SFU MORRIS J. WOSK CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE

Beyond Inclusion

Equity in Public Engagement

A Guide for Practitioners

About This Document

This report proposes eight principles to guide the meaningful and equitable inclusion of diverse voices when planning and implementing public engagement initiatives that will inform decision-making processes. The ideas presented were developed through a participatory research and consultation process led by Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue from May 2019 - January 2020, including seven focus groups with community members and representatives from government and civil society, a review of over 40 related resources and interviews with 13 public engagement practitioners.

About the SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue fosters shared understanding and positive action through dialogue and engagement. As a trusted convener and hub for community initiatives, we have engaged hundreds of thousands of citizens and stakeholders to create solutions for critical issues such as climate change, democracy and civic engagement, peace and security, inter-cultural dialogue, urban sustainability and health. The Centre actively connects the university and community partners to exchange knowledge and work towards shared objectives, and supports student success through the Semester in Dialogue and other experiential education opportunities.

Acknowledgments

Primary author: Nicole Armos
Graphic design: Sabrina Azaria
Illustrations: Sandeep Johal
Peer reviewers: Darine Benkalha, Rain Daniels, Karin Fuller, Ginger Gosnell-Myers, Lauren Howard, Joy Johnson, Thomas Kearney, Ruth Mojeed, Robin Prest, Jennifer Reddy and Jewelles Smith

Lead project manager: Grace Lee
Project support, facilitation and advising: Elodie Jacquet, Robert Daum, Ginger Gosnell-Myers, Robin Prest, Cicely Blaine, Diane Finegood, Joanna Ashworth, Kareen Wong, Janani Ravikularam, Anurag Balasubramanian and Alice Muthoni Murage

The Centre for Dialogue also thanks those who contributed their time, experience and knowledge as participants in focus groups and roundtables during the research and consultation process. Unless otherwise attributed, quoted statements in this report are drawn from notes taken at these sessions, which were anonymized to encourage free dialogue and critical reflection. Although notetakers strived to stay true to the language used by participants, not all quotes necessarily represent verbatim statements from participants, and the authors have made minor corrections for grammar and syntax.

This project was made possible, in part, by the SFU Centre for Dialogue Endowment.

Copyright

This report is published under the Open Government Licence – Canada 2.0. You are free to copy, modify, publish, translate, adapt, distribute or otherwise use the information in any medium, mode or format for any lawful purpose. Credit should be attributed to Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue. Any works referring to this material should cite:

> Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue. (2020). *Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement.*

ISBN: 978-1-77287-073-2

Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction 3

About this guide 6

Key definitions 7

Dimensions of inclusion and equity 9

A principles-based approach to inclusion and equity 11

Section 2: Principles of Equitable Public Engagement 12

Principle 1: Invite participation within an authentic and accountable engagement process 17

Principle 2: Plan early and proactively 21

Principle 3: Establish respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples 27

Principle 4: Engage the internal diversity of a community 35

Principle 5: Work in reciprocal relationship with communities 41

Principle 6: Tailor engagement plans to the context 45

Principle 7: Commit to ongoing learning and improvement 49

Principle 8: Advance systemic equity 51

Section 3: Scoping Projects for Inclusion and Accessibility 55

Participant identities and lived experiences 56

Addressing barriers to accessibility 57

Section 4: Recommended Resources 74

Appendix: Outline of the Consultation Process 78

Section 1: Introduction

Public engagement is premised on the belief that everyone has the right to be involved in decisions that will affect their life.[1] Accordingly, governments and organizations around the world are increasingly engaging the communities they serve to inform the development of policies, programs and initiatives.

Inclusion is integral to ethical and effective public engagement. Hearing from people with diverse lived experiences leads to more innovative ideas, better decisions, greater public support of outcomes and stronger democracies.[2] Inclusion is listed in guiding principles, values and mission statements across the field of public engagement.[3]

However, public engagement initiatives often struggle to draw participants who truly represent the demographic, attitudinal and experiential diversity of the communities that may be impacted by a decision. For some, the logistics of an engagement (such as location or timing) may conflict with parallel responsibilities, such as work or childcare.

Footnotes

1 As expressed in the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)'s Core Values, "public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process."

2 For instance, see the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s 2009 book, *Focus on Citizens: Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services*.

3 For instance, see the Core Principles for Public Engagement (2009) developed collaboratively by members and leaders of the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD), the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), the Co-Intelligence Institute and other leaders in public engagement.



> "Someone needs to have power to say, 'we're going to include you.'"
>
> **— Rain Daniels, educator and trainer**

Additionally, many groups of people have faced historic and ongoing marginalization due to their race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic background, citizenship status, or other identities and lived experiences. These groups are often under-represented in leadership and engagement processes due to overt exclusion and/or systemic physical, social and financial barriers.

Even when the public is engaged, their voices may not equally influence action, as differences in power and privilege play out not only in the engagement process, but also in the way final decisions are made.

Engagement processes that fail to address these barriers and systemic inequities may cause more harm than good—reinforcing power imbalances, leading to poorer-quality decisions that do not serve the community's needs and decreasing their trust in institutions.

The language of "including diverse people" can mask the systemic inequities that lie beneath patterns of under-representation in public engagement. Focusing on inclusion can also perpetuate the dynamic where those who have historically held more power and privilege remain at the centre of decision-making—engaging the "marginalized" when and if they please.

This guide helps public engagement practitioners explore what it would take to move beyond inclusion and towards a practice of equity—sharing power so that communities and leaders may collaborate throughout the planning, implementation and follow-up of an engagement in order to genuinely co-create solutions.

About This Guide

This guide is designed for individuals sponsoring or planning public engagement initiatives that will inform decision-making in governments, organizations or institutions across sectors.

Section 1: Beyond Inclusion: Equity in Public Engagement introduces the guide and proposes definitions for key concepts such as inclusion, equity and accessibility within the context of public engagement. It further describes the value of a principles-based approach to equitable public engagement.

Section 2: Principles of Equitable Public Engagement outlines eight principles that can support equity over the course of an engagement process, providing examples of tools and strategies that can help enact them and discussing common challenges and constraints practitioners may face. Case studies illustrate how these principles are being enacted in diverse contexts.

Section 3: Scoping Projects for Inclusion and Accessibility outlines some factors practitioners can reflect on when scoping and designing engagement processes, including a list of identities and lived experiences that may impact people's experience within an engagement. It also includes possible strategies to mitigate common barriers to accessibility.

Section 4: Recommended Resources provides a list of further resources for practitioners.

Co-creating This Guide

Ideas in this guide were developed through a participatory research and consultation process including:

- **Seven focus groups and working sessions** with community members and representatives from government and civil society
- **A review of over 40 existing resources** related to inclusion and equity in public engagement
- **Interviews with 13 engagement practitioners** to explore real-world case studies
- **A peer-review process** involving 11 focus group participants, engagement practitioners and government representatives to refine the ideas presented in this guide

For more information about the research and consultation process, see p. 78.



Key Definitions

The meaning of terms can often shift between contexts and communities, and words carry embedded assumptions and histories. Being transparent about how one defines and uses terms helps to build shared understanding and identify differences in perspectives.

This guide uses the phrase "equitable public engagement" to describe participatory decision-making processes that are inclusive, equitable and accessible. Our definitions of these and other key terms, within the framework of public engagement, are as follows:

Public engagement encompasses a variety of activities that meaningfully involve community members, Indigenous rights-holders and/or stakeholders to inform decisions for planning, policies, programs and services that will impact them.

Inclusion in public engagement means to involve people who reflect the demographic, attitudinal and experiential diversity of the communities that may be impacted by a decision. Inclusive public engagement nurtures a sense of welcome, belonging, recognition and safety for all people, where diverse perspectives and ways of life are valued and respected.

Accessibility in public engagement exists when all members of the communities impacted by a decision can access and fully participate in the engagement space and processes.

Equity in public engagement exists when resources and opportunities for participation are distributed in a manner that responds to historic and ongoing disadvantages faced by marginalized groups. Equitable public engagement provides mutually beneficial opportunities for people to contribute and is mindful of power and privilege within engagement processes, institutions and broader systems.

Intersectionality (first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw) is an analytical lens that recognizes how power structures and individual lived experiences are influenced by multiple aspects of an individual's identity and social location, including their gender, race, socioeconomic background, age and disability. These intersecting factors may magnify experiences of discrimination and disadvantage, and create unique circumstances that impact accessibility, safety, inclusion and equity in public engagement processes.

Marginalized is a term used to describe groups of people who face historic and/or ongoing barriers to participating in the civic sphere due to socioeconomic inequities, lack of political rights or recognition, or other forms of oppression, discrimination or persecution. Some marginalized groups that have historically been under-represented in democratic processes and leadership include Indigenous Peoples, people of colour, women, gender non-binary individuals, LGBTQS2+ individuals, people with disabilities, youth, seniors, immigrants and refugees, people with drug or alcohol dependencies and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and levels of education. Other common terms to describe marginalized groups include priority, vulnerable, targeted, hard to reach, disadvantaged, under-served, disenfranchised, disempowered, underprivileged, at-risk or high-risk. Different groups or individuals may have varying associations and preferences between these terms.

Figure 1: The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)
Public Engagement Spectrum

What level of engagement are we promising the public? (IAP2)

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.



"Social inequities impede participation in democracy: it's nice to have freedom of expression, but if you don't have access to clean water or food there can be no adequate participation."

— Anonymous participant

Dimensions of Inclusion and Equity

There are multiple dimensions to inclusive and equitable public engagement. Often, the most immediate indication of inclusion is the accessibility of the engagement space and processes, and whether participants reflect the demographic, attitudinal and experiential diversity of communities that may be impacted by a decision.

However, inclusion also depends on whether decision-makers are truly committed to incorporating public input in the decision-making process as well as whether they have garnered sufficient public trust in the authenticity and meaningfulness of the process to draw participation.

Further, accessibility and inclusion "on the ground" is impacted by systemic issues of equity, including the diversity of leadership, how equitable power dynamics are within institutions as well as the degree of social equity within the community that enables people to participate in civic life. Conditions such as poverty, limited access to education, weak social or physical infrastructure, or the erosion of justice increase barriers to participation.

The principles for equitable public engagement presented in this guide address all of these interlocking factors of inclusion and equity. The principles aim to minimize logistical and systemic barriers to increase diverse participation in decision-making processes, in order to transform systems and advance broader social equity.

When is Participatory Decision-Making Best?

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) outlines how public participation initiatives exist on a spectrum (see p. 8)—ranging from processes that inform the public about the issue, to processes that place the final decision in the public's hands.

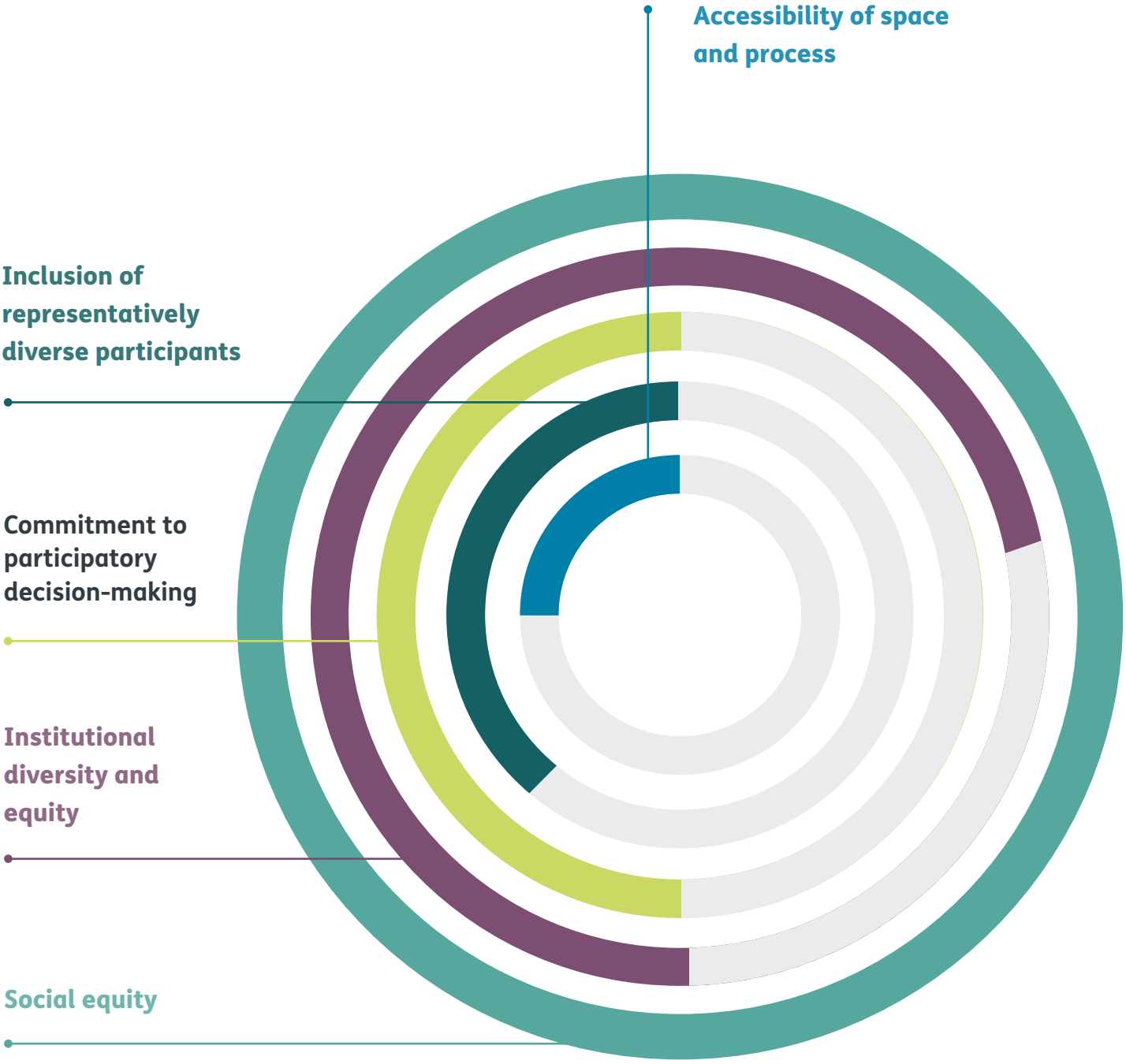
Developing more participatory and collaborative engagement processes is particularly advisable when:

- a decision will have a significant impact on a community
- the impacted communities have faced historic or ongoing marginalization, discrimination or oppression
- there exists a significant imbalance in power and equity leading to communities being excluded from decision-making and leadership

While all forms of participation are valuable in different contexts, the principles for equitable public engagement presented in this guide are designed to inform participatory and collaborative engagement processes that aim to increase the public's impact on the decision.

Figure 2: The dimensions of inclusion and equity

The interlocking factors that support equity and inclusion in public engagement can be visualized as a series of concentric circles.



A Principles-Based Approach to Inclusion and Equity

This guide proposes eight principles for equitable public engagement that are designed to inform choices and guide action when planning and implementing public engagement in order to maximize the meaningful and equitable inclusion of diverse voices in decision-making processes.

Inclusion and equity in public engagement are highly dependent on the context—including the topic and the demographics and histories of the impacted communities. Various tools and strategies for inclusion and equity have been developed,[4] each of which may be more important, useful or effective in different situations. **Following a principles-based approach can help practitioners adapt and respond creatively to emerging needs and diverse contexts, while upholding core values.**

The principles for equitable public engagement are most effective when they are applied together—they are not designed to be a "pick and choose" list.[5] We encourage practitioners to continually reflect on the degree to which their engagement practices are aligned with these principles and the values they represent.

However, we also acknowledge that these eight principles may not be comprehensive. Practitioners and communities may identify additional values, principles and approaches that are crucial to establishing equity in their particular context, and our collective understanding of inclusion, accessibility and equity continues to evolve over time. Thus, instead of presenting these principles as a static and prescriptive set, we offer them as an invitation (or provocation) for ongoing conversation.

Footnotes

4 See p. 74 for a list of suggested resources that can further support practitioners.

5 We assessed our principles using the criteria for principles set out by Michael Quinn Patton in *Principles-Focused Evaluation: The GUIDE* (2018), including whether they provide clear direction, and are useful, actionable, grounded in meaningful values, adaptable for different contexts, evaluable and interconnected.

Section 2: Principles of Equitable Public Engagement

Public engagement is premised on the belief that everyone has the right to be involved in decisions that will affect their life. Hearing from people with diverse lived experiences leads to more innovative ideas, better decisions, greater public support of outcomes and stronger democracies. Further, moving beyond inclusion and towards a practice of equity involves sharing power so that communities and leaders may collaborate throughout the planning, implementation and follow-up of an engagement in order to genuinely co-create solutions.

The following eight principles are designed to inform choices and guide action when planning and implementing public engagement in order to maximize the meaningful and equitable inclusion of diverse voices to inform decisions in governments, organizations or institutions across sectors.

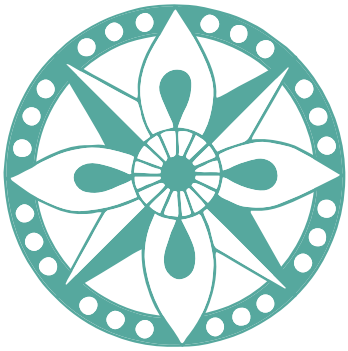
Following a principles-based approach can help practitioners adapt and respond creatively to emerging needs and diverse contexts, while upholding core values. Read on to learn more about these principles alongside specific strategies that can support their implementation.





1 Invite participation within an authentic and accountable engagement process

Authentic public engagement does not have pre-determined conclusions or expected outcomes. Decision-makers are genuinely interested in the public's input and responsive to what they hear. Set realistic expectations by clarifying the scope and the degree of influence participants can have on the final decision. Follow through with commitments and communicate outcomes transparently to foster trust in engagement processes.



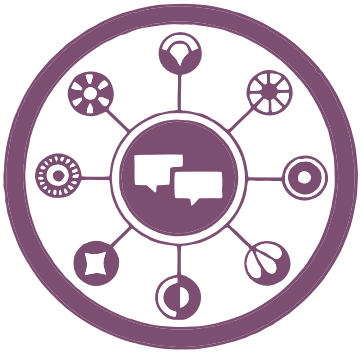
2 Plan early and proactively

Design the entire engagement plan with the aim of maximizing inclusion and equity, including budgets, timelines, scoping and framing, outreach and communication, process design, evaluation and follow-up. Anticipate and address inequities or potential barriers to participation before community members are discouraged from participating or are forced to advocate for themselves.



3 Establish respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples

In recognition of Indigenous Peoples' ancestral ties to the land and their inherent rights, work in a spirit of reconciliation both when specifically engaging Indigenous Peoples, or when engaging other communities on ancestral Indigenous Territories. Acknowledge and equitably address the impacts of past and present-day colonialism, honour and centre Indigenous knowledge and worldviews and foster trusting, reciprocal and collaborative relationships with Indigenous Peoples.



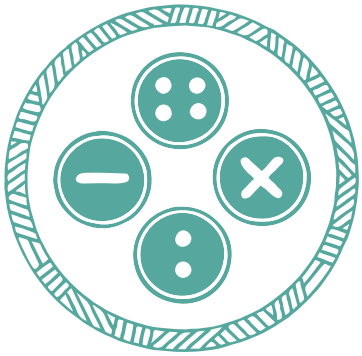
4 Engage the internal diversity of a community

Community members who share one aspect of their identity or experience may hold very different perspectives on an issue and may face different barriers to participation. Apply an intersectional approach to engagement to hear from diverse members of the communities who may be impacted by a decision.



5 Work in reciprocal relationship with communities

Equitable public engagement is founded on trusting, respectful, collaborative and reciprocal relationships with communities. Dedicate time and resources to relationship building and share power to co-create mutually beneficial and accessible engagement processes.



6 Tailor engagement plans to the context

In consultation with partners and participants, tailor engagement plans to suit the particular topic, objectives, location, available resources, key audiences and individual participant needs. Distribute resources equitably in order to meet the needs of those who face the greatest barriers to participation.



7 Commit to ongoing learning and improvement

After establishing a baseline understanding of inclusive, equitable and accessible engagement practices, develop capacity over time by engaging in reflection, evaluation, and ongoing professional development.



8 Advance systemic equity

Power inequities, colonialism and systems of discrimination or oppression (such as racism, sexism, ableism, classism, ageism, heterosexism, etc.) fundamentally limit participation in democracies and impact interactions within engagement processes, institutions and communities. Question long-standing norms, structures and power relationships, and work to advance diversity and equity in systems and leadership.

"The foundation for meaningful engagement is authenticity, accountability and trust."

— Anonymous participant





Principle 1

Invite Participation Within an Authentic and Accountable Engagement Process

Authentic public engagement does not have predetermined conclusions or expected outcomes. Decision-makers are genuinely interested in the public's input, and responsive to what they hear. Set realistic expectations by clarifying the scope and the degree of influence participants can have on the final decision. Follow through with commitments and communicate outcomes transparently to foster trust in engagement processes.

- **Engage early.** Conduct public engagement at a point in the decision-making process when findings can still make an impact—not once a decision has already been made. Similarly, involve the community in designing the engagement early on, instead of when plans are set.
- **Clarify objectives.** Hold honest conversations about the goals of the engagement process and the degree of influence participants can have in the decision-making process.[6] Set realistic expectations in light of constraints such as timelines, resources, and existing policies.
- **Minimize consultation fatigue** by conducting a scan of recent or current engagement initiatives and identifying gaps and overlaps. Treat engagement like a finite resource, honouring the time and energy it requires from community.
- **Report back** about the outcomes within a reasonable timeframe (for example, read about *What We Heard* reports on p. 19).

Footnotes

6 (IAP2)'s Spectrum of Public Participation can help decision-makers and public engagement practitioners clarify the objectives of the initiative and the degree of influence the public can have on the final decision-making process. Building on this, the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue's Strategic Framework for Public Engagement offers further questions to clarify the scope, objectives, reach and impact of proposed public engagement initiatives.

- **Involve communities in implementation** by incorporating time in your engagement for networking, capacity building and action planning for grassroots change. When possible, engage the public in an ongoing advisory body or task force to monitor and advise on future progress.
- **Maintain a non-partisan framing** and involve stakeholders with diverse perspectives to ensure broad buy-in that can survive turnover in leadership.

Reporting What We Heard

What We Heard reports are increasingly becoming a staple in public engagement initiatives to support transparency and accountability. *What We Heard* reports typically:

- **Outline** the outreach and engagement process
- **Summarize** community recommendations and next steps
- **"Close the loop"** with participants by explaining how their input contributed to decisions

It is important that all communication material in an engagement be easily accessible for participants as well as stakeholders. For example, the *What We Learned* report for Accessible Canada's engagement to develop a new federal accessibility legislation is available online in an accessible format for screen readers as well as on-demand in alternate formats such as large print, braille, and audio (read more about this engagement on p. 25).

When engaging about initiatives that will take a longer time to implement, it is also beneficial to periodically follow up with participants and the broader community about long-term impacts and decisions. For example, the *Your Voice. Your Home.* engagement process conducted by the Centre for Dialogue on behalf of the City of Burnaby released reports after each phase of the two-part engagement process. The Task Force overseeing the initiative subsequently presented a final report with 18 recommendations, which was approved by City Council. The Task Force further suggested that the City follow up with a progress report after 16 months to report on the implementation of the housing initiatives (read more about this engagement on p. 48).

"When engagement isn't done properly and people don't feel meaningfully engaged, it creates cynicism; false engagement is more harmful than not engaging at all."

— Anonymous participant



Rebuilding Trust

Recent years have seen concerning levels of public trust and participation in democratic processes and institutions around the world.[7] One probable cause for the erosion of public trust is patterns of engagement with little or no impact, for instance, if decision-makers conduct engagement for the sake of optics and finalize decisions before the engagement is complete or "shelve" findings without further action.

Even when there is a will to implement findings, action may be obstructed by contradicting policies, limited resources, or turnover in staff and leadership. Sometimes, implementation takes years and progress may not be immediately apparent. A lack of periodic updates or benchmarks for measuring change can create the appearance of poor accountability.

Levels of trust are often lower among communities who have been historically marginalized or who have been over-consulted in a short time frame, leading to a sense of "consultation fatigue."

It is important to be mindful of levels of trust, histories of marginalization and the risk of consultation fatigue within communities when planning an engagement strategy. Although it may take time, building relationships (see p. 41) and conducting high-quality, transparent and accountable engagement are crucial to rebuilding trust.

Footnotes

7 For instance, see the SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue's 2019 Environmental Scan of Public Opinion Research on the State of Canada's Democracy.



Principle 2

Plan Early and Proactively

Design the entire engagement plan with the aim of maximizing inclusion and equity, including budgets, timelines, scoping and framing, outreach and communication, process design, evaluation and follow-up. Anticipate and address inequities or potential barriers to participation before community members are discouraged from participating or are forced to advocate for themselves. Ideally, the planning process itself should be inclusive, co-creating the engagement initiative with representatively diverse community members and partners.

- **Start early.** Develop a public engagement process with enough time to carefully map impacted communities, build relationships and conduct sufficient outreach.
- **Dedicate resources in your budget** for measures that can support accessibility (see p. 58) and establish reciprocity (see p. 43), estimating these costs early on in consultation with community partners.
- **Research** the topic and impacted communities and hold conversations with community partners in order to identify historic or ongoing inequities and potential barriers to participation that you can address proactively.
- **Use formal tools and frameworks** to apply a lens of inclusion and equity throughout your planning process (such as the Gender-Based Analysis Plus framework—see more on p. 38).
- **Work in partnership** with the community throughout the planning process (see p. 41).
- **Maintain transparency** by communicating the strategies, tools and frameworks you implemented (such as by outlining your outreach process and accessibility measures in the final report).



"Diversity should not be an afterthought; it requires careful planning, research, and critical thinking in order to identify and address gaps early on."

— Anonymous participant

Limited Time and Resources

Time and resources are essential to building relationships, conducting sufficient outreach and addressing accessibility needs for equitable public engagement. Rushed or under-resourced engagement processes can cause more harm than good if they raise public expectations yet fail to facilitate access or build trusting relationships with communities.

Nonetheless, limited time and resources are one of the most common barriers to enacting comprehensive and equitable public engagement.[8] Engagement practitioners often have to contend with limited staff and budgets, short funding cycles, fast-paced political timelines or the need to respond urgently to emerging issues.

When working with short timelines or limited budgets:

- **Critically assess the project objectives and timelines.** Given the available time and resources, how broadly can you engage, without compromising quality and equity? Can the engagement be conducted in iterative phases to address urgent questions immediately and pursue further objectives in the future with more planning time? Be transparent with decision-makers and the public about realistic objectives and necessary trade-offs.
- **Prioritize accessibility needs** (see p. 47) to address the top barriers faced by the communities who will be most affected by the engagement.

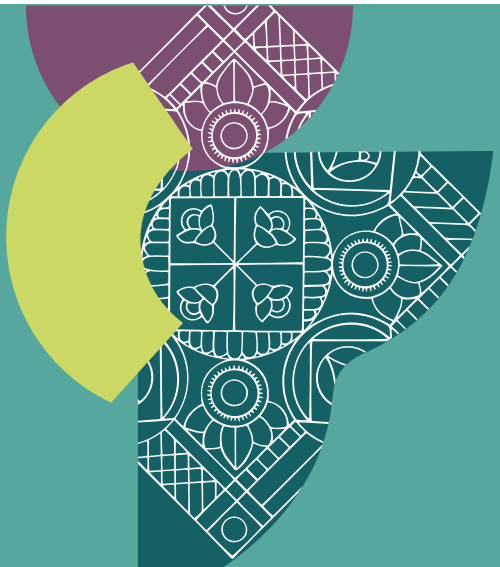
Footnotes

8 Adequate time and resources are listed amongst the OECD's 2001 guiding principles for information, consultation and active participation in policy making. However, when the OECD asked governments from 25 countries and the European Commission which of these principles were the hardest to apply, 45% of respondents cited a lack of resources, and 36% cited time factors (OECD, 2009 *Focus on Citizens: Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services*). A lack of time and resources was similarly one of the most common barriers to enacting inclusion identified by participants in the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue's 2019 focus groups on inclusion in public engagement.

- **Build on existing work.** Research past engagement initiatives and news related to the topic, so that your engagement can explore gaps or next steps in a deeper way, instead of starting from scratch. Share your findings with participants to acknowledge their past participation and explain the value of the new engagement.
- **Sustain relationships** with community partners between projects in order to deepen trust, develop the relationship, and support future collaborations.
- **Advocate for more time and resources.** In some cases, additional time or resources can be made available if practitioners put forth a strong business case. Encourage the engagement sponsor to consider the return on investment: would additional time and resources support the quality and trustworthiness of the outcomes, leading to more effective and durable decisions? Would additional time or resources help deepen community relationships or trust, instead of risking to damage these?

"The first and most obvious challenge to inclusive public engagement is always time."

— Anonymous participant



Case Study

"Normally, when I go to events, I need to worry about whether I can participate, enter the room, have space for my scooter or sit at the table. I have to call in advance and make back-up plans and my own arrangements. With these consultations, I didn't have to question or worry. They were accessible and I felt welcome."

— **Accessible Canada participant, What We Learned report**

Co-creating a Meaningful Engagement for an Accessible Canada



In 2016, Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities Carla Qualtrough hosted Canada's largest and most accessible consultation on disability issues to inform the development of a new federal accessibility legislation. Over the course of nine months, more than 6,000 Canadians and 90 organizations participated in the Accessible Canada engagement at 18 in-person meetings held across the country as well as through online surveys, letters, emails, videos and phone calls.

With one in seven Canadians living with a disability, and the number expected to grow with an aging population, developing a strong accessibility legislation helps ensure that all people have equal opportunities to participate and succeed.

It was imperative to provide the full range of supports individuals might need to contribute, especially when planning public sessions where organizers lacked advance knowledge of who would be in the room. Available supports included sign language and real-time captioning in English, French, and Inuit; online materials in braille, large print, e-text, audio and sign language; intervenor services for participants who are deaf-blind; mental health supports; and attention to providing accessible spaces for participants with mobility restrictions or environmental sensitivities. Although some details were inevitably missed, satisfaction with the process was high, and organizers were keen to learn and improve over the course of the engagement.

Developing such an accessible process depended upon co-creating the engagement with people with lived experiences of having a disability. Honouring a core principle in the disability community of "nothing about us without us" the engagement team worked closely with disability organizations and advisory groups of people living with disabilities whose deep understanding of the broader disability community guided plans and necessary trade-offs.

Process designer and facilitator Jacquie Dale also considered how accessibility supports would impact the engagement process in order to design in-person meetings that were not only accessible, but also conducive to deep conversation. For instance, providing sufficient support staff and communication devices allows for more small-group work, and facilitates more interaction between people living with different disabilities, instead of restricting participants to forming groups around the accessibility support they need. Facilitators would also pause the process if there was a technological difficulty with an accessibility support to ensure that no one missed out.

For more participant statements and information about the Accessible Canada engagement and outcomes, see their What We Learned report.

"Co-creation is really critical, and needs to be brought into the engagement world as a real part of our practice."

— Jacquie Dale, process designer and facilitator



Principle 3

Establish Respectful Relationships with Indigenous Peoples

In recognition of Indigenous Peoples'[9] ancestral ties to these lands and their inherent and distinct Treaty, constitutional and human rights, engagement practitioners hold a responsibility to work in a spirit of reconciliation[10] in all engagement processes—whether they are specifically engaging Indigenous Peoples, or engaging other communities on ancestral Indigenous territories.

This responsibility for reconciliation can be enacted in different ways, including by acknowledging and equitably addressing the impacts of past and present-day colonialism; honouring and centering Indigenous knowledge and worldviews; fostering trusting, reciprocal and collaborative relationships with Indigenous Peoples; and advancing reconciliation and decolonization at an organizational and systemic level.

- **Familiarize yourself with the lands, history, culture, protocols and governance structure** of the Indigenous communities you are engaging and/or on whose ancestral territories the engagement takes place. Keep in mind that urban settings are often home to Indigenous people from multiple Nations.
- **Make time for relationship building.** Building personal relationships should precede engagement planning and sustaining strong relationships should be one of the central goals of practising engagement.
- **Follow the lead of Indigenous communities.** Respect community decisions and cede power and space for Indigenous people to lead the engagement. Recognize that your engagement may not be the first time the community has worked on this matter.

Footnotes

9 Material in this guide has been primarily developed for a Canadian audience. However, elements of this principle may also apply in other settler colonial states, such as those in North and South America, the Caribbean or Oceania.

10 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action (2015, Vol. 6) states that all Canadians have a responsibility to take action on reconciliation.

- **Prioritize reciprocity.** Work with the community to ensure the engagement process supports their economic, social and cultural wellbeing, and that outcomes address their priorities and lead to positive systems change (see p. 43 for more on reciprocity).
- **Centre Indigenous knowledge and worldviews.** In consultation with Indigenous community knowledge keepers, respectfully incorporate Indigenous protocols and cultural elements, such as land acknowledgments, ceremonies, language, or traditional foods. Consider how the engagement can reflect Indigenous ways of knowing or values such as holism, respect, connectivity or spirituality. However, be careful not to apply a "pan-Indigenous approach" or appropriate Indigenous culture by using cultural elements without full understanding, permission or due credit—always ask first.
- **Provide culturally relevant health and wellness supports** for participants, staff and volunteers when engaging with sensitive topics—such as spaces and materials for ceremony, or support from Indigenous Elders or healers. Build in time to meaningfully discuss issues of importance rather than rushing through something that clearly holds meaning. Providing compensation also shows consideration and respect for participants' time and wellbeing.
- **Develop an organizational strategy** to advance action for reconciliation, decolonization and anti-racism within the engagement as well as at a systemic level, such as through policy reviews and ongoing professional development.
- **Build public awareness** and prepare non-Indigenous participants for informed and respectful dialogue by including information about Indigenous rights, the impacts of colonialism and steps toward reconciliation (in relation to your engagement topic) in preliminary material.

Understanding Reconciliation and Decolonization

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada notes that:

> "Reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the of the past, an acknowledgment of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour."[11]

Enacting reconciliation is a complex process that may begin by engaging in learning and discussions about the meaning of reconciliation itself. As Bob Joseph notes, reconciliation is not a "trend," "gesture," or "box to tick"—it requires a deep sense of personal responsibility to take action in our personal and professional lives.[12]

Decolonization can be understood as a process of restoring Indigenous culture, worldviews, traditional ways and interpretations of history and power. As Bob Joseph describes how:

> "decolonization requires non-Indigenous individuals, governments, institutions and organizations to create the space and support for Indigenous Peoples to reclaim all that was taken from them."[13]

The strategies listed here offer a starting point for supporting reconciliation and decolonization within and through public engagement processes.

Footnotes

11 See the TRC's Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Canada (2015, p. 6-7).

12 See a discussion and further resources about reconciliation in Bob Joseph's post "What reconciliation is and what it is not" (2018).

13 See Bob Joseph's "A brief definition of decolonization and indigenization" (2017).

Respecting Indigenous Rights and Title

Indigenous Peoples hold an inherent right to self-determination in regards to their political systems and social, cultural and economic development, as affirmed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Under UNDRIP, the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples is required before the approval of legislation, projects, or administrative measures affecting their rights, lands, territories or other resources.[14]

In Canada, the Supreme Court established that federal and provincial governments have a legal duty to consult, and, where appropriate, accommodate Indigenous Peoples around actions or decisions which may affect their Aboriginal and treaty rights.[15]

Public engagement sponsors and practitioners have a responsibility to determine where their engagement process falls in relation to the legal duty to consult. It is beyond the scope of this report to provide guidance on fulfilling legal obligations for the duty to consult in a nation-to-nation, government-to-government or Crown-Inuit relationship. However, broader engagement processes must still build respectful relationships with the Indigenous communities they seek to engage around decisions that will impact the wider community and/or on whose ancestral territories the engagement takes place.

When engaging Indigenous communities, it may be most appropriate to first build relationships and/or partnerships with community leaders. Some First Nations communities are led by hereditary chiefs, others are led by an elected chief and council system (as introduced in the 1876 Indian Act), and some communities have both forms of leadership. Prior to commencing an engagement, research the community's governance structure and who you should approach first.

Footnotes

14 Canada endorsed the principles of UNDRIP in 2010, and in 2019, British Columbia became the first Canadian province to formally adopt UNDRIP into legislation. For more on free, prior and informed consent, see especially Articles 19 and 32.

15 The duty to consult as it is known today was formally established through a series of Supreme Court rulings in 2004 and 2005. To learn more, see the Government of Canada website and the Library of Parliament's Duty to Consult Background Paper by Brideau (2019).

Note the difference between consulting Indigenous rights and title holders (such as the First Nation on whose land you may be engaging on) and consulting urban Indigenous populations (who may include Indigenous, First Nations, Métis and Inuit people from across Canada who are living outside their traditional lands). While it may be important to engage both communities, these engagements may need to remain distinct, as the urban Indigenous community cannot speak for, or conduct protocols in the place of, legal rights and title holders.

Finally, remember that consulting with leadership is not a "shortcut" for engaging the broader community. It is important to involve diverse voices from within Indigenous communities, such as individuals of different ages, gender identities, disabilities, socioeconomic background, or other relevant identities and lived experiences (see p. 36 for more on applying an intersectional approach to engagement).

To learn more about building respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples in business and personal life, see Indigenous Relations: Insights, Tips and Suggestions to Make Reconciliation a Reality (Bob Joseph with Cynthia F. Joseph, 2019).



"It's about undoing, unearthing, decolonizing. Re-making systems with Indigenous people in the centre."

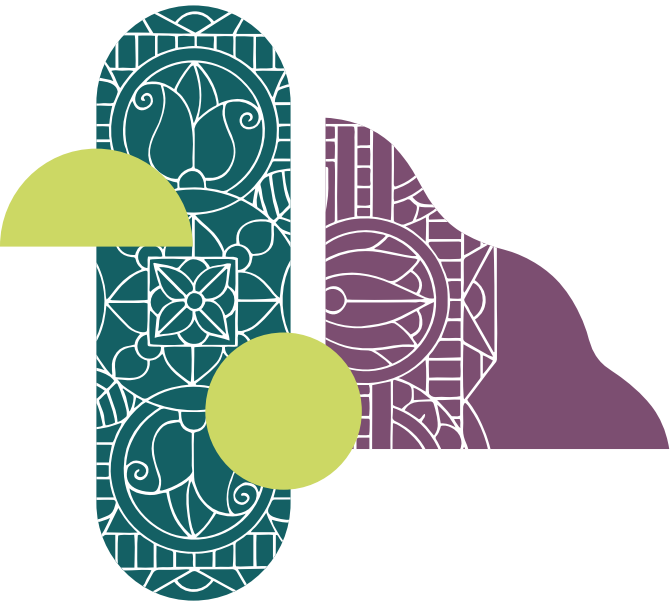
— Rain Daniels, educator and trainer

Case Study

"These four outcomes [community belonging, connection to family, cultural awareness and financial security] are really what we want to see in any engagement with Indigenous communities."

— Jeska Slater, Skookum Lab Indigenous Social Innovation Coordinator

Strengthening Community In and Through Engagement



In BC's largest urban Indigenous community, Surrey's Skookum Lab is developing new ways to address child and youth poverty through social innovation informed by deeply collaborative and reciprocal community engagement.

Developed by the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC), Skookum Lab is committed to developing community-based problem definitions and solutions for poverty. The Lab prioritizes listening to how Indigenous children and youth experience poverty and works collaboratively with community members and organizations to advance systemic change.

Since 2018, the Lab has engaged over 1,000 community members and stakeholders through processes grounded in Indigenous wisdom and culturally appropriate methodologies, including small-group discussions, art and culture-based projects, interviews and larger community campfire gatherings.

The Lab's research and engagement highlighted the way economic, social and cultural wellbeing come together to form what Lab Coordinator Sheldon Tetreault describes as a "holistic picture of wealth." Fittingly, both the prototypes and the Lab's engagement opportunities are designed to increase the wealth of participants by addressing four impact areas (known as the "4Cs"): community belonging, connection to family, cultural awareness/visibility and cash/financial security.

For instance, one engagement approach involved establishing four separate Guide Groups for youth, Elders, community support workers and caregivers.

Guide Groups engage in discussions around Indigenous child and youth poverty while participating in activities that build relationships, support cultural learning and affirm a positive sense of identity, such as shared meals, arts, regalia making, ceremony or activism.

Additionally, the groups helped to increase awareness of available community programs, services and supports such as housing assistance, peer-to-peer networks, income or employment programs and recreation grants.

To learn more about Skookum Lab's model, engagement activities, and prototypes, read their 2018-19 Progress Report.



Principle 4

Engage the Internal Diversity of a Community

While we often speak of communities or identities as isolated and homogenous units (e.g., women, youth, etc.), it is important to recognize that everyone's identity is made up of multiple factors, which intersect with one another to shape our experiences. Community members who share one aspect of their identity or experience (such as a neighbourhood or ethnicity) may hold very different perspectives on an issue and may face different barriers to participation. Apply an intersectional approach to engagement to hear from diverse members of the communities who may be impacted by a decision.

- **Map identities and experiences,** which may impact people's ability to participate in your engagement, and/or their perspectives and experiences with the topic of the engagement (see p. 56 for a starting list of considerations).
- **Set a baseline goal for representation** for the identities and experiences that are most relevant to the engagement topic. Demographic data such as the census can help identify benchmarks for representation—but keep in mind that marginalized groups are often undercounted due to barriers such as literacy, linguistic proficiency, lack of a fixed address or citizenship status.
- **Make a strategic outreach plan.** Consider which outreach approach[16] may best serve your goals, timeline and budget. At times, it may be necessary to "over-recruit" participants with particular identities or experiences to ensure balanced representation given levels of attrition.
- **Monitor gaps.** It can be helpful to ask participants for optional demographic information through registration or exit polls, with an explanation about how this information helps you ensure diverse representation. During the first rounds of engagement, ask your partners and participants "Who is missing? Who is not in the room?"

Footnotes

16 Common approaches to engagement recruitment include opening registration to the public, sending individual invitations to select community members, employing a "snowball" approach whereby invited participants are encouraged to invite additional participants from their networks or conducting random selection with support from a market research firm.

- **Avoid assumptions about who can participate**, which can sometimes lead to the exclusion of groups such as children and youth, the elderly or individuals with cognitive disabilities or mental health challenges. Instead, adapt engagement approaches to increase accessibility.
- **Critically consider group composition.** Hosting separate engagement sessions with specific communities can help participants feel more secure speaking among their peers and mitigate risks when tensions exist between groups. However, bringing communities together through dialogue can also be a powerful way to bridge divides and foster mutual understanding. Discuss the best approach with your community partners, given the topic and context.
- **Disaggregate data.** When reporting findings, highlight differences and areas of convergence between different communities in order to preserve the context, complexity and diversity of their perspectives and experiences.

Representation Without Tokenism

When seeking diverse representation, practitioners run the risk of tokenizing individuals. Tokenism occurs when efforts to enact inclusion are (or seem to be) merely symbolic: inviting only a few participants from under-represented groups to give the appearance of diversity.

Tokenistic engagement does not meaningfully involve people in the decision-making process, nor does it transform inequitable power dynamics. By reducing people to their perceived identities, tokenism can perpetuate stereotypes and erode trust.

In order to avoid tokenistic engagement:

- **Invite participants based on their interest in the topic** and the unique perspective they bring from all of their intersecting (and possibly invisible) identities and experiences. Do not frame the invitation around a specific part of their identity (e.g. do not invite someone "as a woman of colour...") and do not expect an individual to act as a spokesperson from a given community.

"Community is not one thing; it's communities (in the plural)."

— Anonymous participant

- **Avoid rushed invitations.** Gaps in representation are all too often flagged in the last minute, leading to tokenistic invitations based on an individual's perceived identity. Dedicate sufficient time to outreach and proactively reduce barriers to accessibility in order to draw interested participants with diverse experiences.
- **Invite multiple participants from each community** to hear from a diversity of perspectives and experiences. Encourage participants to share from their full range of life experiences.
- **Be transparent.** Explain your strategies for representative recruitment and acknowledge gaps. For instance, if a panel has an unbalanced gender or racial representation, it might be a timely opportunity to openly explore the underlying causes at the event by asking the group, what inherent biases, barriers and inequities exist in this field?
- **Involve marginalized groups meaningfully.** Ensure the engagement is authentic and accountable (see p. 17), and as much as possible involve community members in co-creating the engagement (see p. 42).

Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)

The Government of Canada has adopted **Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)** across all departments as a framework to analyze how people's intersecting identities can impact their experiences with policies, programs and initiatives.

GBA+ encourages us to challenge our assumptions and conduct further research by asking questions such as: [17]

- Whose point of view is reflected in defining the problem?
- Could certain groups be affected differently?
- If you consider an issue "neutral," can you support this with evidence?
- What type of gender and diversity disaggregated data are already available regarding this issue of policy?

Footnotes

17 For more key questions, see the Demystifying GBA+ Job Aid.

Case Study

Engaging Across Intersecting Identities of the LGBTQ2S+ Community

Relationship-building was a crucial first step when the non-profit organization QMUNITY was contracted to lead a historic engagement process with Yukon's LGBTQ2S+ community to advise the Territorial Government on how to reduce discrimination in programs, policies and services.

For many LGBTQ2S+ Yukoners, such an engagement was long overdue, and unfortunately a legacy of marginalization and systemic inequity had eroded trust in government initiatives.

Meetings with community members, advocacy groups, and government in the pre-engagement phase helped QMUNITY build trust and better understand the community's frustrations, expectations and priority topics for discussion in order to inform the design of an accessible, respectful, safe and meaningful engagement.

Intersectionality was a key consideration for the engagement design. As the acronym suggests, the LGBTQ2S+ community encompasses multiple sexual and gender identities—and an intersectional lens also took into account how an LGBTQ2S+ person's experiences are influenced by other aspects of their identity, such as their age, place of residence or family status.

For example, Project Lead Joel Harnest notes that seniors who grew up in an era of greater public discrimination may not be "out" in their communities.

Similarly, LGBTQ2S+ individuals may reveal some or all of their identities to select people based on their level of trust (e.g. coming out to close friends, or disclosing that they are gay, but not that they are trans).

Anonymous mail-in and online surveys offered a safe and discrete alternative for people who were not comfortable attending in-person consultations, while helping to reach individuals in more remote communities.

While about 70% of Yukon's population is concentrated in Whitehorse, it was important to hear from the experiences of LGBTQ2S+ residents across the territory. Organizers secured funding to visit five additional communities, and to provide transportation and accommodations for residents who wanted to participate from communities they were unable to reach. Funding was also provided for childcare for participants with families, and materials were translated to French to better serve Yukon's francophone population.

To read more about QMUNITY's engagement on behalf of the Yukon Government, read their final reports.

"People need to be heard. People need to know that their stories are valuable and informing [the process]. So when I heard those stories of anger, and mistrust, and rage, and frustration, and sadness, that needs to inform how we ultimately design the engagement process."

— Joel Harnest, project lead





Principle 5

Work in a Reciprocal Relationship with Communities

Equitable public engagement is founded on trusting, respectful, collaborative and reciprocal relationships with communities. Prior to launching an engagement initiative, dedicate time and resources to build relationships and partnerships with local community members, leaders and organizations who hold deep first-hand knowledge about their community's history, culture, assets, interests and needs. Share power with communities to co-create a mutually-beneficial and accessible engagement process.

- **Dedicate time to build genuine personal relationships** with community members and leaders. Meet in person and drop your agenda—this is time to listen, learn and connect.
- **Partner with community organizations and local leaders** whose knowledge about the community and established relationships and networks can support your planning, broaden outreach and lend credibility to the initiative.
- **Share power and co-create the engagement.** Instead of imposing a predetermined plan, actively involve community members and partners in framing questions and objectives, mapping stakeholders, planning outreach and designing engagement approaches.
- **Hire local leaders and/or support capacity-building opportunities** so that community members can take the lead in organizing and delivering the engagement. Recognize different ways of leading!



- **Identify meaningful forms of reciprocity.** Ask the community about their priorities to ensure that the engagement's process and outcomes provide mutual benefit such as:
    - Financial compensation
    - Capacity building and skills training
    - Stimulating local economies by hiring local vendors and staff
    - Networking, organizing and community building opportunities
    - Public acknowledgment or reference letters
    - Implementation of community recommendations

  Remember that local community organizations may be working with limited time, resources and staffing capacity. Equitable engagement shares power without adding further burden.
- **Sustain relationships** and nurture ongoing communication and collaboration with community partners between engagement initiatives. Establish multiple points of contact to mitigate the impact of staff turnover on relationships.

Representation Without Gatekeeping

Community organizations and leaders are often valuable partners and collaborators for an engagement initiative. However, it is important to be mindful of the complex relationships and power dynamics within the community.

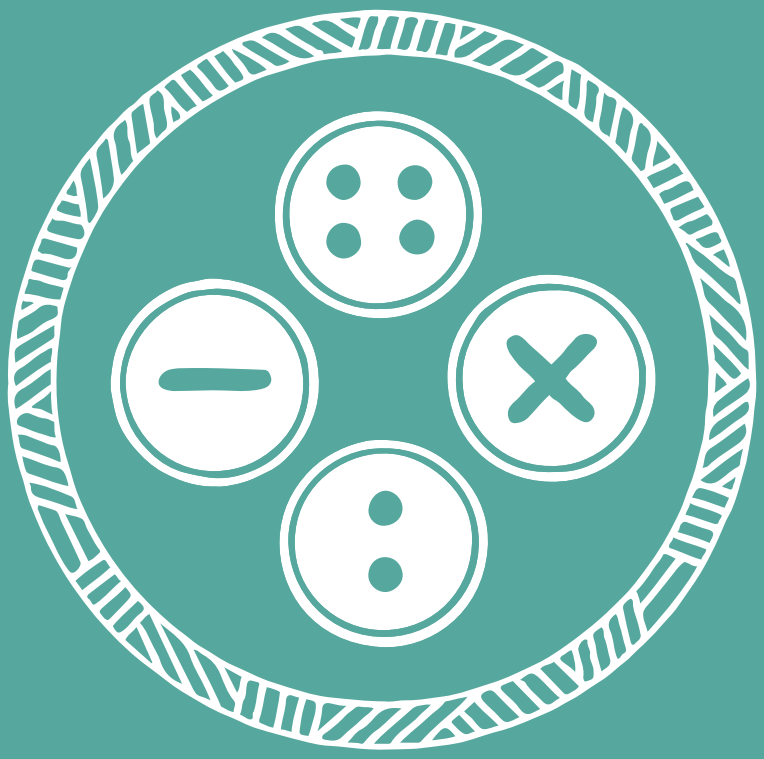
Highly visible, powerful or even widely respected organizations and leaders do not necessarily represent the interests and perspectives of all community members. Developing partnerships may reinforce existing power inequities and tensions in a community, and some partners may become "gatekeepers," limiting access to the engagement to particular groups and influencing future relationships.



Strategies to establish broad representation and avoid gatekeeping include:

- **Research the history and recent news** of communities and potential partners to identify potential tensions.
- **Respect power structures** within a community by first building relationships with established authorities—such as the director of an organization, or the hereditary and/or elected chiefs in an Indigenous community. However, do not assume that this can replace broader engagement. Work with leadership to hear directly from the community.
- **Where possible, partner with multiple community organizations**, including those working in the grassroots, in order to reach broader audiences.
- **Select partners based on the additional perspectives and experiences they bring**, rather than which groups provide answers that are easiest to hear or accept.
- **Map the internal diversity of a community** and ensure that partners and participants are representative of the community throughout the process.

> "Engagement takes time. The relationship building takes time. I've gone into some communities five times, meeting with leadership."
>
> **— Anonymous participant**



Principle 6

Tailor Engagement Plans to the Context

In consultation with partners and participants, tailor engagement plans to suit the unique context of the initiative, including the particular topic, objectives, location, available resources, key audiences and individual participant needs. Remember there is no "one size fits all" solution—equity and accessibility needs vary over time and between different individuals and communities. Distribute resources equitably in order to meet the needs of those who face the greatest barriers to participation.

- **Co-create the engagement with community members and partners** to identify potential barriers and design the most effective approaches to outreach and engagement. When working in multiple communities, effective engagement may look and feel different in each context.
- **Ask people about their individual accessibility needs,** for instance, through the registration process, and address these on an individual or group basis.
- **Communicate information about accessibility** during promotion and registration, including details about the physical space, warnings about potential barriers and information about available accommodations and supports.
- **Remain flexible** to adapt and respond to emerging needs and changes in the community. If the first engagement has poor turnout, adjust your approach and try again with renewed resolve!
- **Use a range of engagement and facilitation techniques** to provide options for how individuals can participate based on their needs and preferences, such as:
    - Both in-person and online engagement
    - Multiple dates and locations
    - Engagements in different languages
    - Multiple ways to express ideas including speaking, writing, or arts-based activities
    - Adaptations for activities to address barriers such as mobility, sight, hearing or literacy

Prioritizing Accessibility Needs

At times, different groups or individuals may have competing accessibility needs that are difficult to reconcile, such as conflicting needs for timing and location, or translation needs for multiple languages. Similarly, activities that are highly engaging for some (such as those involving physical movement) may pose barriers to participation for others.

Practitioners must also take budgets and timelines into account to ensure that accessibility provisions are financially sustainable in the long-term. Distributing resources effectively and equitably requires strategic prioritization based on:

1. **The level of direct impact** the outcomes of the engagement will have on each community.
2. **The degree and nature of the barriers** to participation that these communities face.

Practitioners should work with community partners to discuss necessary trade-offs and develop measures for accessibility using available project resources and community assets.

It is important to note the difference between equity (giving individuals what they need to participate fully) and equality (treating everyone the same). Equality is fair only if everyone faces the same barriers—which is very rarely the case. Some people face greater barriers to participation than others based on their identities and systemic social inequities.

Engagement plans may need to offer different types and/or amounts of accommodations to different individuals or groups to ensure equity. By taking a thoughtful and strategic approach to planning and prioritizing accessibility needs, practitioners can transparently communicate their rationale for such differences.

> "Understand the key audience and build the engagement process around their needs."
>
> **— Anonymous participant**



Case Study

Reaching Residents Where They Are at to Build Housing Solutions for All

> "I believe that if we do not address common barriers to civic engagement, the solutions that we invest in can only be half as effective. The work that we have done by connecting with community members where they are already gathered has shown me that this is a valuable element of any public consultation moving forward."
>
> **– Maxine Yeo, Community Student Ambassador**

Your Voice. Your Home. Meeting the Housing Needs of Burnaby Residents was the largest public engagement exercise every conducted by the City of Burnaby, BC, engaging over 2,600 residents. The Centre both co-designed and facilitated the Mayor's Task Force on Community Housing and led two phases of public engagement activities, moving from idea generation to the creation of actionable recommendations.

Alongside two online surveys and two large community workshops, the Centre recruited a team of 10 Community Student Ambassadors to engage directly with residents who faced greater barriers to participation, such as low-income residents, newcomers, youth and seniors.

While the surveys and the workshops required Burnaby residents to self-identify and reach out, Community Student Ambassadors *reached in* to the community to meet and speak with residents directly.

Leveraging their diverse linguistic and cultural competencies, Ambassadors initiated small, informal housing-related discussions with over 400 residents from their personal networks, through community organizations and in public spaces such as coffee shops and transit stops. Ambassadors also supported residents who were interested in participating further by registering them for formal community workshops.

To learn more about the Your Voice. Your Home. engagement, see the final reports.



Principle 7

Commit to Ongoing Learning and Improvement

Practising equitable public engagement requires ongoing learning at an individual and institutional level. Establish a baseline understanding of inclusive, equitable and accessible engagement practices and develop further capacity over time by embedding processes for feedback, reflection, evaluation and ongoing professional development. Continually examine assumptions and biases, ask difficult questions and listen to the lived experiences of different community members.

- **Establish ongoing opportunities for capacity building** around inclusion and equity. Ideally, baseline mandatory training should be provided to all staff, including both frontline workers and senior leadership. Further training opportunities can be designed in response to emerging issues, questions and the particular communities you work with. See p. 74 for a list of recommended professional development opportunities and resources for further learning.
- **Establish a culture and dedicated times for critical reflection.** Lead with a spirit of curiosity, vulnerability and humility, inviting uncomfortable conversations as opportunities for growth. Encourage your team to examine unchecked assumptions, unconscious biases, unspoken power dynamics and individual or institutional privileges.
- **Incorporate mechanisms for evaluation before, during and after an engagement** to identify emerging issues, receive feedback from the community and learn from successes and failures. Engage partners and participants in designing evaluation.
- **Be transparent about shortcomings.** While respecting privacy and confidentiality, be honest and forthcoming about issues that arise. Acknowledge failures and limitations, and apologize for harm caused. Seek community input in determining ways forward, and propose a plan to address issues in a timely way.
- **Communities of practice.** Explore opportunities to learn from and with partners and other engagement practitioners. Opportunities for knowledge exchange, including the honest sharing of failures, helps build our collective capacity for ethical public engagement, instead of learning through trial and error at the expense of community members.



Principle 8

Advance Systemic Equity

Power inequities, colonialism and systems of discrimination and oppression (such as racism, sexism, ableism, classism, ageism, heterosexism, etc.) fundamentally limit participation in democracies. Examine how power, privilege and systems of oppression impact interactions within engagement processes, institutions and communities. Question long-standing norms, structures and power relationships, and work to advance diversity and equity in systems and leadership.

- **Increase diversity among decision-makers and public engagement staff** by establishing equitable hiring policies and workplace cultures that support the recruitment, retention and advancement of individuals from historically under-represented groups.
- **Acknowledge and address systemic discrimination and power imbalances** within engagement processes and institutions. Open space for frank conversations and/or anonymous feedback to surface issues of systemic discrimination. Acknowledge your own power and privilege and actively work to shift power dynamics.
- **Share power and co-create engagement processes** with community members and partners in order to challenge the traditional hierarchy between decision-makers or practitioners and the public.
- **Review and revise policies and procedures** that reinforce dominant norms at the expense of marginalized groups. Embed inclusive and accessible practices in official policies. For instance, institutions conducting public engagement may need to lift restrictions on providing honoraria, include non-binary gender options in registration procedures, etc.
- **Welcome innovations to engagement approaches and institutional structures.** Traditional engagement processes were designed by and for dominant groups. Advancing systemic change requires breaking the status quo.

Decentering Engagement

The idea of *including people in a decision-making process* can imply a hierarchical power dynamic where the central "decision makers" hold the power to choose when to engage, who to include and how to go about it.

Moving beyond inclusion, equitable public engagement explores how we can distribute power to democratize not only decisions but also engagement processes. We are invited to ask questions such as:

- Is public engagement a one-way process?
- Who sets the agenda?
- What would it look like for community members to engage with one another, and their organizations, institutions and governments?
- Who prioritizes action steps resulting from the engagement?
- How can conveners cede power for meaningful co-creation?

There is great value in governments and organizations initiating public engagement to inform their decisions, increase transparency and maintain relationships and communication with the communities they serve. However, the principles of equitable public engagement call practitioners to acknowledge the inherent power imbalances within institution-led engagement, involve communities in co-creating engagement plans early on, and imagine new possibilities for community-led engagement as an alternative or parallel process to traditional top-down engagement.



Case Study

Community-Led Candidate Engagement

Driven by the conviction that all people are capable of contributing to their community, the Self-Advocates of Semiahmoo (SAS) in Surrey, BC work to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities hold the same rights and responsibilities as all people living in Canada.

When it comes to civic engagement, SAS flips the traditional model of Q&A sessions with political candidates through the All Candidates Mixer model developed by Involvement Coordinator Jillian Glennie. Ahead of federal, provincial and municipal elections, candidates and community members are invited to participate in a three-part engagement event hosted by SAS. First, candidates receive one minute to respond to questions developed by SAS members about topics they have identified as priorities for the community, such as housing, employment or transportation. Candidates are encouraged to focus on their own platforms and the format eliminates cross-talk between candidates to help foster a cordial environment.

Next, SAS members take the panel seats and share short speeches highlighting their experiences and key concerns. The event closes with a reception with light refreshments where SAS, community members and candidates can speak directly to one another.

The gathering's unique structure helps to advance SAS's motto of "making change through positive relationships" by creating a space where people with diverse abilities can meet and build relationships with future elected officials, while receiving experience engaging in a professional manner at a high-profile event. SAS believes that because of such events, they have a higher influence in community engagement relating to government decisions.

To learn more about SAS's activities and the All Candidates Mixers, visit their webpage and news highlights of their 2019 federal, 2018 municipal and 2017 provincial events.

Section 3: Scoping Projects for Inclusion and Accessibility

Public engagement practitioners must be attentive to the way an engagement initiative's topic, format, timing and location, as well as the intersecting social identities and experiences of participants, can all impact accessibility and equity. While it is impossible to create an exhaustive list, the following sections introduce some factors to consider when scoping and designing engagement processes.

Practitioners should always conduct further research, consult with community members and partners, and use additional planning resources (see p. 45) to tailor strategies to the context of their engagement.

Participant Identities and Lived Experiences

People's intersecting social identities and lived experiences can impact their ability to access a public engagement initiative as well as their sense of inclusion, equity and safety within an engagement process. The social identities and lived experiences of the conveners and public engagement practitioners also influence the power dynamics within an engagement process.

There may be inequities between and among participants and/or between the organizers and participants due to social identities and experiences that marginalize or privilege in different contexts.

Some social identities and experiences engagement practitioners should consider include:

- Racial, cultural and ethnic background
- Experience of colonization
- Settler status
- Nationality, citizenship status and immigrant/refugee experiences
- Religious or spiritual beliefs
- Sex and gender identity and expression
- Sexual orientation and expression
- Age
- Physical and developmental disabilities
- Physical and mental health
- Neurodiversity
- Socioeconomic background (including income, housing)



- Place of residence (e.g., urban/ suburban/rural; Indigenous people living on or off reserve)
- Geographic mobility (e.g. individuals living in healthcare institutions or under custody)
- Available means of transportation
- Family composition (including marital status and dependents)
- Education and vocational training
- Occupation and work schedule
- Political beliefs and affiliations
- Language proficiency and literacy
- Digital literacy and access to technology
- Substance dependencies
- Historical or ongoing experiences of trauma, abuse, systemic oppression or marginalization

Addressing Barriers to Accessibility

Various barriers can impede people from learning about, attending or participating safely and meaningfully in an engagement process. Just as an individual's social identities and lived experiences are fluid and not always apparent, barriers to participation are not always explicit or predictable. A proactive plan for inclusion includes sufficient time to understand the context and discuss potential barriers to accessibility directly with prospective participants and community partners in order to tailor outreach and engagement strategies accordingly. Additionally, plans should account for invisible and unexpected barriers, and remain flexible to adapt to emerging needs.

As a starting point, the following pages[18] outline some common barriers to participation, questions to consider when planning, and strategies that can help address these barriers.

Footnotes

18 The text on page 58 to 73 was inspired by, and expands upon, the table of "Barriers to Participation and Potential Solutions" in the *Handbook on Citizen Engagement: Beyond Consultation* (Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2008, p. 15). Additional items were drawn from participant feedback in our consultation process and other resources for accessibility listed on p. 70.

Physical Accessibility

Questions to ask

Are there barriers leading to or within the venue for participants with physical disabilities or restricted mobility (e.g., stairs, tight spaces, inaccessible washrooms, accessibility of roads, transportation, entryways)?

Potential strategies

- Choose venues that are physically accessible
- Increase mobility in entryways and within the venue (e.g. provide ramps, rearrange furniture)
- Plan suitable adaptations to engagement activities for individuals with disabilities or restricted mobility
- Provide advance notice about the venue's physical accessibility
- Plan to have staff or volunteers available to assist participants in entering the space, if necessary. Make this support available for all participants, instead of relying on assumptions.

Geographical Accessibility

Questions to ask

- Do participants have access to safe and reliable transportation to the venue?
- Is the distance to the venue reasonable for participants? How long or complex is the commute?
- Are some groups of people unable to leave their place of residence (e.g., individuals in healthcare institutions or under custody)?

Potential strategies

- Choose venues near main public transit lines
- Offer complimentary transportation
- Host multiple engagements at different locations
- Offer alternative channels for participation (e.g., online engagement, hard-copy surveys distributed by community partners, telephone surveys)



Financial Accessibility

Questions to ask

- What costs or financial losses may participants face if they attend (e.g., transportation, meals, childcare, caregiving, support workers, taking time off from work)?
- If participants receive compensation in the form of monetary payments, will this impact their ability to receive income assistance with earning restrictions (e.g., disability assistance, unemployment insurance)?
- Is the form of financial compensation accessible for participants (e.g., cheques and e-transfers may be inaccessible for individuals who lack a bank account or internet access)

Potential strategies

- Provide complimentary services or reimburse participants for costs of participation (e.g., transportation, meals, childcare, caregiving, support workers)
- Host family-friendly engagement events, or multiple engagements at different dates times
- Provide financial compensation after discussing the most appropriate and meaningful form of payment with participants (e.g., cash, cheques, gift certificates)



Date and Time

Questions to ask

- How might work, health conditions, caregiving or other responsibilities impact when and for how long participants are available?
- Does the engagement coincide with dates of historical, cultural or religious relevance to the community in a way that would impact attendance or make the event insensitive or inappropriate?
- Does the engagement overlap with religious or cultural practices that are observed at specific times, such as periodic fasts, days of rest or prayers? Is there a risk of causing tensions between participants who observe these practices and those who do not?
- Does the event coincide with community assemblies or other important meetings or events?
- What cultural differences exist regarding time? Will a short and fast-paced engagement be perceived as beneficially efficient or insensitive and ineffective?

Potential strategies

- Consult community members and partners about event dates and times
- Respect start and end times
- Host multiple engagements at different dates and times
- Offer alternative and/or asynchronous channels for participation (e.g., online engagement, hard-copy surveys)

Cultural Diversity

Questions to ask

- How might cultural differences in ways of knowing, meaning-making and communicating impact engagement processes?
- Are the engagement spaces, activities and language inclusive of people from diverse races, ethnicities, nationalities and other identity-based cultures?
- What cultural norms and protocols should inform the communication strategy, the event's opening and closing words and activities within the engagement?
- What historical or cultural associations does the venue hold for community members?

Potential strategies

- Work collaboratively with community members and partners to frame and design engagements with attention to cultural worldviews and community narratives
- Respect cultural norms and protocols in the engagement process (e.g., order of speakers)
- Incorporate cultural traditions and forms of expression

Gender Inclusivity

Questions to ask

Are spaces, activities and language respectful and safe for people of diverse gender identities and expressions, especially for people who identify as transgender or non-binary?

Potential strategies

- Invite participants to indicate their preferred pronoun(s) through introductions or on nametags (if working online, ask participants to include pronouns within the usernames with which they participate!)
- Offer gender-inclusive options on registration forms and surveys.
- Choose venues with at least one gender-neutral washroom. Affix signage stating that washrooms are trans-inclusive.
- Be mindful of language and visuals that are gendered or perpetuate the erasure of transgender or non-binary identities.



Language and Communication

Questions to ask

Are your methods for outreach and public engagement accessible for:

- people with lower levels of literacy?
- people who are deaf or hard of hearing?
- people who are blind/low vision?
- people with speech impairments?
- people who are not proficient (reading, writing, listening or speaking) in the dominant language?

Potential strategies

- Combine multiple modes of communication, such as text, audio, video and graphics as well as print and digital communication
- Ask participants about particular needs and preferences regarding communication tools and means of communication (e.g., through registration)
- Use symbols, colours and graphics to enhance visual communication
- Provide real-time translation and interpretation in relevant languages, ASL and/or braille
- Add captions to images and videos; use live-captioning for digital video events
- Use plain language, with limited jargon
- Do not speak quickly and use a microphone in large spaces
- Use large, accessible fonts
- Ensure that digital materials are accessible by screen readers

Technical Accessibility (for Online Engagement)

Questions to ask

- Might some participants lack access to computers and/or fast and stable internet connections (e.g., people in remote regions or from lower socioeconomic backgrounds)
- Do some groups of people lack the digital literacy necessary to navigate the engagement platform?

Potential strategies

- Combine offline and online engagement approaches (e.g., in-person engagements, mail-outs, telephone conference connections, telephone surveys, text messages or radio phone-in shows)
- Give preference to low-bandwidth and mobile-friendly engagement platforms
- Consider loaning or sponsoring technology, mobile data cards or Wi-Fi hubs
- Use platforms that are familiar to key audiences and/or that are easy to navigate (e.g., social media, or platforms that don't require downloads)
- Send a how-to guide beforehand, and schedule time for testing and orientation

Awareness

Questions to ask

- What spaces and modes of communication do community members regularly access?
- What community networks can support outreach?

Potential strategies

- Develop tailored outreach strategies for different communities of interest
- Work with community partners to support outreach
- Combine online and offline approaches for outreach
- Take measures to ensure accessibility in language and communication (see p. 62)

Sense of Belonging, Capacity and Confidence

Questions to ask

- Might some participants feel they have less of a right to participate, given the topic, their identities, previous experiences or marginalization, etc.?
- Might some participants need more time to respond to questions, speak or write? (e.g., due to confidence in public settings, translation needs, literacy levels or use of communication devices)
- Do participants have the necessary skills and experience to fully participate in the engagement activities?
- What degree of trust do communities have with the convening institutions or engagement processes as a whole?
- Given the demographic make-up of participants, which voices may be in the minority and who may be marginalized in discussions?
- Do facilitators have the necessary skills to identify and address unequal power dynamics, oppression or discrimination in the room and create an environment of safety?

Potential strategies

- Reinforce the value of inclusive participation
- Develop dedicated outreach strategies to invite historically marginalized groups
- Send personalized, individual invitations
- Hold space for participants who may take longer to speak or write, and encourage them to take the time they need
- Provide communities with resources they need to fully participate, potentially including funding to build their internal expertise and capacity (e.g., mentoring youth on skills such as public speaking, engaging in dialogue, etc.)
- Host engagements at familiar community venues
- Identify power imbalances and encourage participation from marginalized voices through facilitation and process design
- Consider whether dedicated engagements with particular groups may enhance participants' sense of belonging and confidence
- Provide specialized training for facilitators

Health and Wellness

Questions to ask

- What dietary restrictions, allergies or environmental sensitivities do participants have?
- Is the engagement addressing potentially sensitive topics that could re-traumatize participants or trigger strong emotional reactions?
- What supports may be necessary for individuals with particular health conditions or substance dependencies?
- How frequent and long do breaks need to be? (e.g., consider if some participants need food or medications on a particular schedule, require additional time to receive assistance by support workers or need to walk service dogs, etc.)

Potential strategies

- Inquire about participants' health and wellness needs in advance, such as through registration
- Provide complimentary food and refreshments, with necessary dietary alternatives
- Provide advance notification about airborne allergies and environmental sensitivities
- Establish a scent-free policy, requesting both participants and venues not to use scented products
- Provide culturally appropriate physical and mental health supports (e.g., counselors, Elders or traditional healers, healthcare providers)
- Create a dedicated wellness space for participants to reflect, gather themselves or seek support
- Include regular breaks and consult partners and participants about appropriate break length. Do not eliminate or shorten breaks to address schedule delays, as those who rely on breaks will feel disengaged if their needs are not met

Data Security and Ownership

Questions to ask

- Given the topic of the engagement, what personal or professional repercussions might participants face if their participation or input is disclosed?
- Is there a need to ensure confidentiality or anonymity regarding participants' identities or contributions?
- Who owns or can access the data collected after the engagement? How long will it be stored, where and how?

Potential strategies

- Establish policies and procedures for secure data handling and storage, and communicate these to participants
- Communicate the privacy policies of online engagement platforms in plain language
- Give preference to platforms with secure, domestic servers, end-to-end encryption and password-protected access for online outreach, engagement, communication and data storage
- Inform participants about data collection plans, and obtain signed informed consent for photographs and audio/video recording
- Do not attribute participant names to ideas in notes; anonymize data sets
- Familiarize yourself with principles regarding First Nations data collection, protection, use and sharing and discuss its application with partners[19]

Footnotes

19 For more information, see the First Nations Information Governance Centre's OCAP® principles at https://fnigc.ca/ocap

Safety and Security

Questions to ask

- Are there histories of conflict or discrimination that could increase some participants' risk of experiencing physical or verbal harassment, or social exclusion before, during or after participating in the engagement?
- Do some participating communities commonly face marginalization in public venues or online spaces?
- What micro-aggressions may facilitators (or automated online moderators) not easily perceive or detect?
- Is there a risk for lateral violence between different communities you are engaging?
- Are there potential security risks for the event? (e.g., disruptions or online hacking of engagements addressing highly polarized topics)
- Do some participants fear threats to their personal safety due to the time or location of the event?
- Do some participants fear their income, other resources or social relationships might be affected if they participate?



Potential strategies

- Clearly communicate guidelines for respectful participation
- Consider the need to host separate engagements for groups who may experience harassment, exclusion, marginalization or other forms of systemic harm
- Provide staff training (e.g., regarding historical context, anti-racism, conflict de-escalation, etc.)
- Develop a moderation strategy for online discussions
- For higher-risk contexts, design engagements that are by invitation only, with a low public profile (and password-protected if online)
- Choose venues at well-lit and safe locations
- Provide complimentary transportation or “safe-walk” accompaniment to transport
- Offer alternative and anonymous channels for participation (e.g., online engagement, hard-copy surveys available in discreet locations)

Other Barriers

Questions to ask

What other considerations may impact people's ability to access the engagement and participate meaningfully?

Brainstorm concerns and solutions with community partners and advisors!

Section 4: Recommended Resources

Training Opportunities

BC Provincial Health Services Authority

San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training

http://www.sanyas.ca/

Government of Canada

Gender-Based Analysis Plus

https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/gba-acs/index-en.html

Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc.

https://www.ictinc.ca/

Rain Daniels, Educator and Trainer

Principled Engagement with Indigenous People

Contact raindaniels2@gmail.com

Sample of LGBTQ2S+ Training Providers in Canada

QMUNITY (BC)

https://qmunity.ca/learn/training/

The Canadian Centre for Gender & Sexual Diversity (Ontario)

https://ccgsd-ccdgs.org/workshops/

Sexuality Education Resource Centre (Manitoba)

https://serc.mb.ca/what-we-offer/service-providers/

Recommended Resources

University of British Columbia

Research 101: A Manifesto for Ethical Research in the Downtown Eastside

https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/

Community Futures British Columbia

Aboriginal Engagement Toolkit

https://www.communityfutures.ca/sites/default/files/documents/CFDA%20Aboriginal%20EngagementToolkit%20revised%20January%2008.pdf

Community Toolbox

Chapter 27: Cultural Competence in a Multicultural World

https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence

City for All Women Initiative

Advancing Equity and Inclusion: A Guide for Municipalities

www.equityandinclusion.ca

Context Research

Creating a Model for Inclusive Public Participation with Members of Vancouver's Chinatown

https://www.contextresearch.ca/database/files/library/Model_for_Inclusive_Public_Participation_with_Vancouvers_Chinatown.pdf

First Nations Health Authority

#itstartswithme Cultural Safety and Humility: Key Drivers and Ideas for Change

www.fnha.ca/culturalhumility

Government of Canada

Gender-Based Analysis Plus

https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/gba-acs/index-en.html

Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness

Engagement Key Principles

https://victoriahomelessness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/170630_posters-3.pdf

Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness

Engagement Toolkit: People with Lived Experience in BC's Capital Region

https://victoriahomelessness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/170630_crd_toolkit.pdf

BC Centre for Disease Control: Harm Reduction Program

Peer Engagement Principles and Best Practices: A Guide for BC Health Authorities and Other Providers (Version 2)

http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/PEEP%20Best%20Practice%20Guidelines.pdf

Joseph, B. & Joseph, C. F.

Indigenous Relations: Insights, Tips & Suggestions to Make Reconciliation a Reality

https://www.ictinc.ca/books

Institute for Local Government

A Local Official's Guide to Immigrant Civic Engagement.

http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/2008_-_guide_to_immigrant_civic_engagement_0.pdf

Lassonde School of Engineering York University

Inclusion Lens: Event Management Tool

http://inclusionlens.yorku.ca

Lived Experience Advisory Council

Nothing About Us Without Us: Checklist for Planning Inclusive and Accessible Events

https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/LEAC-7principles-checklist-final.pdf

Lived Experience Advisory Council

Nothing About Us Without Us: Seven Principles for Leadership and Inclusion of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness

https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/LEAC-7principles-final.pdf

McIntosh, P.

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack

http://www.interpretereducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/white-privilege-by-Peggy-McIntosh.compressed.pdf

Ministry of Children and Family Development

Youth Engagement Toolkit: Evaluation Tool

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/data-monitoring-quality-assurance/information-for-service-providers/youth_engagement_toolkit_evaluation_tool.pdf

Ministry of Children and Family Development

Youth Engagement Toolkit: Resource Guide

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/data-monitoring-quality-assurance/information-for-service-providers/youth_engagement_toolkit_resource_guide.pdf

Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy Network

Indigenous Ally Toolkit

http://reseaumtlnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Ally_March.pdf

Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Inclusion in Open Government: A Literature Review

http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/centre-for-dialogue/Watch-and-Discover/Reports and Findings/Inclusion-in-Open-Government_LiteratureReview.pdf

Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Inclusion in Open Government: Key Learnings and Strategies

http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/centre-for-dialogue/Watch-and-Discover/Reports and Findings/Inclusion-in-Open-Government_KeyLearningsStrategies.pdf

Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Inclusion in Open Government: A Perspective from a Sample of Women's, LGBTQ2S and Newcomer Organizations

http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/centre-for-dialogue/Watch-and-Discover/Reports and Findings/Inclusion-in-Open-Government_InterviewsSummaryReport.pdf

Public Agenda

Beyond Business as Usual: Leaders of California's civic Organizations Seek New Ways to Engage the Public in Local Governance

http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/beyondbusinessasusual_publicagenda_2013.pdf

Racial Equity Tools

https://www.racialequitytools.org/fundamentals/resource-lists/tip-sheets

Seattle Office for Civil Rights

Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide

https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/ParksAndRecreation/Business/RFPs/Attachment5_InclusiveOutreachandPublicEngagement.pdf

Canadian Policy Research Network

Handbook on Citizen Engagement: Beyond Consultation

https://ccednet-rcdec.ca/sites/ccednet-rcdec.ca/files/handbook_on_citizen_engagement.pdf

Rooted in Rights

How to Make Your Social Justice Events Accessible to the Disability Community

https://media.rootedinrights.org/wp_content/uploads/2017/02/15232943/SocialJusticeEventAccessibilityChecklist_RootedInRights-1.pdf

Toronto Transit Commission

Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit

https://www.ttc.ca/Coupler/PDFs/Diversity%20and%20Inclusion%20Toolkit.pdf

Homeless Hub

A Way Home: Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit

https://www.homelesshub.ca/toolkit/way-home-youth-homelessness-community-planning-toolkit

Appendix: Outline of the Consultation Process

Outline of the Consultation Process

This Guide was developed through a broad research and consultation process conducted by the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue between 2019 and 2020, including:

- **A literature review** of over 40 resources on inclusion, accessibility and equity in public engagement;
- **Four focus groups on Inclusion in Public Engagement** with community members, academic researchers and representatives from community organizations, government and public institutions in Metro Vancouver;
- **A regional workshop** bringing together participants from our four focus groups, to field-test emerging principles;
- **A roundtable on Inclusion in Open Government** held in Ottawa, in parallel with the 2019 Open Government Partnership Summit;
- **A Working Session on Indigenous Perspectives on Inclusion in Public Engagement** with Indigenous leaders in Vancouver; and
- **A peer-review process** with nine reviewers, including one participant from each of our focus groups and provincial and federal government staff.

Notes from focus groups, workshops and roundtables were qualitatively coded alongside the literature review resources to identify values, principles and practices that support inclusion and equity as well as common challenges or constraints practitioners face for implementation. Our set of eight principles for equitable public engagement, and their corresponding strategies, were developed out of these emerging themes and further refined through the peer-review process.

Guiding Questions

Focus groups invited participants to reflect on their personal experiences participating in or convening public engagement in order to surface systemic challenges to inclusion and equity in public engagement as well as core principles, practices and resources that can help address these barriers. Discussion questions included:

- Tell us about a positive experience of inclusion in a public engagement process that informed decision-making. What principles or actions made inclusion possible?
- Tell us about a time when you faced a barrier to participation or struggled to create an inclusive and accessible space for others. What were the key challenges or structural constraints?
- What resources could help address these challenges? (e.g., tools, networks, information)
- What would you want to change about your public engagement practice to make it more inclusive?
- What can be done to shift organizational behaviour to support inclusive civic engagement?
- What values and considerations are important for meaningful and respectful engagement with Indigenous communities?
- How can we decolonize engagement?

At the regional workshop, we presented a draft set of principles and invited participants to test and expand on these ideas through a series of fictionalized scenarios that reflected common challenges to inclusion and equity emerging from the focus groups. Participants identified responses and approaches to address each scenario and defined indicators of success, while considering the practical constraints of decision-makers.

Designing an Inclusive Consultation

It was of great importance to maximize accessibility and equity throughout our consultation process to ensure that the findings reflected diverse lived experiences and perspectives from historically marginalized communities. Key elements for success included:

Co-creation

Our consultation process was co-created with consultants and participants. First, we collaborated on the process design with diverse facilitators who had experience working with the specific audiences we convened in each focus group: community members and organizations, academic researchers, and government or public institutions. Focus group participants also informed the design of our subsequent regional gathering through anonymous feedback surveys and a focused discussion asking:

- What are the most powerful questions you would want to explore?
- What can we do to ensure maximum accessibility in this dialogue?
- Who must be in the room for this to be a truly inclusive and successful meeting?



Individualized accessibility

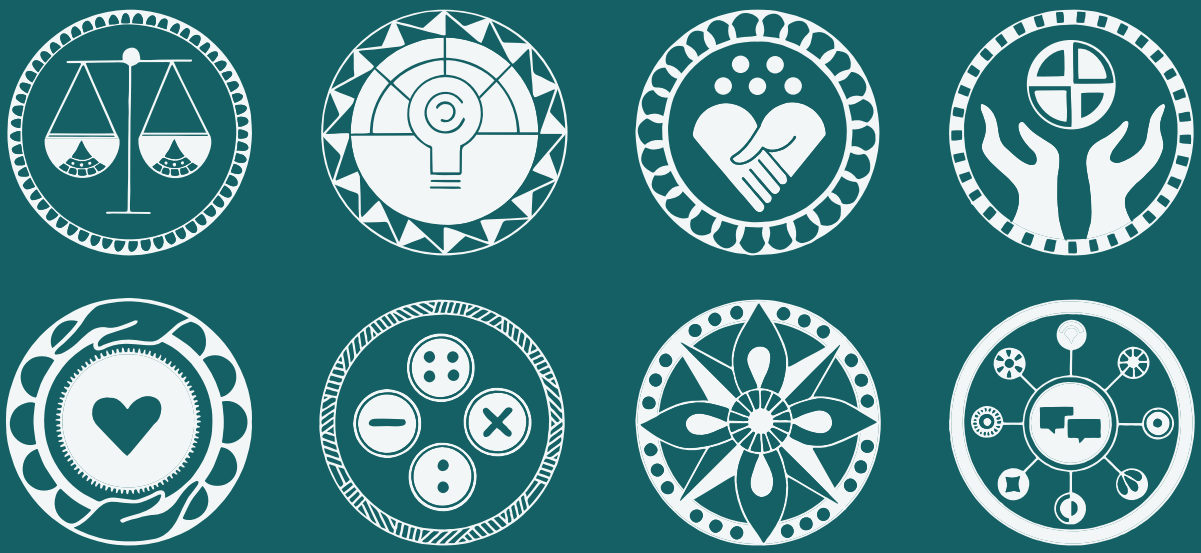
Prior to each event, we connected personally with each participant to inform them about the scope of the discussion, and inquire about individual accessibility concerns. We offered honoraria for participants whose time would not be compensated for by another organization. Participants were invited to recommend additional attendees to increase the diversity of participants.

Indigenous voices

Given the context of colonization in Canada, it was important to include Indigenous voices throughout our consultation process, while also holding space for the distinct experiences, perspectives and concerns Indigenous communities hold in regards to equity and inclusion in public engagement. Each event was opened by an Indigenous Elder from the territories on which the event was held, and we prioritized the involvement of Indigenous community members, academics and representatives from government and public institutions. Additionally, we held a dedicated Working Session on Indigenous perspectives in January 2020, inviting Indigenous leaders to provide feedback on our proposed set of principles and hold a focused discussion on equity and decolonization in public engagement.

Iterative feedback

Our iterative consultation process allowed participants to be deeply involved in the development of our proposed set of principles. At each focus group we presented our draft work to date, seeking feedback on the emerging themes and identifying gaps. One participant from each focus group was additionally invited to participate as a peer-reviewer of our final draft.



SFU MORRIS J. WOSK CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
MORRIS J. WOSK CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE
sfu.ca/dialogue | @dialogue