

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

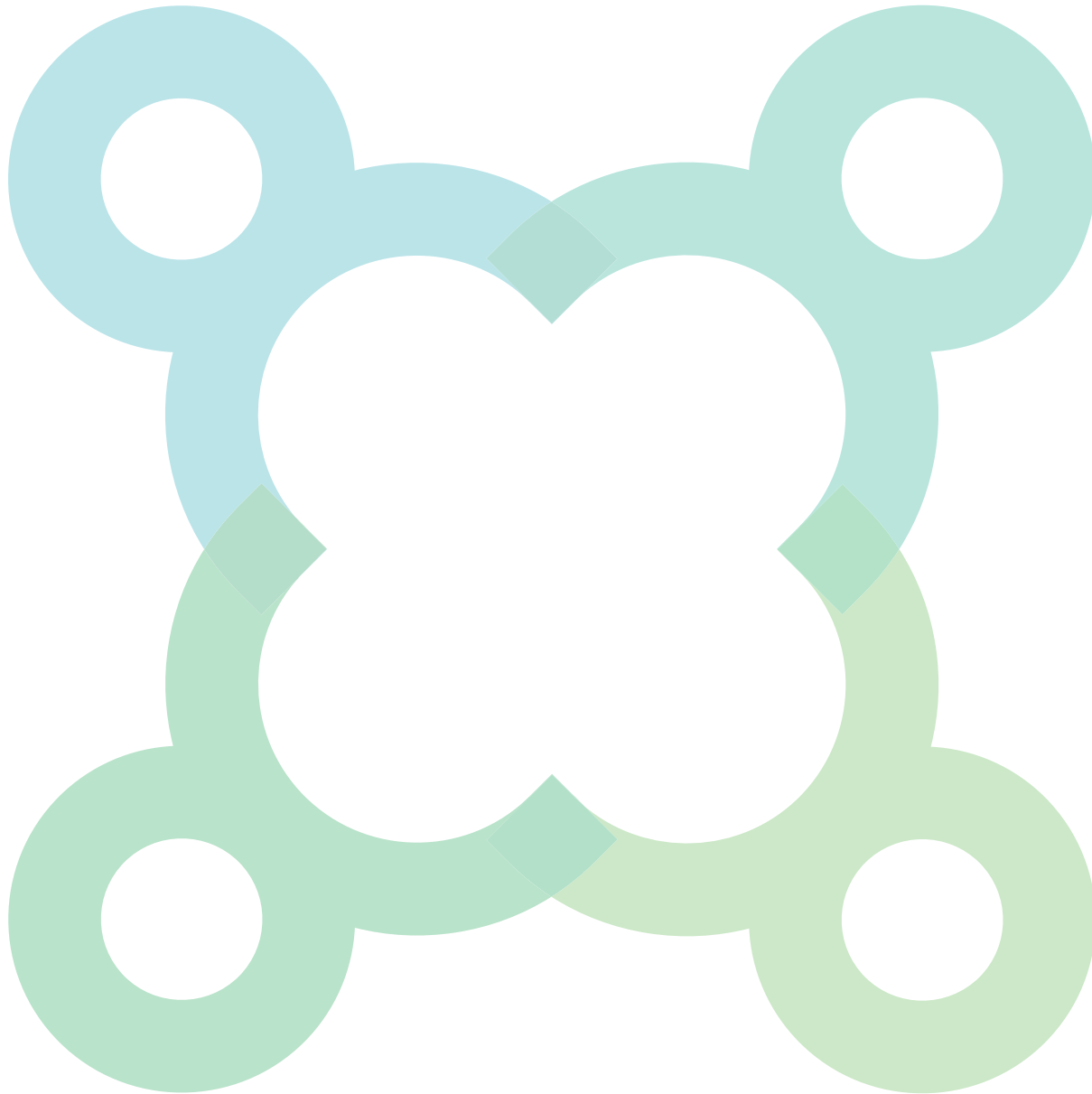
**“ALONE WE CAN DO SO LITTLE;  
TOGETHER WE CAN  
DO SO MUCH.”**

**- Helen Keller**

If you have any questions about the Town's community engagement initiatives, please contact [communications@whitby.ca](mailto:communications@whitby.ca) or call 905.430.4300 x7120.

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# WELCOME

Community engagement plays an important role in what makes a municipality – including Whitby – a welcoming, vibrant and inclusive place to live, work and enjoy.

Each day at the Town of Whitby (the Town) we make decisions that impact the community, including our residents, businesses and community groups. We recognize that as Whitby continues to modernize and grow, how we conduct community engagement must also evolve to meet the needs of our changing community. To that end, we are proud to present this publication – the Town’s first Community Engagement Framework.

Through the commitment statement, goals and guiding principles within, this framework aims to provide a consistent approach for when, how and why the Town will engage with the community. While community engagement is not a new focus for the Town, this framework will serve as an integral part of how we will continue to engage the community in the decisions that impact them most. It will also continue to deliver on our commitment to meaningful community engagement as a valued and important part of how we work. Ultimately, the framework will help us develop and deliver quality programs and services that the community wants – now and for the future.

We thank all who took the time to lend their ideas and suggestions into the development of this framework. We look forward to continuing to engage and collaborate with you in the days and years ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Gaskell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Matt Gaskell**  
Chief Administrative Officer

# INTRODUCTION

Community engagement should be delivered through a consistent and effective engagement process that is transparent and well-defined. To be effective, community engagement must also be easy to participate in and inclusive of residents of all ages and stages of life. As an organization, we must also continue to invest in our engagement efforts through staff training, collaboration with the community and continual improvement. Ultimately, by engaging residents, businesses and community groups in the decision-making process, we can:

- Build cooperative and trusting relationships
- Achieve better decisions or outcomes
- Support informed and inclusive decision-making
- Continue to build on the Town's commitments to inclusivity, accountability and transparency

The framework is intended to guide and support Town staff who are responsible for seeking input and providing information to the community as part of a project, program and/or planning process. It can also serve as a foundational resource for Whitby community organizations and groups that are involved in conducting similar public events, projects and programs.

For Whitby, community engagement involves all forms of interaction, contribution, and exchange between the Town and the community that offers the opportunity to learn and be heard as the Town makes decisions.

# BUILDING THE FRAMEWORK

## WHAT WE HEARD

To ensure that community engagement is meaningful, actionable and inclusive, this framework is based on the success of the Town's current engagement to date and research into best practices from other municipalities located in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area as well as around the world. The framework also leverages the Public Participation Spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). Most importantly, however, to ensure the framework reflects the needs of the local community and aligns with the capacity and resources of the Town, the framework is built on the perspectives of more than 400 residents, businesses, community organizations and Town staff who contributed their ideas and feedback.

### Some of what we heard:

- Keep us informed of the outcomes
- We want to feel heard and considered as part of Town processes
- Need ongoing and consistent opportunities...so engaging becomes a habit
- Communication is key, as is sharing information between community groups
- Make it easy to follow and not time consuming
- Show us the Town is embracing views and goals of the whole community
- Must be accessible to all who wish to participate
- Enhancing quality of life for residents is the bottom line
- Use innovative ways to engage and educate residents
- Provide lots of notice and build awareness
- I want to feel that my voice has a place and is worth hearing

**“I WANT TO FEEL THAT  
MY VOICE HAS A PLACE  
AND IS WORTH  
HEARING.”**

# OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our Community Engagement Framework is grounded in the following set of guiding principles that speak to how the Town will conduct community engagement:

## SINCERE AND GENUINE

We will be authentic, open and honest as to why we are seeking input and how input will be used. We will show the impact of feedback and how it is connected to decision-making. We will continuously work to establish trust and confidence with our stakeholders and the community.

## WELCOMING

We will ensure all processes are respectful, inclusive and approachable for diverse audiences and perspectives.

## VIBRANT AND INNOVATIVE

We will communicate clearly and effectively using a range of dynamic, creative and innovative techniques, facilitate access to engagement activities and inspire the community to get, and stay, involved.

## INCLUSIVE

We will work to reach and hear from diverse audiences and ensure people feel heard.



# OUR COMMITMENT

## TO VALUE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS AN IMPORTANT PART OF HOW WE WORK

To achieve our commitment we have set out three goals:

### **1 Be consistent and effective in our engagement**

Objectives:

- Implement a corporate approach to how and when the Town engages
- Develop an action plan and tool kit to serve as a roadmap for engagement
- Create clear, values-based, decision-oriented, goal-driven engagement plans
- Incorporate the engagement spectrum into project planning and strategic communications planning to align expectations with the appropriate engagement opportunities
- Define roles and responsibilities for the Town's engagement efforts
- Establish measurement to improve engagement practices and deliver on the Town's engagement commitment

### **2 Make engagement easy and inclusive**

Objectives:

- Develop accessible digital engagement tools to make providing input more convenient
- Strengthen and build on standard communications with residents, community groups and businesses
- Promote community engagement opportunities in a clear, concise, timely and consistent way
- Use multiple channels (traditional and non-traditional) for communicating engagement opportunities to increase participation and outreach
- Identify opportunities to conduct in-person engagement activities
- Report on outcomes, successes and lessons learned
- Use creativity in developing engagement opportunities

### **3 Invest in our engagement efforts**

Objectives:

- Provide staff the necessary training, tools and supports to conduct meaningful engagement
- Continue to seek and act on new opportunities for collaboration with the community
- Measure and demonstrate the impact of engagement in order to connect community feedback with the Town's decision-making
- Explore and identify areas for professional and skill development for staff who lead engagement processes
- Build community engagement into the annual Budget, work plans and Request for Proposal processes
- Stay up-to-date on community engagement best practices and new ideas

# OUR ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

A well-defined engagement process that is implemented consistently across the organization is key to the Town's community engagement efforts. Each opportunity should be assessed in order to determine the scale and scope of the engagement.

When engagement is identified as an opportunity to support a project or decision, the four steps of our engagement process are: define, plan, act and report back.

## DEFINE

Defining the parameters of any engagement process early on is a foundational step to the overall success of the process.

### The 'Define' step involves:

1. Defining the purpose of the engagement process
  - What decision needs to be made?
  - What are the objectives?
  - What background information/context on the project is needed?
  - What information can we share with the community?
2. Defining the level of engagement
  - What can the community influence?
  - What cannot be changed?
  - Which engagement level is most appropriate?
  - At what points in the process can we engage?
  - What are the technical or planning steps that engagement should be tied to?
3. Defining the budget and resources/tools
  - What staffing, resources and tools are needed?
  - What budget is needed to execute a successful engagement process?



## PLAN

A well-defined engagement plan will ensure that the entire process is well thought out and planned for. The plan will serve as a roadmap for how the engagement will unfold.

### The 'Plan' step involves:

1. Developing an engagement plan
  - What is the project or process timeline?
  - Is this a phased approach?
  - How will success be measured?
2. Identifying stakeholders, community organizations and targeted audiences
  - Who has an interest?
  - Who will be directly or indirectly impacted?
  - Who else needs to know?
3. Establishing the appropriate approach and activities
  - What communication channels and activities are most appropriate?
  - What can we do to adapt activities and techniques to this specific project, program or process to make it fun, interactive and inspiring?
4. Determining roles and responsibilities
  - What roles are needed to make these efforts effective?
  - What are the responsibilities of each role?
5. Establishing ways to report back and measure success
  - How and when will the team report back?
  - What key performance indicators will be used to measure success?



# OUR ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

## ACT

At this step, the engagement plan is put into action. Town staff connect and work with the community to gather input.

### **The 'Act' step involves:**

- Implementing the engagement plan
- Listening and learning in an authentic and genuine manner
- Providing clear and up-to-date information related to a project
- Promoting meaningful, two-way conversations
- Keeping track of feedback received
- Using a 3rd party neutral facilitator (when applicable)

## REPORT BACK

In order to build ongoing relationships through open dialogue, it is important to report back to the community and those involved in the process on the impact of their input.

### **The 'Report Back' step involves:**

- Informing the community about the outcome of their participation and next steps in a timely manner
- Identifying how and where feedback fits into the overall process or decision-making and how it has shaped the outcome(s)
- Inviting the community to remain involved in the process beyond the timeline of the specific process

# OUR FRAMEWORK

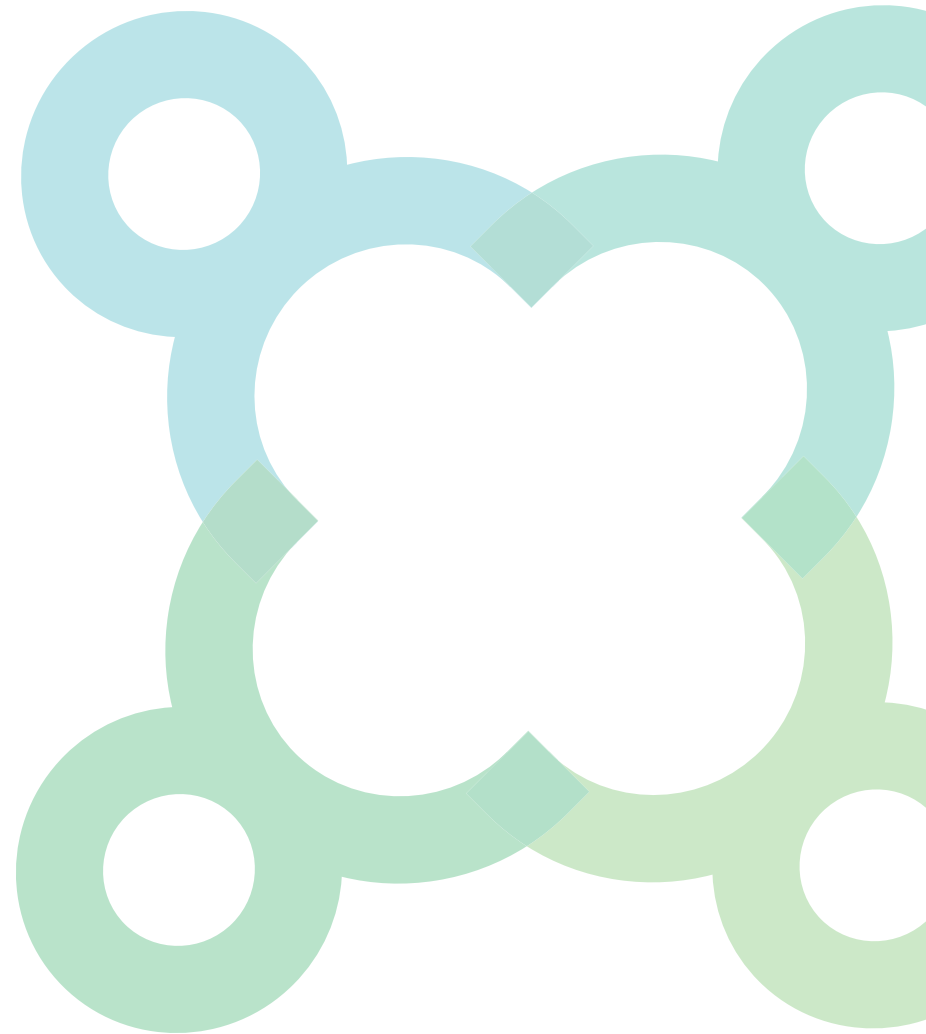
Our Community Engagement Framework explains how, when and why the Town will engage with the community. It also clearly defines the Town's purpose for engagement, helping to ensure clear expectations from the community in terms of their level of involvement.

Our engagement spectrum has been adapted based on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation.

# COMMUNICATIONS

Meaningful community engagement requires a strategic communications plan to promote awareness and encourage participation in community engagement opportunities.

To help deliver on our goal to make engagement easy and inclusive, communication should be clear, understandable, timely and multi-channel. It should strengthen and build on standard communications with residents, community groups and businesses to ensure they are kept informed.



# OUR ENGAGEMENT SPECTRUM

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
<b>Goal</b>	To share information	To listen and learn	To work together	To partner and work together
<b>Our Promise</b>	<p>We will share information</p> <p>We will work to build awareness and understanding</p>	<p>We will listen, learn and share</p> <p>We will incorporate feedback and ideas, where possible</p>	<p>We will work with you</p> <p>We will ensure ideas are reflected in the decision-making process and outcomes, where possible</p>	<p>We will look to you for advice and innovation</p> <p>We will develop recommendations or solutions and incorporate advice and recommendations into the decision-making process</p>
<b>Communication Style</b>	<p>One-way</p> <p>Town to community</p>	<p>Two-way (one time)</p> <p>Town to community and community to Town</p>	<p>Two-way (multiple times)</p> <p>Town to community, community to Town, Town back to community before a final decision</p>	<p>Two-way ongoing and in-depth (multiple times)</p> <p>Town to community, community to Town and back and forth multiple times before a final decision</p>

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
<b>Our Responsibility</b>	<p>Share information</p> <p>Make the final decision</p>	<p>Provide multiple opportunities for all voices to be heard and considered</p> <p>Make final decision / recommendation and report back</p>	<p>Provide multiple opportunities to influence decision-making</p> <p>Consider recommendations and ideas</p> <p>Make final decision / recommendation and report back</p>	<p>Provide multiple opportunities to influence decision making</p> <p>In partnership with the community, make final decision / recommendation and report back</p>
<b>Community's Responsibility</b>	Learn	Participate	Participate	Partner
<b>Most Appropriate For</b>	<p>A decision that has been made and needs to be shared</p> <p>A decision that cannot be changed by the community but that impacts the community</p> <p>A decision that requires awareness</p>	<p>A decision that requires input and feedback to shape the final outcome</p> <p>A decision that benefits from consensus of feedback to support the final outcome</p>	<p>A decision that benefits from multiple sectors/audiences buy-in and participation</p> <p>A decision that benefits from the assurance that the final outcome has local relevancy and support</p> <p>When looking for expert advice from targeted groups</p>	<p>A decision that requires multiple sectors/audiences buy-in and participation</p> <p>A decision that requires assurance that the final outcome has local relevancy and support</p> <p>When looking for expert advice from targeted groups</p>

# OUR ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The activities listed below highlight various techniques that the Town currently delivers as well as new ideas that will be implemented at each level of engagement.

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
<p>Social Media</p> <p>eNews (Email Notifications)</p> <p>Council Meetings</p> <p>Interested Parties List</p> <p>Publications (i.e. Council Highlights, The Whitby Perspective)</p> <p>News and Notices (media releases, public notices, web stories)</p> <p>Print Materials (i.e. Town Page, door hangers/bill stuffers, fact sheets, etc.)</p> <p>Digital Screens at Town facilities</p>	<p>Surveys</p> <p>Focus Groups</p> <p>Community Open Houses</p> <p>Public Meetings</p> <p>Stakeholder Interviews</p> <p>Pop Up Activations/Special Events</p> <p>Comment Forms</p> <p>Telephone / Online Town Halls</p>	<p>Design Charrettes</p> <p>Workshops / Roundtables</p> <p>Coffee Chats / Conversation Circles</p> <p>Annual Community Engagement Event (i.e. iterative process with opportunities to engage more than once)</p> <p>Polling</p>	<p>Volunteer Advisory Committees and Boards</p> <p>Working groups / Task Forces</p> <p>Partnerships with Local Community Groups</p> <p>Participatory Decision-Making (i.e. budget process)</p>

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Recommendations of team roles include:

## ENGAGEMENT LEAD

Any staff member responsible for a project or decision that includes engagement. With support from the Corporate Communications team, will lead the design, planning and implementation of the engagement process.

## SENIOR LEADER

A member of the Senior Leadership Team who reviews the design of the engagement process and provides support and approval to the Engagement Lead.

## CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Staff that offers strategic communications planning, digital media, brand and special events support. Provides support and guidance through the design and delivery of engagement processes.

## ENGAGEMENT TEAM

Staff who support community engagement planning and activities, including Corporate Communications, Technology and Innovation Services, Senior Leadership Team, and others.

# MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

We are committed to continually improving and investing in our community engagement process as a valued part of how we work. By evaluating and measuring the success of these efforts and their outcomes, we can use lessons learned for future projects and initiatives.

The following are key metrics related to each goal that will be measured and reported on to ensure we continually improve and refine our efforts.

## GOAL 1:

### **Be consistent and effective in our engagement**

Percent of participants' who understand our engagement process

Percent of projects that have a documented engagement plan

Percent of projects that have a defined decision statement

Percent of staff reports to Council that have the Communication and Public Engagement section well defined

Participants' – both internal and external – understanding of the purpose for engaging

Overall community awareness of engagement opportunities

# INFORM CONSULT INVOLVE COLLABORATE

## GOAL 2:

### **Make engagement easy and inclusive**

- Number of online interactions
- Number of in-person interactions
- Number of social media interactions
- Number of engagement activities
- Number of channels used to communicate engagement opportunities
- Number of eNews subscriptions
- Number of community groups and businesses reached
- Number of engagement opportunities held in the community
- Length of time for each engagement opportunity
- Informal feedback on engagement tools and tactics

## GOAL 3:

### **Invest in our engagement efforts**

- Number of staff trained in community engagement
- Number of community engagement staff training/learning opportunities
- Number of collaborative activities/sessions held
- Number of new participants in engagement
- Participants' perceived value of participating
- Cost of engagement per project
- Percentage of results reported back to participants'



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