The following profiles briefly summarize a few of the projects that were successful due to seniors' participation ranging from sharing information, consultation and full participation.

Profiles of New Westminster Seniors Engagement

Celebrating Seniors Festival

The Seniors Advisory Committee, which advises Council on issues of relevance to an aging population, formed a sub-committee to recognize and celebrate the contributions of seniors. This sub-committee, which is comprised of community seniors, designed, programmed and implemented the festival. Given the amount of autonomy provided in planning the festival,

“Older persons want to do more than simply continue to reside in their communities—they want to be able to contribute to, and benefit from, community life.”

(Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide (2006).

the seniors felt a sense of ownership. They also used their considerable connections to draw in and involve other seniors, which has contributed to a series of highly successful festivals. In 2010, the festival attracted about 600 seniors.

In My Back Yard (IMBY) Fairs – Connecting Seniors to Services

To better connect seniors to services, a series of fairs were held in New Westminster. From the outset, it was decided that seniors themselves would have a central role in the project. To this end, a working group of seniors was established. This working group was involved in all facets of planning and decision-making. They were also involved in project implementation. Over the course of ten months, working group membership increased and members took on more responsibility for the project as they gained confidence in their abilities and skills. In the end, the fairs were a tremendous success, involving close to 40 senior-serving organizations and attracting 385 people, the vast majority of whom were seniors.

Queensborough Community Plan

As part of the development of the Queensborough Community Plan, meetings were held with seniors, youth and other population groups. To maximize involvement by seniors, it was decided to place the item on the agenda of the Queensborough 50+ Social Club (formerly Queensborough Old Age Pensioners' Association), which meets on a monthly basis. Given that the item was part of its regularly scheduled meeting, there were over 50 participants, the vast majority being 55 years or older. As the presentation was specific to the needs of seniors, there was a great deal of discussion. Additionally, 24 seniors completed a questionnaire related to the issues that they face and their specific needs.

Wheelability Assessment Project

For many years, seniors and persons with disabilities had raised concerns related to accessibility. As part of a seniors planning table, the idea for a 'wheelability' study was hatched. Given a funding opportunity, the idea became a reality and a project to improve mobility and enhance active transportation options for people who are reliant on wheeled mobility devices was implemented. From its inception, the project was about involving mobility aid users in actively assessing the built environment. A working group of mobility aid users was established and over 30 mobility aid users and their companions took part in two assessment days. Additionally, 121 mobility aid users completed a survey as to how they move about the built environment and the challenges that they face. As a result of this project, a video was produced for staff training purposes; a map was prepared to better inform mobility aid users about route choices; and the assessment information was used to address identified deficiencies and inform design decisions.

Youth-Centre at Moody Park

A youth centre had been discussed as far back as 2003 but little progress had been made. In 2008, the City made a funding commitment in support of a youth centre and established a task force. Of interest, this task force included representation from the Century House Association and the Seniors Advisory Committee. One of the reasons for this representation was due to the fact that one of the locations under consideration was Century House, which is a seniors facility. After an extensive evaluation process, it was determined that the preferred site was Century House. This preference could have been problematic; however, the senior representatives acted as liaisons with other seniors and informed them of the many benefits associated with co-location. In the end, the Century House Association came out in support of the youth centre and it contributed \$20,000 towards a furnishing and equipment fundraising campaign, which eventually raised in excess of \$200,000. The Seniors Advisory Committee also put forth a motion in support of the centre and the preferred location. Senior representation proved to be an essential element in both garnering support for the preferred location and in raising funds for the centre.

Challenges of Engaging Seniors

There are many challenges that may limit engagement by seniors, including ageism, life changes, literacy and use of technology, and age-related changes.

Ageism

Ageism refers to a perception or attitude that results in discrimination on the basis of chronological age. As people get older they are often treated differently than younger people simply because they are older. A quick review of greeting cards reflects common stereotypes of aging, with a negative emphasis on loss of ability and reduced value to society. This is due to false attitudes and assumptions such as, all seniors...

- are hard of hearing, have vision loss and poor health,
- dislike and resist change,
- are less competent and engaged with life, and
- will eventually experience dementia.

In truth, seniors are far more diverse than younger people. Differences in experiences and opportunities, education and work, culture or country of origin, family life, travel, volunteering, and interest in a wide range of topics over decades make seniors the most complex segment of our population.

Ageism may result in people unnecessarily raising their voices or responding with impatience when a senior is asking questions or asserting their position. If the senior is with someone younger, people may direct questions or answers to the younger person—even if the interests and needs of the senior are the focus of the conversation. They may over-simplify their response, or not take the senior’s concerns seriously. Another common communication error is to speak to a senior in a patronizing way, sometimes calling them, “dear,” or other phrases that may be well-intended but imply a superior-inferior relationship.

Regrettably, seniors may anticipate being treated with disrespect or disregard, and become reluctant to engage with community processes. It is important to recognize and address attitudes and assumptions that discourage seniors’ engagement. Age is not an indicator of disconnection, outdated perspectives or an inability to participate effectively and constructively in community processes. In engaging seniors, speak directly and respectfully with them. Ask how they prefer to be referred to— as Mr., Mrs., Miss, or on a first-name basis.

Life Changes

In addition to the risks of ageism, there are **life changes** that can impact seniors’ engagement.

- Seniors may want to spend time with grandchildren, which may reduce time available for community engagement.
- Seniors may want or need to continue employment for income or simply out of interest (even when retirement is an option), which may reduce time for community engagement.
- Seniors may want to travel or return to school, which may limit their availability to participate, particularly in long-term engagement processes.
- Seniors may be providing time and energy-consuming care for family members or friends.

It is important to understand how individual seniors want to participate in community engagement. Structuring engagement activities to support seniors availability, interests and priorities will increase the likelihood of their participation. The Engagement Planning Checklist in Part 2, Section 1, includes ways to address the impact of life changes on seniors’ engagement.

Literacy and Use of Technology

Literacy is a key cultural factor that impacts engagement. Literacy BC reports that 80% of seniors are working with low levels of literacy. Low literacy impacts seniors health and wellbeing in

many ways. In addition to age-related changes discussed in the next section, low literacy may be due to a number of reasons.

Seniors may have experienced:

- limited educational opportunities or support in early years,
- limited opportunity to maintain reading skills,
- learning loss due to cognitive changes, and
- too few literacy programs for seniors.

Another aspect of contemporary life related to literacy that impacts engagement is use of technology. While many seniors use computers for a range of activities, there are many who do not. Reliance on the internet, email or social media for sharing information and communicating with community members will implicitly exclude non-computer users. Keep in mind that non-computer users may be seniors, as well as people of all ages without the experience, resources, or support needed to access computers.

Regardless of literacy levels and familiarity with technology, seniors have extensive knowledge and life experiences that are invaluable for community engagement. They retain the ability to process spoken language and to understand pictures and images.

Ensure that information is posted and made available in print, referring to Part 1, Section 4, “Communication and Plain Language” for effective techniques. The Engagement Planning Checklist also includes ideas for effective distribution of print materials to reach seniors. Part 2, Section 4, includes ways to make engagement techniques senior-friendly, which can also address low literacy or limited experience with technology.

Age-Related Changes

There are five main areas of age-related changes that can impact seniors engagement: vision, hearing, cognition and memory, bones and joints, and functional abilities.

1. Vision: A typical change in vision related to age is reflected in the variety of fashionable reading glasses available at retailers. Presbyopia (far-sightedness) can start at age 40, making it hard to read small type. Other vision changes such as cataracts and macular degeneration may start at age 60. These may affect perception of contrast, colour, and details. Refer to Part 1, Section 4, of this toolkit for effective print techniques to help address these changes.

2. Hearing: Presbycusis is the slow loss of hearing that may come with age. About 30 to 35% of people 65+ and 40 to 50% of those 75+ have some hearing loss. It is mostly due to changes in the inner ear but can also be due to other more complex changes. It may result in seniors experiencing speech as mumbled or slurred, having difficulty with high-pitched sounds and coping with background noise. The Checklist provides suggestions for providing an environment that can reduce the impact of hearing loss on seniors engagement, and there are resources listed in Part 3.

3. Cognition and Memory: While most cognitive skills remain strong throughout life, some may decline with age. Slower processing of information or recall can make it harder to find details in a document or make comparisons. Seniors may have less “working memory,” reducing their capacity to hold many different types of information in mind at the same time or to multi-task. They may also have difficulty filtering out distractions to focus on specific information or make decisions. However, these declines can be readily addressed by appropriately structuring engagement activities.

4. Bones and Joints: The Fraser Health Seniors’ Health Profile reports that by age 65, 77% of men and 85% of women in Canada have at least one chronic condition such as arthritis or diabetes. Arthritis, which causes stiffness, pain and reduced joint mobility, is the most common chronic condition in later life. It can make it painful to move or sit for extended periods of time. As listed in the Checklist, providing comfortable chairs with arms for support and having frequent breaks during presentations can increase seniors comfort and ability to participate.

5. Functional Abilities: Fall risk is a very serious concern for seniors. Fraser Health notes that, “One in three adults over the age of 65 falls at least once per year. Falling can cause injury, loss of mobility and independence, and is the sixth leading cause of death in seniors. Seniors' falls and injuries cost Canadians \$3 billion per year.”

(http://www.fraserhealth.ca/your_health/seniors/falls_and_injury_prevention).

The Checklist includes recommendations for choosing safe locations and setting up displays to reduce obstacles and fall risk.

For more information and resources about other benefits and challenges of seniors engagement, refer to Part 3: Seniors Engagement References and Resources.

3 | New Westminster Seniors Demographics

Seniors are our fastest growing and most diverse population group. Their role and impact as decision-makers is increasing dramatically. Understanding the audience you want to reach, or “audience profiling,” will make community engagement much more effective.

Canadian and Global Demographics

The role and impact of seniors as decision-makers is increasing dramatically. Seniors are the fastest growing population group in Canada due to increased life expectancy and reduced fertility (people having fewer children than in previous generations). They are the largest and most active voting block and the most heterogeneous population group due to the wide diversity of life experiences.

In the next ten years, Canadians over 65 are expected to outnumber those under 15, with that population growing from 4.2 million to 9.8 million by 2035. As Health Canada’s Division of Aging and Seniors reports:

“At the start of this new century, Canada faces significant aging of its population as the proportion of seniors increases more rapidly than all other age groups. In 2001, one Canadian in eight was aged 65 years or over. By 2026, one Canadian in five will have reached age 65. ...

Population aging is a complex issue that concerns not only the well-being of today’s older Canadians but also broader areas and sectors affecting the total population, such as health, labour markets and public finances. It affects and engages communities, all levels of government and all sectors of society.”

(“Canada’s Aging Population” Division of Aging and Seniors, Health Canada © Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada 2002. This reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.)

In response to global population aging, the World Health Organization is leading initiatives to develop age-friendly communities where,

“...policies, services, settings and structures support and enable people to age actively by: recognizing the wide range of capacities and resources among older people, anticipating and responding flexibly to aging-related needs and preferences, respecting the decisions and

lifestyle choices of older adults, protecting those older adults who are most vulnerable, promoting the inclusion of older adults in, and contribution to, all areas of community life.”

(World Health Organization, Global Age-Friendly Cities Project, Brochure published by the Public Health Agency of Canada, May 2006.)

In response to this global initiative, the City of New Westminster has undertaken research in support of creating an Age-Friendly City. More specifically, the City engaged older adults in an assessment process using the ‘Checklist of Essential Features of Age Friendly Cities,’ which was developed by the World Health Organization. In total, 46 older adults took the time to complete and return the checklist. Based on the results, a number of suggestions were made as to how the City can adapt its policies, processes and services to be more accessible and inclusive of older adults, including in the area of civic involvement and volunteerism. This toolkit addresses a number of suggestions to facilitate access and inclusion with regard to engagement processes.

New Westminster Demographics

In 2011, there were 67,514 people living in New Westminster, 8,474 or 12.6% of which were seniors (65+). By 2036, there are projected to be 97,683 people living in New Westminster, 20,947 or 21.4% of which are projected to be seniors. As such, in the next 25 years, the seniors population is projected to increase by 12,473 or by 147%.

This increase in the number and percentage of seniors speaks to the need to develop engagement processes which are inclusive of seniors and respectful and responsive to their diverse abilities, limitations, needs, and preferences. If not, some seniors may feel disenfranchised and may question the legitimacy of engagement processes and results.

Understanding Neighbourhood Variations

There are significant variations in the percentage of the population that is comprised of seniors by neighbourhood in New Westminster. Of the 13 neighbourhoods in New Westminster, seniors comprise 7.4% of the population in Queensborough and 24.2% of the population in the Uptown (see Appendix A).

The percentage of the population which is comprised of seniors by neighbourhood is important, as it provides information as to if an engagement event is representative or not. For example, if 12.5% of participants at an engagement event in the Uptown are seniors, then it can be inferred that seniors are under-represented at that event (given that seniors represent 24.2% of the

population in the Uptown). Based on this information, the event organizer may consider holding a targeted focus group with seniors to gain their input and perspectives.

Developing an Audience Profile

In developing an engagement process, it is important to understand the target audience. Try to locate specific information relating to: educational attainment (literacy), family structure, health status (limitations), housing type, language of choice (proficiency), income, and socio-economic background.

Some relevant indicators for seniors (65+) in New Westminster include the number and percentage who...

- Report health and activity limitations: 4,230 or 57%
- Live alone: 2,830 or 38.2%
- Do not have a high school certificate, diploma or degree: 2,590 or 34.9%
- Rent: 35.2%
- Immigrated: 2,925 or 39.4%
- Immigrated between 2001 and 2006: 2.4%
- Have a mother tongue other than English or French: 2,195 or 30.1%
- Lived in a different municipality, province or country five years ago: 1,035 or 13.9%.

(Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census)

The above information will enable the event organizer to more effectively and meaningfully engage seniors. For example:

- If language is an issue, consider retaining the services of an interpreter.
- If mobility is an issue, consider holding an event in an accessible, central location or at a seniors facility or residence.
- If awareness is an issue, consider a marketing campaign that includes leafleting rental buildings and informing faith and senior serving organizations.

To access neighbourhood specific information for New Westminster, go to:

http://www.newwestcity.ca/business/planning_development/demographics.php

The United Way of the Lower Mainland is developing profile information about vulnerable seniors. To access this information (when complete), go to: <http://www.uwlm.ca/>

4 | Communication and Plain Language

To successfully engage any diverse group, it is important to ensure that accessible, clear and relevant language is used to reach your audience. Plain language communication should be one strategy employed to meaningfully engage seniors.

Plain language does not mean that messages are presented in their simplest form; instead, it highlights the need to adequately define your target audience and have a clear understanding of their background, culture, health status, reading level and other pertinent factors that will help to craft messages that are clear and relevant.

This section will serve to cover the following:

- Age-Related Changes Relating to Communication
- Plain Language Principles
- Audience Profiling
- Plain Language Document Design Principles
- Plain Language Design Checklist

Age-Related Changes Relating to Communication

As people age, they experience a number of changes (especially relating to vision quality) that affect their ability to read and to process information. Ailments such as cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration are typically “elderly” conditions that affect the vision of an aging population. In fact, close to 75% of all individuals with low vision are over the age of 65.

In a study published in the *Journal of Gerontology* (1991), adults who were of a more senior age (mean age of 68.3 years) had a drop in reading speed by 70% when reading text in very small or very large characters. While hearing problems are also more common in older populations, it is not as serious as vision problems and is usually determined by hearing abuse at younger ages. In addition to vision and hearing, studies have actually found that the appearance of “white matter lesions after the age of 60 can significantly affect cognitive function in old age.”

All of the factors above, coupled with a rapidly advancing technological environment, are reasons why the usage of clear communication or plain language is necessary when communicating with older adults. These age-related changes all reinforce the need for guidelines such as using larger text, louder volume and allowing more processing time at engagement events.

Benefits of Plain Language

There are a number of benefits of writing in plain language. Plain language communication aims to reach people who cannot read well; helps all readers understand information; and prevents misunderstandings and errors. In a municipal setting, where documents like forms and reports are used, plain language communication can greatly reduce the amount of time spent explaining complicated materials. Essentially, plain language communication will save time because it gets the job done well the first time.

Plain Language Principles

The first step in plain language communication is to have an understanding and recognition of plain language. Materials that use plain language (clear writing and design) follow some general principles:

Focus on the information that readers want or need to know - This area is often a struggle for many organizations that pack their brochures and reports with any information about the topic that comes to mind. This saturated writing style will only serve to confuse your reader and dilute your key messages. To prevent this from happening, it is often useful to document your “key messages – the important pieces of information that your reader needs to know,” to ensure that the messages stay prominent in your document. As a reminder, key messages should be:

Write down your key messages at the onset of your document creation. This will help to ensure your writing stays on track and to the point.

- Believable
- Clear and Concise
- Memorable
- Positive

Respect the reader’s background and intelligence – The following section on audience profiling will provide clear guidelines and ideas on how to best write for your audience. As mentioned above, the creation of documents in plain language means that the documents are relevant and at the level of your reader. It is your responsibility to know your audience.

Use a familiar language and a straightforward communication style – Every organization has a specific language and communication style that it uses. When creating plain language documents, it is important to be cognizant of the words and phrases that might be specific to your organization but are not to your target audience. Familiar language excludes acronyms, jargon, technical language and words that may be the “flavor of the month.” Once your

documents are created, it usually helps to test them on your target audience to see if your messages are resonating with them and if your language and choice of words are clear.

Materials that follow plain language principles:

- Incorporate large type,
- include photos or other graphics to illustrate information,
- make it easy for the reader to find out what is critical or important, and
- provide adequate white space.

Materials that follow plain language principles avoid:

- Dense text, small type and other layout errors that can intimidate the reader,
- heavy blocks of type,
- justified type,
- too many competing elements – i.e., over-designed, and
- too much information on a page.

Audience Profiling

Your most important asset in plain language communication is your audience.

1. Members of your target audience can play a key role in testing and providing feedback on your communication materials. As such, you should consider creating an advisory committee of your target audience to review your materials. Having such a body will help to ensure that your materials are relevant to your target audience.

When you involve your target audience in assessing your materials, it:

- Tells your readers you value their opinion,
- provides feedback and insight on cultural sensitivities, and
- makes your final product better.

2. Developing materials with a clear profile of your target audience will also assist with the creation of key messages that are relevant and accurate. There is no such thing as the general public. In all communications, there is always a specific target audience with distinct expectations, motivations and past-knowledge.

To create an audience profile, please consider the following questions:

- Who is your target audience?
- What is their general understanding of English?
- Do you have access to members of this population to test your materials?
- Do you have any specific information relating to their culture, education, family structure, income and socio-economic background?
- Is there any other notable information about this group?

Plain Language Document Design Principles

The way you present information on the page is just as important as the words and sentences you use to present that information. A well-written document can be difficult to read if it is poorly laid out. It is also important to check with your organization's communications and marketing staff to ensure that your documents meet organizational brand standards. Many organizations clearly define the colours, font and writing style that their materials must follow.

The following list outlines document design factors that are equally important as language when developing plain language communication materials:

- Choose a solid, plain typeface, which is easy to read – e.g., Sans Serif fonts.
- Thirteen or fourteen point is a good size for most writing.
- Do not combine more than three different typefaces on the same page.
- Be generous with margin space i.e., do not print on every inch of your page.
- Use left justified and right ragged margins.
- Make a table of contents for long documents.
- Divide your document into sections of related information.
- Keep paragraphs to no more than four or five sentences.
- Leave space between paragraphs.
- Underline titles.
- Use boxes to separate key information from the rest of your text.
- Use bullets for point form lists.
- Use italics to emphasize a phrase or word.
- Use color or shaded areas to set text apart and use high contrast for colors.
- Avoid contractions – e.g., “you are” instead of “you’re”.
- Do not use all capital letters as they are harder to read and it looks like you are yelling.

Graphics and Photos

The use of graphics and photos in plain language communication is encouraged. It provides more white space and visual representations of the printed text (which can be extremely helpful for those who are not comfortable with their reading). When using graphics and photos however, it is important to keep the following in mind:

1. Connect with your advisory committee (made up of members of your target audience) to check over your documents for relevance. This is necessary, especially when using culturally relevant graphics or photos as you will want to ensure that they are relevant and respectful of your target audience.
2. Do not use too many photos and limit your usage of cartoon-like graphics. Whenever possible, use photos of 'real' people and scenarios (to create as clear a link as possible with the true representation of your text).
3. Place all graphics and photos as close as possible to the text they refer to.

Plain Language Design Checklist

Use the following checklist to assist with the creation of plain language communication. The future actions needed column provides a space to document future work that is needed to fully answer the associated question.

Questions	Yes	No	Future Actions Needed
Have I clearly defined the key messages that I want to include in this document?			
Have I created a profile of my target audience?			
Have I assessed my draft document to ensure that it avoids unfamiliar language (acronyms, jargon, etc.)?			
Have I assessed my draft document to ensure that it follows plain language communication principles?			
Have I passed my draft to my representative advisory committee for their review and feedback?			

PowerPoint Presentations

PowerPoint presentations are a frequently used component at many engagement events or sessions. The following list shows some “do’s” and “don’ts” for using PowerPoint presentations with older populations:

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limit the number of points on your slide to two or three• Add relevant graphics or photos• Allow for processing time between slides• Provide printed copies of your slides or key points to your audience• Use a microphone for presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make your slides very text-heavy• Only use text with no graphics or photos• Go through each slide in quick succession and only ask for/allow questions at the end of the presentation• Give presentation with no printed materials for the audience to refer to

Consultation Poster Example

Do this...	Not this...
<p style="text-align: center;">New Westminster Transportation Forum</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Are you 55+ and have thoughts about transportation in your community? (road conditions, transit, walking paths)</i></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">You are invited to attend the New Westminster Transportation Forum</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Date: November 00, 2010 Time: 10:00 to 11:30 am Location: Century House</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Free parking is available. This location is accessible by buses #001, #002 and #003</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For more information, please contact John Smith, Transportation Planner at (604) 000-0000</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">New Westminster Transportation Forum</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Come provide your thoughts about seniors transportation in New Westminster</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The City of New Westminster will be hosting a transportation forum on November 00, 2010 at Century House. This forum will serve to gather feedback from local seniors on the gaps that they face with our current transportation structure.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For more information, please call (604) 000-0000</p>

The example on the left has the following components that make it more of a plain language document:

- Relevant graphics,
- boxes and bolding to bring out relevant text,
- contact information for a real person,
- important information (about the forum) is clearly emphasized,
- target audience is clearly defined and there is a call to action, i.e., “are you 55+ ...”, and
- location accessibility information is included.

Plain language Communication Resources:

The following resources will help you create and assess your materials for plain language factors:

1. Clear Language and Design: Interactive Readability Tool
<http://www.eastendliteracy.on.ca/clearlanguageanddesign/readingeffectivenessstool/>
2. How to Cut the Gobbledegook: An Introduction to Plain Language Writing and Clear Design
<http://lrnpei.ca/files/PLain%20language%20manual.pdf>
3. Plain Language Network (lots of great links, resources, samples, etc.)
<http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/>
4. Plain Train: Online Plain Language Training Tool
<http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/plaintrain/>
5. SMOG Calculator: Interactive Readability Calculator
<http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/campaign/SMOG.html>
6. The Plain Language Movement
<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/index.cfm>

Natasha Raey (Raey Consulting), provided research and writing services for Chapter 4, Communication and Plain Language.

Part 2: Engagement Tools

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Comprehensive Event Checklist

The City of New Westminster is committed to creating an Age-Friendly City, which encourages active aging by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security to enhance quality of life as people age.

To ensure that civic engagement processes are inclusive of the viewpoints of seniors and responsive to their varying needs and capacities, the following checklist has been created.

The checklist is based on an extensive evaluation process and literature review and is intended to build confidence in and empower City staff with regard to their abilities and skills to meaningfully engage seniors in New Westminster.

The checklist should be a first point of reference. More detailed information regarding specific engagement techniques can be found in the toolkit, along with cited reference materials.

Location and Venue

- Hold event or session in Uptown unless issue is specific to a neighbourhood.¹
- Hold event or session at a location where seniors congregate and are familiar.²
- Ensure venue is convenient by foot and well served by public transit.
- Ensure venue is accessible (e.g., no stairs, working elevator with good capacity, etc.).
- Ensure parking lot is accessible, conveniently located and well lit.
- Consider posting directional signage from parking lot, at entrance and within venue.
- Book a microphone if more than 15 participants.
- Ensure adequate seating even if event is an open house.
- Consider providing tables or clipboards if participants are required to write.
- Ensure screen is adequately sized and presentation is clearly visible from back of room.
- Set-up room to maximize eye contact and hearing (e.g., classroom, horseshoe, etc.).
- Check out venue prior to making booking (e.g., acoustics, lighting, temperature, etc.).³
- Test equipment to ensure it is functional prior to event.

¹ Over a third (34.8%) of seniors reside in the Uptown and Brow-of-the Hill neighbourhoods.

² Some frequented places include Century House and the Public Library in the Uptown.

³ Some venues are not air conditioned and can be uncomfortably hot during summer months.

Scheduling

- Check to see if there are potentially conflicting events marketed at seniors.
- Schedule event or session during daylight hours.
- Consider scheduling as part of an existing seniors' meeting.
- Consider scheduling prior to or after an existing seniors' meeting.⁴
- Consider scheduling a daytime and evening event or session if inclusive of those who work.
- Ensure event or session is no longer than two hours unless combined with a meal.
- Ensure presentation is no longer than 30 minutes.
- Ensure discussion time is equal to or greater than the presentation time.
- Ensure agenda includes a 10 minute break after the first hour.

Marketing and Promotion

Placement

- Place ads in CityPage and under 'What's Happening' on City's website.
- Send invitation to Seniors Advisory and Special Services and Access Committees.
- Consider sending invitation to Seniors Planning and Action Network.
- Consider sending invitation to Queensborough 50+ Social Club.
- Consider sending invitation to Sapperton Pensioners Club.
- Consider placing a related article in the Clarion (which is a monthly newsletter for seniors).
- Consider notifying the Manager of Seniors Services at Century House.
- Consider notifying the Seniors Services Society.
- Consider placing posters in frequented locations such as Century House and Public Library.
- Consider placing posters in seniors residences such as Dunwood Place, Rotary Tower, etc.
- If cancelled, place ads in media used to promote event and post signs at location.

⁴ Try to avoid meeting fatigue when scheduling an event or session either prior to or after an existing seniors' meeting. If the combined time exceeds two hours, then look at a different date.

Content

- Use plain language principles for all print materials.
- Identify issue or topic area.
- Identify purpose of event and its relevance to seniors.
- Identify date and time and include an agenda if several items are to be discussed.
- Identify location and consider including directions or a map.
- Incorporate contact information, including name, telephone number and email address.

Design

- Use a simple layout with lots of white space.
- Use bright colours and high contrast text.
- Use Sans Serif font with a minimum font size of 13 point.
- Consider incorporating photos of seniors to emphasize relevance to seniors.⁵

Engagement Session

Structure

- Introduce City staff (and consultant team), including position(s) within organization.
- Welcome participants and provide overview of event or session.
- Consider stating event's or session's relevance to seniors.
- Consider providing time for participant introductions if less than 15 participants.
- Consider an ice-breaker activity if time permits.
- Review agenda and opportunities for participant engagement, including asking questions.
- Provide adequate information to facilitate meaningful participant engagement.
- Distribute handouts after event or session unless essential for participant engagement.
- Discuss next steps, including further opportunities for engagement.

⁵ Ensure photos include younger and older seniors unless marketed at a particular segment of seniors. Additionally, ensure photos include seniors from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Facilitator

- Be personable and consider greeting participants prior to event or session.
- Be patient with and supportive of participants.
- Demonstrate generational etiquette – e.g., appropriate dress, language, manners, etc.
- Encourage and facilitate engagement, including seeking out quiet participants.
- Establish transparency and trust with participants.
- Demonstrate a good understanding of the subject matter.⁶
- Pace the event or session and have regular check-ins as to participant comfort with pace.
- Listen attentively and reframe questions to ensure clarity and understanding.
- Anticipate and prepare for questions which may be asked by senior participants.
- Acknowledge and mediate anger, conflict and/or fear.
- Record but do not debate issues which are divisive or difficult to resolve.
- Ensure that the event or session begins and ends on time.

Content

- Use plain language principles for all print materials.
- Ensure content references or is relevant to seniors.
- Avoid acronyms and complex language.
- Define all technical terms.

Information

- Consider forwarding relevant background information prior to event or session.
- Provide detailed agenda, including approximate time per item and person responsible.
- Provide print copy of PowerPoint presentation – i.e., minimum of two slides per page.
- Use Sans Serif font with a minimum font size of 13 point.
- Provide feedback or response form and include contact information.
- Provide summary information after event or session via print copy and web link.

⁶ As part of the evaluation process, working group members identified the importance of a facilitator or presenter having a good command of the subject matter and being able to answer questions.

Logistics

- Have participants wear name tags and request that they clearly write their name.
- Ensure adequate lighting if feedback is being requested during a presentation.
- Provide healthy refreshments, including decaffeinated coffee and tea.

Evaluation

- Administer an evaluation form to gain feedback on engagement techniques and facilitation.
- Provide adequate time to complete evaluation form.
- Review evaluation form results for learnings and revise techniques and style accordingly.
- Share and discuss learnings with other City staff.

2 | New Westminster Seniors' Organizations

Century House and Century House Association

620 Eighth Street, V3M 3S2

604-519-1066

Lesley Cole, Manager, Youth and Seniors Programs

Shelly Schnee, Program Director

Marg McKee, Century House Association President

Queensborough 50+ Social Club

Freda D'Souza, President, 604-524-6977

Sapperton Pensioners Club

318 Keary Street, V3L 3L3

604-522-0280

Vic Leach, Vice President, 604-525-2819

Seniors Advisory Committee (SAC)

John Stark, Senior Social Planner, 604-517-3777

Seniors Planning and Action Network (50+) of New Westminster

Mariam Larson, Coordinator, 604-515-1719, manage@mariamlarson.com

Annette Oakes, Chairperson

Seniors Services Society

209 - 800 McBride Boulevard

New Westminster, V3L 2B8

604-520-6621

Kara-Leigh Jameson, Executive Director

3 | New Westminster Venues

Venue Name and Address	Booking Contact	Phone Number	Room(s)	Capacity (Range)	City Facility	Uptown Location
Centennial Community Centre 65 East 6th Avenue	Manager	604-777-5100	4	12 - 90	Yes	No
Centennial Lodge, Queen's Park First Street and 3rd Avenue		604-777-5111	1	135	Yes	No
Century House / Youth Centre 620 Eight Street	Manager	604-519-1066	7	4-160	Yes	Yes
City Hall 511 Royal Avenue	City Staff Member		6	8-100	Yes	No
Dunwood Place 901 Colborne Street	Manager	604-521-8636	2		No	No
Justice Institute 715 McBride Blvd.	Facility Rental	1-866-566-7660	5	8 - 200	No	No
New Westminster Public Library	Donna Harding	604-527-5676	2	12 - 40	Yes	Yes
Queensborough Community Centre	Manager	604-525-7388	7	20 - 350	Yes	No
Roma Hall 940 Ewen Avenue	Catering/Booking	604-521-8320	2	70 - 250	No	No
Sapperton Pensioners Hall 318 Keary Street	Manager	604-522-0280	2	200	No	No
Seniors Services Society 209 - 800 McBride Boulevard	Executive Director	604-520-6621	1	12	No	No
Westminster Club 713 Columbia Street	Catering Manager	604-521-6641	4	8-250	No	No

Possible Questions to Ask:

- Is there a charge for the facility? If yes, how much is the charge?
- Who is responsible for room set-up and dismantling?
- Is the facility fully accessible?
- Is there on-site parking? Is there a charge for this parking?
- How many chairs / tables are available? (State number.) Are the chairs padded?
- What technology is available (projector, screen, microphone, speakers, etc.)?
- What time of day / days of the week is the facility available?
- Other...

4 | Making Engagement Techniques Senior-Friendly

Introduction

City staff are familiar with and comfortable using the following engagement techniques:

- Open Houses
- PowerPoint Presentations
- Focus Groups
- Town Hall Meetings
- Questionnaires or Surveys

Instead of introducing new engagement techniques, which would have required an extensive training component, this toolkit provides ways to make the above techniques more senior-friendly.

Based on the working group evaluations of community engagement events and the research, a senior-friendly checklist was developed for each engagement technique. By using the checklist, staff would be ensured that the needs of seniors are accommodated and that participants would have opportunities to participate and inform planning, policy development and decision-making.

Regarding the above techniques, they are often used in combination. For example, an open house followed by a presentation and a meeting. As such, staff may have to consult more than one checklist in implementing an engagement event.

Open Houses

Open houses provide opportunities for the public to access information, usually in the form of boards, displays, models and/or video, and ask questions of staff. They are self-directed and self-paced and are often used prior to a presentation or meeting.

Open houses are primarily used to share and clarify information; however, they can also be used to obtain input by way of a feedback or survey form. They are also useful in gauging community opinion and sentiment.

Open houses can be used for larger audiences and are appropriate for the engagement of seniors as long as they are planned with this sub-population in mind.

Senior-Friendly Factors

Please refer to the comprehensive event checklist for information about location and venue, scheduling, marketing, and promotion. When staging an open house, the following senior-friendly factors should be taken into consideration:

- Book a venue with adequate space for expected number of participants to circulate.
- Greet participants upon arrival and consider providing a brief orientation.
- Have a sign-in sheet and request optional phone number and mailing address.⁷
- Have staff and resource people wear nametags that are clearly visible.
- Provide a clear starting point and number presentation boards if sequential.
- Provide adequate spacing between boards (at least one board length).
- Provide seating for participants to rest (every fourth or fifth board).
- Ensure boards adhere to plain language principles.
- Ensure boards are large enough to be viewed at a safe distance.
- Ensure boards are placed at a height that is suitable for a person in a wheelchair.
- Ensure boards are secure and do not pose a fall risk.
- Limit the number of boards to no more than 15.⁸
- Provide assistance to participants with visual and/or hearing impairments.

⁷ It should be recognized that many seniors do not have access to the Internet. A phone number and mailing address will enable follow-up with senior participants, including forwarding information.

⁸ If more than 15 boards, then consider making a presentation. In this way, participants can be seated, which will avoid seniors having to stand for overly long periods of time.

-
- Provide refreshments in a central and visible location.
 - Provide tables if asking participants to complete a feedback or survey form.
 - Provide handouts of information on boards and related materials.
 - Ensure all handouts adhere to plain language principles.
 - Thank participants for attending the session.

PowerPoint Presentations

PowerPoint presentations are a frequently used component at engagement events and sessions. They are used to share and clarify information and are often used in conjunction with question and answer sessions and small group discussions.

Presentations are most successful when they provide participants with essential background information to more fully participate and to provide informed input. They can also be used to present options and to explore possible implications.

Presentations can be used for larger audiences and are appropriate for engagement of seniors as long as they are planned with this sub-population in mind.

Senior-Friendly Factors

Please refer to the comprehensive event checklist for information about location and venue, scheduling, marketing, and promotion. When making a presentation, the following senior-friendly factors should be taken into consideration:

- Create a profile of your target audience – i.e., culture, health status, literacy level, etc.
- Consider testing the presentation with members of your target audience.
- Ensure the issue or topic is relevant to your target audience – i.e., define key messages.
- Ensure presentation is no longer than 20 minutes.
- Ensure discussion time is equal to or greater than presentation time.
- Limit the number of points on each slide to two or three.
- Use a plain solid typeface, which is easy to read – e.g., Sans Serif fonts.
- Use a large font size for text – i.e., minimum 18 point.
- Use bullets for point form lists.
- Use high contrast for colours.
- Use left justified and right ragged margins (and be generous with margin space).
- Avoid unfamiliar language – e.g., acronyms, jargon, technical terms, etc.
- Incorporate culturally relevant graphics and photos.
- Place graphics and photos as close as possible to related text.
- Use photos of real people and scenarios.
- Allow for information processing time between slides.

-
- Limit the number of slides to no more than 15.
 - Provide handouts of slides and cited materials.
 - Ensure all handouts adhere to plain language principles.
 - Ensure all handouts use 13 or 14 point font.
 - Thank participants for attending the session.

Other Considerations

- Book a venue with adequate space for expected number of participants to circulate.
- Book a microphone if more than 15 participants.
- Consider providing clipboards or tables if participants are required to write.
- Ensure screen is adequately sized and presentation is clearly visible from back of the room.
- Secure and tape all electrical cords to avoid trip hazards.
- Test equipment to ensure it is functioning prior to the event.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a qualitative research technique that uses facilitated discussions among small groups to explore and identify beliefs, perceptions and views related to a particular topic. They are often used to prepare for a more extensive consultation, to gain input from a sub-population of the community (e.g., recent immigrants, seniors), or to probe deeper into a specific issue.

Focus groups are most successful when participants receive information in advance (unless you want to get initial reactions to an issue) and when the people involved share a common interest.

Focus groups are best suited for smaller groups and are appropriate for engagement of seniors as long as they are planned with this sub-population in mind.

Senior-Friendly Factors

Please refer to the comprehensive event checklist for information about location and venue, scheduling, marketing, and promotion. When holding a focus group, the following senior-friendly factors should be taken into consideration:

- Limit focus group size to between six and ten participants.
- Ensure session is no longer than 60 minutes.
- Arrange tables and chairs in a roughly circular form (no larger than it needs to be).
- Introduce yourself and welcome participants.
- Provide a brief overview of the topic without biasing the discussion.
- Consider an icebreaker if participants do not know each other.
- Consider name-plates or tags to assist with name recognition.
- Consider using an ambient microphone placed in the centre of the table.
- Consider using a flip chart as a visual record of the discussion.
- Develop a set of six to eight open-ended questions to facilitate a 'naturalistic' discussion.
- Develop probing questions in case certain topics do not come up naturally.
- Move from general to more specific questions.
- Ensure balanced engagement by participants.
- Support quiet participants but do not directly solicit input.
- Provide time for participants to organize their thoughts before responding to a question.
- Pace the session and include regular check-ins about participants' comfort with pace.

-
- Listen attentively and reframe feedback if inaudible.
 - Acknowledge and mediate anger, conflict and/or fear.
 - Summarize key themes at the end of the session.
 - Thank participants for attending the session.

Other Considerations

- Provide healthy refreshments, including decaffeinated coffee and tea.
- Place refreshments to the side.
- Secure and tape all electrical cords to avoid trip hazards.
- Start and end session on time.

Town Hall Meetings

Town hall meetings are used to share and clarify information and to answer questions. Most often, they start with an open house or presentation to provide essential background information to facilitate informed input. They can also incorporate focus or small group discussions, as well as surveying, to gain specific feedback on an issue or topic.

Town hall meetings are used for larger audiences and can be appropriate for the engagement of seniors as long as they are planned with this sub-population in mind.

Senior-Friendly Factors

Please refer to the comprehensive event checklist for information about location and venue, scheduling, marketing, and promotion. When staging a town hall meeting, the following senior-friendly factors should be taken into consideration for this sub-population:

Communications

- Inform participants of disabled parking spaces in close proximity to venue.
- Inform participants of transit routes that serve the venue.

Venue

- Book a venue with adequate space for expected number of participants to circulate.
- Book a venue with break-out rooms if including focus or small group discussions.
- Check out the venue prior to making booking (e.g., acoustics, lighting, temperature, etc.).

Logistics

- Provide adequate spacing between rows of seats – i.e., 33.5 inches (850 millimeters).
- Provide comfortable seating for participants (preferably padded).
- Post directional signage to entrance, break-out rooms and restrooms.
- Set-up room to maximize eye contact and hearing (e.g., classroom, horseshoe, etc.).
- Provide refreshments in a central and visible location.
- Provide tables if asking participants to complete a feedback or survey form.⁹
- Use a microphone for all presenters and a cordless microphone for participants.
- Secure and tape all electrical cords to avoid trip hazards.

⁹ If feedback or survey form is being completed at the conclusion of the meeting then tables and chairs can be set-up to one side of the room for those who require a solid, stable writing surface.

-
- Test equipment to ensure it is functional prior to meeting.

Structure

- Greet participants upon arrival and distribute agenda.
- Have a sign-in sheet and request optional phone number and mailing address.¹⁰
- Have staff and resource people wear name tags that are clearly visible.
- Welcome participants and provide an overview of meeting.
- Consider stating meeting's relevance to seniors.
- Review opportunities for participant engagement, including asking questions.
- Pace the meeting and have regular check-ins as to participant comfort with pace.
- Summarize key themes at the end of the meeting.
- Thank participants for attending the meeting.

Information

- Distribute handouts after meeting unless essential for participant engagement.
- Ensure all handouts adhere to plain language principles.

¹⁰ It should be recognized that many seniors do not have access to the internet. A phone number and mailing address will enable follow-up with senior participants, including forwarding information.

Questionnaires and Surveys

Surveys are a frequently used method for soliciting community reactions to policy proposals, assessing the effectiveness of civic programs and services, and providing opportunities for the community to influence municipal decision-making.

Surveys are often combined with one or more other engagement methods to gain insight into an issue or topic being investigated – e.g., focus groups, key informant interviews, etc.

Surveys can be used for larger groups or populations and are appropriate for engagement of seniors as long as they are planned with this sub-population in mind.

Surveys can be highly technical, especially with regard to selecting and surveying a sample size which is representative of the community. Depending on your experience, you may want to engage an expert in the area of surveying or refer to resources on survey design.

Senior-Friendly Factors

When designing and conducting a survey, the following senior-friendly factors should be taken into consideration:

- Establish the specific goals of the survey – i.e., what is being measured.
- Define target population – e.g., all seniors, immigrant seniors, older seniors, etc.
- Consider capacity of target population – e.g., health status, level of education, etc.
- Determine the method of surveying – e.g., drop-off, mail, telephone, web-based, etc.
- Ensure a non-web-based surveying option is available.
- Consider collaborating with senior-serving organizations to promote and distribute survey.
- Consider having survey available for pick-up at civic facilities and seniors residences.
- Start with a simple introduction and consider providing some general instructions.¹¹
- Ensure question sequencing is conversational – i.e., similar questions grouped together.
- Ensure question layout is consistent – i.e., all closed ended responses to the right of question.
- Ensure questions are brief and ask only one question at a time.
- Ensure questions do not have more than one possible meaning.
- Ensure questions use words and phrases that are simple, direct and familiar.

¹¹ Within the introduction, include the name of the organization conducting the survey, the confidentiality information and the purpose for which the data will be used.

-
- Ensure the first few questions are easy to answer, interesting and relevant.
 - Ensure a balance of open and closed ended questions. The latter are beneficial for seniors with cognitive impairments or recall difficulties.¹²
 - Ensure personal or sensitive questions are introduced towards the end of the survey.
 - Use a plain solid typeface which is easy to read – e.g., Sans Serif fonts.
 - Use a large font size – i.e., minimum 13 point.
 - Use left justified and right ragged margins (and be generous with margin space).
 - Ensure survey adheres to plain language principles.
 - Pre-test survey with members of target population.

Other Considerations

The following questions related to survey design and layout should be considered as part of the pre-test with members of the target population:

- Do respondents understand the survey's goals and instructions?
- Do respondents feel comfortable answering the questions?
- Is the wording of the survey clear and understandable?
- Are the answer choices compatible with the respondents' experience in the matter?
- Do any of items require the respondent to think too long or hard prior to responding?
- Which questions produce confusion, embarrassment or irritation?
- Do any of the questions generate response bias?
- Do the answers collected reflect what you want in regards to the purpose of the survey?
- Is there enough diversity in the answers received?
- Is the survey perceived as being relevant to the target population?
- Is the survey too long?

¹² Question types range from open ended (comments to essays) to closed ended (yes/no, multiple choice, rating scale, etc.).

Engagement Evaluation

Evaluation is different from direction or input about an issue. Evaluation provides senior participants with an opportunity to reflect on the event or session, provide constructive feedback regarding its implementation, and make suggestions to inform future events or sessions. By comparison, issue direction or input usually informs policy, program or service development.

While this toolkit is designed to build confidence in and empower City staff with regard to their abilities and skills to meaningfully engage seniors in New Westminster, it is still important to regularly ask seniors to provide feedback about the success of an event or session, your facilitation skills, and the effectiveness of the consultation or engagement techniques used.

While it is often difficult to receive constructive feedback, it should be remembered that most City staff were not hired based on their facilitation skills or their understanding of the aging process. Instead, they were hired based on their expertise in engineering, park design, planning, etc. As such, evaluation, review and refinement are essential components of the learning process. It is also respectful of seniors who are volunteering their time for the betterment of their community.

The below questions are only suggestions. Their use will depend on the audience (e.g., the general public versus senior-specific), the amount of time available for evaluation, and the experience of the facilitator or presenter. Regarding the latter, while feedback is always important, it is more critical for someone who has little experience with facilitation and only limited knowledge of seniors and the issues that may limit their engagement.

General

1. What is your overall impression of the event or session?

- Very Good Good Average Poor

Comments

2. How did you hear about the event or session?

- CityPage Clarion Committee Newspaper Ad
 Poster Word-of-mouth Other, specify:

3. Were the promotional materials:

- Clear Inclusive Inviting Understandable

Comments

4. Is the venue (i.e., facility and meeting space):

- Accessible Comfortable Convenient Safe

Comments

5. Is the timing of the event or session:

- Too Late Too Early Just Right

6. Is the length of the event or session:

- Too Long Too Short Just Right

7. Is the facilitator or presenter:

- Engaging Knowledgeable Respectful Responsive

Comments

8. Are the consultation or engagement techniques (e.g., focus group, open house, etc.):

- Engaging Fun Inclusive Useful

Comments

9. Is the content (e.g., boards, handouts, presentation, etc.):

- Clear Interesting Relevant Understandable

Comments

10. Are you:

- Male Female

- 44 or Under 45-54 55-64 65-74 75-84 85 or Older

Senior-specific:

If the event or session is senior-specific, consider asking some additional questions:

1. What made the event or session senior-friendly?
2. What, if anything, made the event or session senior-unfriendly?
3. Do you have any suggestions to make the event or session more senior-friendly?

Engagement Opportunities for Seniors

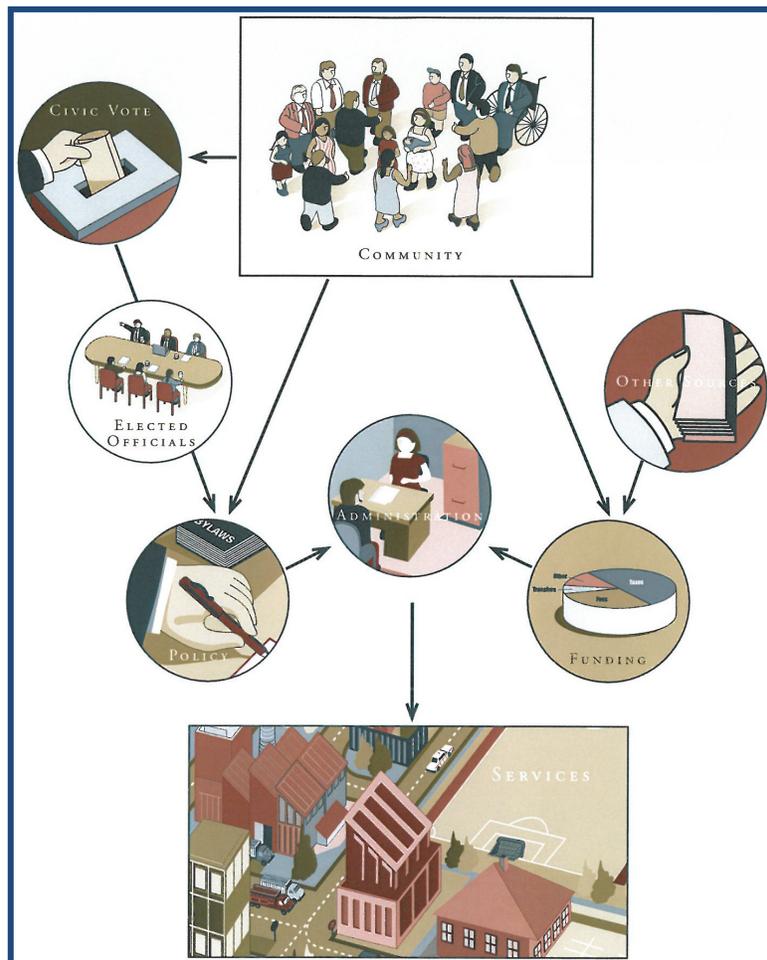
Introduction

In order for seniors to inform municipal planning, policy development and decision-making, they must be aware of the role of municipal government; the programs and services provided by municipal government; and the opportunities for engagement.

What is municipal government?

Municipal government is often considered to be the most accessible and responsive level of government. Council is comprised of citizens elected by the community and staff are often community members.

The **community** provides direction through their **vote**, which elects the **Council**. The Council, with input from the community, set the **policy** which guides the **administration**. The administration, in turn, oversees the operation of **services**, which are the visible part of the work of municipal government. **Funding** for municipal government comes in large part from the community through property taxes and fees for services but funds are also received from the senior levels of government.



Source of Diagram: The Union of BC Municipalities. [Local Government in British Columbia: A Community Effort](#). Updated 2006.

What programs and services are provided by municipal government?

Municipal government provides a range of programs and services, most of which have a direct impact on the lives of seniors. These programs and services include but are not limited to:

- Community Programming and Social Planning
- Economic Development
- Emergency Planning
- Fire and Police Protection
- Garbage Collection and Recycling
- Library Services
- Local Roads
- Parks, Culture and Recreation Services
- Sidewalks
- Street Lighting
- Water, Sanitary and Storm Sewers

Sidewalks can provide an example as to how one of the above service areas impacts seniors. Well-designed and maintained sidewalks, which incorporate accessibility features such as curb ramps, can enable seniors to lead more active and independent lives, while reducing injuries related to falls.

How can seniors get involved in municipal government?

Much of the business of City Council occurs in Council in Committee of the Whole, which is open to the public but is not televised. Many of the items to be discussed will appear on the Consent Agenda, in which Council endorses as a package, unless an item is taken out of Consent at the request of a Councillor.

There are several ways for seniors to get involved in municipal government. They range from voting to volunteering on a committee to seeking office. Some ways require that you first apply or register, while others simply require that you attend.

Voting

Elections for Council are held every third year on the third Saturday in November. To vote, an individual must be at least 18 years of age; be a

Canadian citizen; have resided in British Columbia for six consecutive months prior to seeking registration as an elector; and have resided in the municipality for 30 days prior to registration.

Attending Council Meetings

Council holds two types of public meetings, which typically occur on Mondays. Council in Committee of the Whole occurs in the afternoon (usually at 3:00 p.m.) and a Regular Meeting of

Council occurs in the evening (usually at 7:00 p.m.). The schedule is available on the City's website at:

http://www.newwestcity.ca/city_hall/council_agendas_meetings/agendas_minutes.php

Time is provided, as part of the Regular Meeting of Council, for residents to address Council regarding issues of municipal concern. To address Council, obtain a Delegation Request form, which is available inside the entry doors to the Council Chambers. Complete the required information (i.e., name, city of residence, organization and topic) then submit to the Corporate Officer prior to the start of the meeting. The Mayor or Acting Mayor will request that the delegate come forward from the public gallery to the speaker's podium to make his or her presentation, which cannot exceed five minutes.

When appearing before Council, the usual practice is to refer to the Mayor as "Your Worship" and to Council as "Members of Council." As the Chair of the meeting, all comments and questions must be addressed to the Mayor and not individual Councillors. Persons addressing Council are required to state their name and address for the record.

Participating in Public Consultations and Hearings

Public consultations, which are the subject of this toolkit, are opportunities for municipal government to seek input and discuss and explain issues with the public. They are not formal sessions and can include community forums, focus groups, open houses, opinion polls, surveys, and workshops.

Public hearings are formal sessions that municipal government must hold when making certain decisions, especially regarding

planning and land use. The Local Government Act specifies which decisions require a public hearing, as well as how the hearing is to be advertised and what happens afterward. Residents can speak or submit written comments on how the proposed changes would affect them.

If you are unable to attend a public consultation event (due to its location, timing, etc.), then consider forwarding your written feedback or input to the appropriate staff member. Typically, public consultation ads contain a staff contact and phone number. Also, consider explaining why you cannot attend if you believe that it is an issue that limits others seniors too.

I would like to get involved in the affairs of the City but I don't know how to get started. Who do you contact and where do you look for information? (Age Friendly City Survey Respondent, 2008)

For consultation events and public hearings, consult the New Westminster CityPage in the New Westminster NewsLeader newspaper or go to:

http://www.newwestcity.ca/residents/whats_happening/whats_new.php

Participating on a Council Committee

Volunteer committees help government officials with making decisions and setting policy by discussing issues of relevance to the committee and making resolutions for Council's consideration. Those who wish to volunteer apply to be appointed. Committees can be standing, which means they exist on an ongoing basis, or select, to deal with a specific issue.

The City currently has 27 boards and committees, ranging from Economic Development to Environment to Multiculturalism to Seniors to Youth. Each board and committee has its own terms of reference. For more information, go to:

http://www.newwestcity.ca/city_hall/committees/index.php

Committees are a good way of informing policy in areas related to your interests or needs. They are also a good way of networking with Councilors and City staff and meeting like-minded individuals. Please note that most committees are chaired by a Councilor.

Advertisements related to committee volunteer recruitment appear under the New Westminster CityPage in the New Westminster NewsLeader newspaper starting in early-October, with the deadline for receipt of all applications and personal resumes by the end of October. If positions are not filled after the deadline or vacancies occur during the year, then additional ads may be posted.

Seeking Office

All Mayor and Councillors are elected for three year terms. Any Canadian citizen who is eligible to vote in the Province of British Columbia is qualified to run for election on Council. Candidates do not need to live or own property in the City, though they must have resided in British Columbia for six consecutive months.

Other Ways

There are other ways that seniors can make their views known. Under the Contacts section of the City's homepage, there is general and specific contact information. Regarding the latter, this includes the Mayor and Council, the City Administrator and Departmental Directors, and the Departments themselves. If you do not know the appropriate recipient, then use

postmaster@newwestcity.ca and your e-mail will be directed to the appropriate staff contact for review and response. There is also a General Contact Form, in which to make a request, pay a compliment, report a problem or suggest an improvement. To access the online form, go to:

http://www.newwestcity.ca/city_hall/online_forms_and_services/contact_us.php

Seniors can also arrange to meet with Council or staff members. It is usually best to begin with a specific Department or key staff contact but if concerns cannot be resolved, then one can request a meeting with a Councilor to discuss unresolved issues. Legislative Services is responsible for arranging appointments and advising on the procedures to be followed. Their number is 604-527-4523.

Letters are still an effective form of communication. They are not only received and reviewed by the recipient (e.g., Mayor and Council) but are often forwarded to Departmental Directors and staff for review and response. As such, they can have multiple audiences.

The City of New Westminster provides a wide variety of information on its website. It includes information on Council, Board and Committee agendas and meeting minutes, bylaws, community plans and maps, programs and services, and staff reports and studies. It also includes information on upcoming events and meetings, as well as opportunities to get involved in the community.

To access the City's website, go to: <http://www.newwestcity.ca>

Key Contact Information

City of New Westminster
511 Royal Avenue
New Westminster, BC V3L 1H9
604-521-3711 – General Telephone 604-521-3895 – General Fax
Postmaster@newwestcity.ca – General E-Mail

City Hall Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday (excluding holidays)

“This is the first time that I actually felt that my views mattered. I got a chance to express my concerns and I felt supported by the group. I also got to talk to a Councillor and an Engineer. Both listened to my suggestions.” (Wheelability Assessment Project Participant, 2009)

Part 3: Seniors Engagement References and Resources

Aging and Health

A Profile of Seniors in British Columbia. Children's, Women's and Seniors' Health, Population Health and Wellness, Ministry of Health Services. 2004.
www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/.../profile_of_seniors.pdf

Age-Friendly Communities Initiative, Public Health Agency of Canada
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sh-sa/ifa-fiv/2008/initiative-eng.php>

Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide. Healthy Aging and Wellness Working Group of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Committee of Officials (Seniors). 2007.
http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/publications/public/healthy_sante/age_friendly_rural/index-eng.php

Seniors Health Profile 2010: A Look at the Health of Older Adults in Fraser Health. Fraser Health, Decision Support Services, November 16, 2010.
http://www.fraserhealth.ca/professionals/resources/seniors_and_aging/publications

Community Engagement

Bridgeland, John M.; Putnam, Robert D.; and Wofford, Harris L. *More to Give: Tapping the Talents of the Baby Boomer, Silent and Greatest Generations.* AARP, 2008.
<http://www.aarp.org/giving-back/volunteering/info-09-2008/moretogive.html>

Community Consultation Resource Guide. Victorian Local Governance Association, Australia.
http://www.vlga.org.au/Resources/Consultation_and_Engagement.aspx

Engaging Queenslanders: Community Engagement Guides. Queensland Government, Australia, 2005.

- Introduction to Community Engagement
 - A Guide to Effective Community Engagement
 - A Guide to Community Engagement Methods and Techniques
 - Community Engagement in the Business of Government
 - A Guide to Engaging People with a Disability
 - Evaluating Community Engagement
 - An Introduction to Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities
- <http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au/engagement/guides/index.html>

Fostering Civic Engagement through Self-Directed Teams: 2006 - 2007 Program Report. NCOA: National Council on Aging, 2007.
<http://www.ncoa.org/news-ncoa-publications>

Helping Communities Solve Critical Social Problems by Engaging Adults 55+: Capacity Building Models and Strategies Series, Issue Brief Number 1, March 2008.

National Council on Aging: RespectAbility
<http://www.ncoa.org/news-ncoa-publications>

The Boomer Solution: Skilled Talent to Meet Non-Profit Needs: RespectAbility Initiative Report.

NCOA: National Council on Aging, April 2010.
<http://www.ncoa.org/news-ncoa-publications>

Williams, Alicia; Fries, John; Koppen, Jean; and Prisuta, Robert. *Connecting and Giving: A Report on How Mid-Life and Older Americans Spend Their Time, Make Connections and Build Communities.* AARP, 2010.

http://www.aarp.org/giving-back/volunteering/info-01-2010/connecting_giving.html

Literacy and Plain Language

Literacy and Seniors. Literacy BC. October, 2005.

www.literacybc.ca/Info/seniors.pdf

Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective, Section 4, Part 9: Things to Know if Your Written Material is for Older Adults.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.
<https://www.cms.gov/WrittenMaterialsToolkit/>

Part 4: Appendix

Appendix A: Seniors Population by Neighbourhood

Neighbourhood	#	65+	%	75+	%	85+	%
New Westminster	57,850	7,425	12.8%	3,760	6.5%	965	1.7%
Uptown	7,650	1,855	24.2%	1,120	14.6%	335	4.4%
Downtown	8,870	1,250	14.1%	565	6.4%	145	1.6%
Brow of the Hill	9,520	790	8.3%	390	4.1%	120	1.3%
Glenbrooke North	4,020	625	15.5%	385	9.6%	85	2.1%
Glenbrooke South	2,715	570	21.0%	255	9.4%	45	1.7%
Sapperton	4,485	450	10.0%	225	5.0%	65	1.4%
Westend	4,400	425	9.7%	200	4.5%	55	1.3%
Victory Heights	3,640	410	11.3%	205	5.6%	40	1.1%
Queensborough	5,485	405	7.4%	135	2.5%	10	0.2%
Queens Park	3,040	310	10.2%	130	4.3%	30	1.0%
Connaught Heights	1,740	165	9.5%	65	3.7%	25	1.4%
Kelvin	1,890	165	8.7%	85	4.5%	15	0.8%
North Arm North	385	35	9.1%	20	5.2%	0	0.0%
North Arm South	350	30	8.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Statistics Canada, 2006 Census

Appendix B: Seniors Lens

The below questions are intended to assist seniors to review projects, programs and services:

Accessible: Is it accessible by people with varying capacities? | Is it adaptable to changing needs and circumstances?

Affordable: Does it provide opportunities for all income groups?

Inclusive: Does it appeal to different cultures and interests? | Does it foster belonging and connectedness?

Independence: Does it facilitate or foster independence?

Intergenerational: Does it provide for intergenerational mixing and interaction?

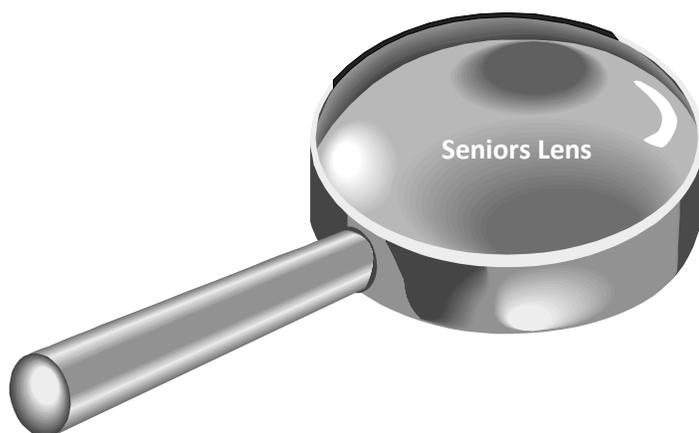
Responsive: Does it respond to the diverse needs of an aging population, including by frail, isolated and older seniors?

Safety: Does it provide a safe and secure environment? | Is it free from potential hazards or risks?

Sense of Ownership: Are there opportunities for community involvement, stewardship and volunteerism?

Socialization: Does it build community? | Does it foster social interaction?

Others...



Appendix C: SET Evaluation Examples

SET Working Group members, using a tool, evaluated engagement events as to whether they were senior-friendly or not. The resultant information was used to inform toolkit development. Below are the evaluation results from two engagement events, the first of which was perceived to be senior-friendly.

Adaptable Housing Policy Workshop (Nov. 17, 3:00-4:30 p.m., Century House)

Strengths

- Good location – accessible, clean, convenient, easy-to-find, familiar, safe
- Good timing – daytime, immediately following meeting involving seniors
- Relevant topic – related to seniors and addressed their specific needs
- Well-prepared presenters – knowledgeable of topic and issues of importance to seniors
- Respectful – provided opportunities for discussion, presenters listened, feedback recorded
- Provision of presentation handouts in which text had large font size – made it easier to follow, not totally reliant on the screen, ability to take away information
- Attention to detail – presenters spoke up so participants could hear, repeated questions

Areas for Improvement

- Provision of background materials in advance would have been helpful
- Low lighting made it difficult to read handouts
- Lack of time to complete feedback form – felt rushed

United Boulevard Extension Project Open House (Nov. 18, 5:30-8:30 p.m., Justice Institute)

Strengths

- Good location – accessible, clean, easy-to-find
- Use of post-it notes to provide feedback to presentation

Areas for Improvement

- Poorly lit parking lot – concerns about personal safety
- Inappropriate venue size – congested, lack of circulation space
- Poor acoustics – difficult to hear responses to questions
- Poor lighting made it difficult to read presentation boards and to provide written feedback
- Too few support staff and they were not clearly identified
- Too much standing and waiting in line – no place to sit
- Unclear as to direction – no orientation, presentation boards were not numbered
- Small size of presentation boards – small font size and too much information
- No background information and few handouts

Mayor Wright: 'It was a donnybrook'
Reaction to TransLink proposals for United Boulevard extension
triggers council action

BY THERESA MCIMANUS, THE RECORD NOVEMBER 24, 2010



Newsworthy: TV camera crews ambushed Mayor Wayne Wright during the opening of Donald's at River Market to get his reaction to concerns about TransLink proposals unveiled at a Nov. 18 open house in the city. Citizens' concerns prompted city council to ask TransLink to remove the contentious options.
Photograph by Lisa King, THE RECORD

Overall

This event was perceived as being senior-unfriendly. In fact, it was felt that seniors were at risk due to crowded conditions and a lack of seating, which could have contributed to a fall.

Appendix D: SET Working Group Evaluation Form

Evaluator Name: _____

Consultation Event Title: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Location: _____

A. Session Promotion (complete this before attending if possible)

1. I saw or heard the session promoted (check all that apply)...

- City Page
- Clarion
- Heard from a Friend (Word of Mouth)
- Announcement; if checked, which meeting? _____
- Newspaper Ad; if checked, which newspaper? _____
- Poster; if checked, where did you see poster? _____
- Other; please specify: _____

2. The promotional information was (check all that apply)...

- Easy to Read
- Easy to Understand
- Inclusive
- Inviting
- Caught My Attention
 - If checked, why did it catch your attention (i.e., colour, title, etc.)? _____
 - Other comments about promotional information: _____

B. Physical Environment (complete during the session if possible)

1. Location is...

- Convenient Easy to Find Accessible Clean Safe

2. Parking is...

- Convenient Easy to Find Accessible Clean Safe

3. Transit access (if used) is...

- Convenient Easy to Find Accessible Clean Safe

4. Meeting space or room is...

- Convenient Easy to Find Accessible Clean Safe
 Comfortable Temperature Comfortable Seating

-
5. Lighting is...
 - Too Bright Too Dark Just Right
 6. Sound is...
 - Too Loud Too Quiet Just Right
 7. Washrooms are...
 - Convenient Easy to Find Accessible Clean Safe

- Comments about the physical environment: _____

C. Attendance (your best estimate)

1. Total # _____ # of Women _____ # of Men _____
2. #55+ _____ # 75+ _____
3. # Using Mobility Aids _____ # Visible Minority _____

D. Session Description (complete after the session if possible)

1. Consultation...
 - Time was... Too Late Too Early Just Right
 - Length was... Too Long Too Short Just Right
 Comments regarding timing: _____

2. Consultation content was...
 - Interesting Useful Inclusive Clear Timely
 - Confusing Boring
 Comments regarding content: _____

3. Consultation techniques were...
 - Engaging Useful Inclusive Clear Fun
 - Confusing Boring
 Comments regarding techniques: _____

4. Presenter(s) or facilitator(s) was (were)...
 - Engaging Knowledgeable
 - Respectful Skilled
 Comments regarding presenter(s) or facilitator(s): _____

E. Evaluation or Feedback Process

1. Please describe the evaluation or feedback process, if applicable: _____

F. Session Handouts or Information Pieces

1. Please evaluate the handouts or information pieces, if available...
- Easy to Read Easy to Understand Inclusive Inviting
 Caught My Attention
- If checked, why did they catch your attention (i.e., colour, title, etc.)? _____

 - Other comments about handouts or information pieces: _____

G. Senior Friendly

1. What made the consultation or engagement senior-friendly? _____

2. What made the consultation or engagement senior-unfriendly? _____

3. What could have made the session better for you? _____

4. What was the highlight of the session for you? _____

