

Engagement Framework



**City of
Courtenay**

Land Acknowledgement

The City of Courtenay recognizes the importance of expressing gratitude for the opportunity to live and work on the lands traditionally cared for by Indigenous peoples. The histories and contributions of these communities are integral to the identity and culture of our region.

The land on which we gather is part of the traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, and the City honours their ongoing presence as well as the rich diversity of Indigenous communities in the area.

In light of the recent Treaty Status of the K'ómoks First Nation, the City understands the critical need to consult with them to update the territorial acknowledgment. The City is committed to engaging in meaningful dialogue to ensure this recognition is accurate and respectful.

It is important to note that a territorial acknowledgment represents just one step in the journey toward reconciliation. Meaningful progress requires sustained action, continuous learning, and active engagement with Indigenous communities. The City of Courtenay reflects on its responsibilities within the broader context of colonial history and its lasting impacts. It is dedicated to fostering respectful relationships grounded in trust and collaboration.

The City will continue to work closely with the K'ómoks First Nation to create an acknowledgment that truly reflects a shared commitment to reconciliation, recognizing the past, present, and future of the land and its peoples.

1. Why We Engage

Democracy thrives when all voices are heard. Public and interest holder engagement empowers communities to shape the policies and decisions that impact their lives. By bringing people together to share knowledge, experiences and ideas, we build stronger, more inclusive communities rooted in dialogue and transparency.

Engagement is more than a process—it is a commitment to transparency, collaboration and accountability. It ensures that diverse perspectives are acknowledged, leading to better-informed decisions that are more equitable and deeply connected to the needs of the people we serve. Through engagement, we honour the collective wisdom of our community and work toward a future shaped by shared purpose and vision.

2. Introduction and Purpose

Vision

The City of Courtenay envisions a community where all voices are heard and reflected in decision-making processes. Engagement is central to building trust, fostering inclusivity and creating shared ownership of the policies and initiatives that shape our future. By working collaboratively with residents, Indigenous partners and interest holders, the City aims to ensure that engagement processes are transparent, meaningful and impactful.

Commitment

The City of Courtenay is committed to creating a responsive and equitable engagement culture. This framework reflects the City's dedication to removing barriers to participation, addressing historical gaps and ensuring that traditionally underrepresented voices have a platform to contribute. By embedding flexibility and adaptability into its engagement processes, the City will honour diverse perspectives and build lasting relationships based on trust and more open dialogue. Through these efforts, the City will ensure that engagement can inform decisions and strengthen the fabric of the community by fostering meaningful dialogue, increasing transparency, and creating opportunities for residents to see their input reflected in City actions and policies.

Purpose of the Framework

The engagement framework will provide the City of Courtenay with a consistent, transparent and inclusive approach to public and interest holder engagement. We designed this framework to guide City staff, Council and partners in planning and executing engagement activities that reflect the diverse needs and priorities of the community.

By establishing transparent processes, tools and expectations, the framework aims to:

- Ensure that all voices are heard and valued in decision-making
- Reduce barriers to engagement for diverse communities, groups and interest holders
- Create opportunities for meaningful participation that build trust, foster collaboration, and strengthen relationships with residents, K'ómoks First Nation, urban Indigenous partners and community organizations
- Support informed decision-making by reflecting community perspectives in policies, programs and initiatives consistently and transparently and
- Promote accountability and transparency by clearly communicating how engagement input is collected, analyzed and used to influence outcomes

This framework reflects the City's commitment to continuously improving its engagement practices to better serve the community and create a shared vision for the future.

Developing this Framework with Community

We built this engagement framework with the community, not for it. Rooted in the belief that the best solutions emerge through collaboration, it reflects the voices, insights and lived experiences of those who call Courtenay home. Every perspective was valued and woven into this framework, from urban Indigenous and equity-deserving groups to staff, the public and elected officials. It is a step toward redefining how we engage—by listening deeply, addressing systemic barriers and fostering relationships grounded in trust and respect.

This framework, built on inclusive engagement principles, highlights the transformative power of genuine collaboration. It reflects the collective wisdom and a commitment to improving life in Courtenay, demonstrating what's possible through meaningful and equitable practices.

3. Guiding Principles

We listen to learn. Every engagement starts with the commitment to listen deeply and meaningfully. The City acknowledges that many voices—particularly those from equity-deserving groups—have not been adequately heard in the past. Through this framework, we commit to listening to understand, respecting lived experiences and using what we learn to shape better outcomes for everyone who lives, works, plays and learns in Courtenay.

We are guided by equity. The City recognizes systemic barriers and commits to removing them. Our engagement practices prioritize creating safe, inclusive spaces honouring our community members' diverse cultures, histories and experiences. We strive for equitable participation by valuing every voice and addressing the unique needs of each group.

We commit to transparency. Earning trust is foundational to our engagement efforts. By being transparent about our processes, intentions and decisions, we will work to build confidence and accountability. We ensure that participants understand how their feedback is used and how their voices influence outcomes.

We are flexible and adaptive. No single approach to engagement works for every project or community. The City commits to remaining flexible, tailoring engagement methods to meet community needs and adapting our practices as we learn. We aim to exceed best practices by continually reflecting, improving and evolving in response to feedback.

We value relationships and reconciliation. Relationships are at the heart of meaningful engagement. The City is dedicated to building and maintaining strong, respectful connections with Indigenous communities, equity-deserving groups and all residents. We embed reconciliation in our practices, recognizing the importance of history, culture and knowledge in fostering collaboration and mutual understanding.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

The following graphic defines small, medium and large projects. The naming structure does not reflect the importance of the events they represent. This naming convention reflects the number of residents impacted, the duration of engagement and the resources required.

S

Small

Small projects involve limited engagement efforts, typically requiring minimal resources and affecting a narrow audience or geographic area (e.g., minor bylaw updates or localized operational changes).

M

Medium

Medium projects require moderate resources, involve multiple interest holders or interest groups and typically address broader issues (e.g., park improvements, or department-wide initiatives).

L **Large**
Large projects involve significant resources, multiple departments, or wide-reaching impacts (e.g., city-wide policy changes, infrastructure projects, or major capital investments).

The following table outlines the typical role of staff and Council in each project. At a high level, the roles of City staff in engagement will vary based on project size and scope. While departments typically lead engagement, the Communications Team plays a key role at all levels, ensuring clear messaging and strategies. Communications also supports project teams by assessing the need for external consultants, defining the scope of work and facilitating onboarding. This includes connecting teams with reliable consultants and assisting in proposal evaluations to ensure the right fit for the project.

Council is vital to ensuring effective and transparent engagement at all project levels. While their involvement may vary depending on the size and scope of the project, they are key to fostering trust, representing community interests and supporting informed decision-making.

	Communications Team	Respective Departments	Council
S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide tools and templates to streamline the engagement process • Review and approve engagement content to ensure alignment with City standards and messaging • Provide ad hoc advice on appropriate engagement methods and tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead the project and engagement process • Draft engagement content, such as public notices, surveys, or FAQs • Coordinate venues and logistics as needed • Implement engagement activities, such as brief surveys or small focus groups • Conduct data analysis and develop an engagement summary report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be informed about the project scope and purpose to address public questions or concerns • Support the engagement process by sharing accurate information with constituents • Review final engagement summary reports or reports to understand community feedback report
M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-develop engagement materials and strategies, ensuring alignment with City goals and standards • Provide tools and templates to streamline the engagement process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead the project, with support from the Communications Team • Collaborate with Communications to develop an engagement plan, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be informed on the engagement plan, including objectives, methods and timelines; flag high-interest or visibility • Attend key

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support data collection and reporting, ensuring feedback is captured and communicated effectively 	<p>including key messages, timelines and tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate venues and logistics as needed Facilitate engagement activities, with oversight and guidance from Communications Conduct data analysis and develop an engagement summary report 	<p>engagement events as ambassadors of the City, such as public meetings or focus groups, to listen and connect with constituents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use engagement summaries to inform decisions, ensuring they reflect community needs and concerns
L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-lead the engagement process Co-develop engagement materials and strategies, ensuring alignment with City goals and standards Coordinate venues and logistics as needed Provide tools and templates to streamline the engagement process Support data collection and reporting, ensuring feedback is captured and communicated effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Act as a subject matter expert, providing technical and operational insights Collaborate with Communications to co-lead the engagement process Participate in facilitating engagement activities, such as public meetings or workshops, alongside Communications Conduct data analysis and develop an engagement summary report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be informed on the engagement plan, including objectives, methods and timelines; flag high-interest or visibility Provide input into the engagement process where appropriate, ensuring alignment with Council priorities Represent the City at high-profile engagement activities, e.g. city-wide public meetings, open houses, or press events, to demonstrate commitment to listening Use engagement summaries to inform decisions, ensuring they reflect community needs and concerns



5. Engagement Planning Process

The following process will help staff design and implement engagement activities that are structured, transparent and responsive to the diverse needs of the community. The steps outlined below provide a comprehensive approach to planning and executing engagement activities for projects of varying scope and scale.

01

Needs Assessment

Define the scope, purpose, and objectives of each engagement, and identify whether the project will be considered small, medium or large.

02

Interest Holder Mapping

Identify target groups, equity-deserving populations, and potential partners for each project.

03

Tools and Tactics

The choice of engagement tools and tactics is influenced by the project's size, scope and target audience.

04

Impact Assessment

Assess the potential impacts of the project on different interest-holders and the community as a whole, as well as on staff resources and capacity.



1. Needs Assessment

The needs assessment is the foundational step in defining each engagement activity's scope, purpose and objectives. To do this, you should:

- **Define the project scope:** Clearly outline the project's goals, desired outcomes and potential impact on the community. Identify the level of engagement required based on the project's size and complexity (small, medium, or large). Consider the impact of the project on marginalized or equity-deserving groups.
- **What aspect of the project can the community inform:** Identify which elements are open to community input and which decisions are predetermined. This will clarify the areas where feedback can directly influence the project's direction. Determine what type of information or feedback will be the most helpful and will inform what questions you need to ask.
- **Set objectives:** Establish clear, equity-driven objectives for the engagement process, ensuring they align with the City's broader goals. Objectives may include gathering input, building relationships, or educating the public about a project. Emphasize outcomes that prioritize culturally safe and inclusive participation.
- **Identify resources:** Assess available resources (budget, staffing, technology) and allocate them according to the project's scale. Consider both internal capacity and the need for external support (consultants, facilitators, etc.). Ensure that resources are distributed equitably, notably to support engagement with marginalized communities.
- **Determine timeline:** Establish timelines for engagement activities, considering the community's needs and critical deadlines. Make sure timelines are flexible to accommodate different community groups' availability and allow time for ongoing feedback. Check other City engagement activities; where appropriate, consider combining activities to ease the burden on residents.
- **Determine which level of engagement and commitment to the community:** The IAP2 Spectrum of Participation outlines the range of engagement levels needed for different projects, from informing the public to empowering them in decision-making. Determining the level of engagement is not just about selecting an approach—it defines the City's commitment to the community and the influence participants will have on the final decision. Each project must carefully assess how much community input can shape outcomes and communicate this directly. Setting transparent expectations about what is open for discussion and what is not is critical in helping the City earn trust with its residents. We will include this commitment in engagement materials and follow-up communication, reinforcing that engagement is meaningful and not a checkbox exercise.

	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Participation goal	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to community	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	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 look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
<p>Inform</p> <p>All engagement projects require the City to provide residents with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and solutions.</p>				

2. Interest holder Mapping

Interest holder mapping ensures that relevant groups, particularly equity-deserving populations, are engaged in decision-making. This mapping helps identify who should be involved in the engagement process and how to reach them effectively. Consider your:

- **Target group:** Define the key participants for each project, including community members, Indigenous communities, local organizations and interest holders. Use demographic data to ensure engagement efforts reflect the diversity of Courtenay's population.
- **Equity-deserving populations:** Prioritize outreach to marginalized and underrepresented communities, addressing potential barriers to participation such as transportation, language and cultural sensitivity. Ensure the engagement process is accessible and culturally safe for all.
- **Identify potential collaborators:** Engage community organizations and local interest holders who can act as trusted intermediaries to facilitate outreach to hard-to-reach groups and activate their networks and communication channels. These collaborators can help design culturally appropriate engagement strategies and encourage broader participation from diverse community segments.
- **Consistent mapping approach:** Use the interest holder mapping spreadsheet in **Appendix A** to track interest holders, their specific interests and the level of impact the project will

have on them. This tool will help standardize the mapping process across projects, ensuring all relevant groups are identified.

3. Engagement tools and tactics

The project's size, scope and target participants will impact the choice of engagement tools and tactics. Offering a range of engagement methods ensures community members have multiple opportunities to participate, particularly those with different schedules, comfort levels and technology access.

	Small (3 months)	Medium (3 - 6 months)	Large (6+ months)
	<p>These projects typically involve localized issues or minor operational changes. For example, City Engineering is working on plans for a neighbourhood infrastructure upgrade. Engagement methods should be efficient, focusing on key interest holders, such as nearby residents and businesses. A small engagement like this would be low on staff capacity and resources and may take around three months to plan and execute.</p>	<p>These projects require moderate resources, involve multiple interest holders and typically address broader issues (e.g., neighbourhood, park improvements or department-wide initiatives). Once you identify your target group, consider contacting organizations that might be closely connected to them. For example, if seniors are an important group to hear from, you could contact a senior-serving organization and ask to do a workshop with their clients. These engagements can require cross-departmental support, are more resource-intensive and will take longer to plan and execute (at least six months).</p>	<p>These projects involve significant resources, multiple departments, or wide-reaching impacts (e.g., city-wide policy changes, infrastructure projects, or major capital investments). They usually require city-wide engagement and might include more than one engagement phase. They also require cross-departmental support, more staff time and resources and more time to plan and execute (six months or longer). For these types of engagements, leverage community collaborators and organizations to help reach a broad population and offer multiple avenues for participation and feedback.</p>
	<p>Engagement tactics could include an online survey and maybe a meeting with the local BIA or chamber of commerce.</p>	<p>Engagement tactics could include online surveys, focus groups and workshops.</p>	<p>Engagement tactics could include a combination of online surveys, focus groups, workshops, community pop-ups, open houses and engagement with City</p>

		advisory committees.
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4. Impact Assessment

This step involves assessing the potential impacts of the project on different interest holders and the community as a whole, as well as on staff resources and capacity. It includes understanding how the project might affect resources, priorities and existing services. This should consider positive and negative impacts on groups, including equity-deserving communities.

- **Identify potential impacts:** Consider how the project might affect interest holders and community members. This could include impacts on their quality of life, economic opportunities, access to services, or cultural heritage.
- **Analyze the significance of impacts:** Determine the scale and severity of the potential effects. Some impacts may be minor or temporary, while others could be significant or long-lasting.
- **Prioritize impacts:** Focus on the most significant impacts, particularly those that could disproportionately affect equity-deserving communities.
- **Document impacts:** A SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) can help assess and document the project's potential impacts. This documentation will inform the engagement strategy and decision-making process.

6. Engagement Methods

Approach

Effective public engagement relies on a diverse set of approaches to ensure all community members have the opportunity to share their perspectives. The City of Courtenay will employ a range of engagement methods tailored to the scope and complexity of each project. When planning engagement activities, consider the timing and scheduling to maximize participation. Avoid engaging during holidays, peak vacation seasons (e.g., summer months), or other periods when communities may be unavailable. Scheduling should also accommodate the availability of marginalized groups, ensuring access to engagement activities when they are most likely to participate.

Activities	What & how	Small	Med.	Large
Surveys/ written	Surveys are structured questionnaires that gather quantitative and qualitative feedback from the public on specific topics. These are effective for collecting data	•	•	•

online engagement	from a large number of people in a structured format. For a project like a proposed park redesign, the City could distribute an online survey to collect input from residents on preferred features, amenities and design elements. These could also be used to gather community input on proposed changes to local bylaws or services, such as waste management or traffic regulations.			
Focus groups	Focus groups are facilitated discussions with a small group of participants that allow for deeper, qualitative insights into specific topics. They are best used when the City seeks in-depth feedback on particular issues or needs detailed community perspectives. For a project like planning a new affordable housing initiative, the City could convene focus groups with community members, local service providers and interest holders to discuss needs, concerns and potential solutions. This method could help the City understand specific community needs and priorities in more detail.	•	•	•
Open house	Open houses for public engagement are events or gatherings that provide information, presentations and opportunities for attendees to learn and offer feedback. These are more casual, drop-in events that facilitate transparent communication, share project details and encourage community involvement. Open houses allow the public to engage in a less structured way, and they are helpful in soliciting general feedback on proposals or options before more formal decision-making begins.	•	•	•
1:1 meetings	1:1 meetings are personalized, face-to-face or virtual discussions between a member of the project team and a community member or interest holder. These meetings are typically scheduled by appointment and allow deep conversations to explore specific concerns, needs, or ideas in detail. These are ideal when a project requires focused, in-depth input from a key interest holder or when the engagement seeks individuals with specialized knowledge. They are particularly effective for	•	•	•

	<p>engaging with local businesses, community leaders, Indigenous representatives, or other interest holders with unique or sensitive perspectives on a project.</p> <p>These are used when broader engagement methods (like surveys or public meetings) might not provide the depth of information needed or when interest holders might feel more comfortable discussing issues privately.</p>			
Pop-up events	<p>Pop-up events are ideal for reaching a broad, diverse audience in convenient, high-traffic locations, particularly when the goal is to inform the public and gather quick, informal feedback. They are best used for projects with a high community interest but may not require in-depth consultation. Pop-ups are effective for soliciting input from people with limited time, such as busy working parents or community members who do not regularly attend traditional engagement events. Attending pop-ups is also a great opportunity to hand out small takeaway items (business cards, flyers) with a website link and QR code for more comprehensive engagement information (online survey, etc.)</p> <p>The City could host pop-up events at places like the Courtenay Farmers Market, downtown shopping areas, busy walkways, or during community festivals to engage residents about ongoing or upcoming projects. These events provide an informal space where residents can stop by, ask questions and give feedback on new infrastructure projects or community programs.</p>	•	•	•
Workshops (in-person & online)	<p>Workshops are interactive, hands-on sessions where participants engage in activities designed to explore ideas, generate solutions and provide feedback. Workshops are best for projects that require detailed community input. The City could host workshops to gather ideas and feedback on proposed community facility designs, such as a new recreation center or community garden. Residents could work together in</p>	•	•	•



	small groups to discuss what features they want to see, offering practical suggestions to inform the final design.			
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Locations

To ensure accessible and inclusive engagement, the City of Courtenay should prioritize central, familiar and culturally appropriate locations easily accessible by public transportation and accommodate various needs, including mobility and language accessibility. Venues such as community centres, libraries, parks and local markets are ideal for both formal and informal events. Additionally, the City should offer virtual engagement options to reach residents who cannot attend in person. By selecting flexible, adaptable spaces and leveraging community-based locations for pop-up events, the City will foster broad participation and make processes accessible to all.

Promotion

Effective promotion is essential for ensuring broad participation and awareness of engagement opportunities. This section outlines how the City of Courtenay will promote engagement activities for small, medium and large projects, aligning with the **Communication Strategy** and tailored to the scale and scope of each initiative. By leveraging digital, print and in-person tactics, the City will ensure that all community members are informed and encouraged to participate regardless of their background or preferred communication channel.

Tactic	What & how	Small	Med.	Large
Social media	Organic social media refers to non-paid posts on platforms like Facebook and Instagram that engage followers with updates, event promotions and project information. It's effective for regular engagement with an active audience.	•	•	•
Paid social media ads	Paid social media ads target specific demographics using platforms like Facebook and Instagram. These ads help increase visibility and drive participation for engagement activities.	•	•	•
E-newsletters	E-newsletters provide regular updates and detailed project information to a subscribed audience. These can promote upcoming events, share progress and encourage participation.	•	•	•



Postering	Postering involves displaying printed materials (e.g., flyers, posters) in local venues to advertise engagement events or key project updates. It is effective for reaching community members in high-traffic areas.	•	•	•
Earned media	Earned media includes press coverage or media mentions that occur without paid placement, typically from local journalists or news outlets. This could include a City-issued news release, info bulletin or staff interview. This tactic helps increase credibility and awareness of engagement activities.	•	•	•
Paid advertisements	Paid advertisements through traditional media channels like newspapers and radio reach a broad audience. These ads can target specific demographics and ensure wide visibility for large-scale engagement efforts.	•	•	•
Direct mail	Direct mail refers to physical materials (postcards, brochures, letters) sent to residents' homes. It effectively ensures that important engagement information reaches a specific (e.g. radius) or a broad audience, especially those not active online.	•	•	•
Community collaborator outreach	Community collaborator outreach involves collaborating with local organizations, community groups and other interest holders to promote engagement activities and encourage participation among diverse groups. This can include developing promo packages and sharing them with organizations to make it easy for them to post to their channels, promoting engagement through their e-newsletters or putting up posters in their spaces.	•	•	•

Community Organizations & Interest Holders

Community organizations are crucial in supporting the City of Courtenay's engagement efforts. They help by fostering connections with diverse populations, sharing valuable insights and amplifying engagement activities. Their involvement is key to ensuring that the City's engagement processes and projects are inclusive, equitable and reflective of community needs. The following outlines how the City can work with community collaborators to deliver engagement activities:

- **Co-design and advise on engagement processes:** The City can collaborate with community organizers to co-design engagement processes that are inclusive, culturally appropriate and aligned with the needs of the people they serve. They can provide guidance to ensure strategies reflect the priorities and cultural context of the populations they represent.
- **Provide expertise and community insights:** Community organizations can also be invited to participate in focus groups, advisory sessions and other engagement activities. These collaborators offer valuable community insights, ensuring City projects are well-informed and grounded in local knowledge.
- **Work together to overcome barriers:** Community collaborators can help connect the City with the people and clients they serve, offering the City access to groups that may otherwise be harder to reach or engage. This can include hosting engagement events within their own spaces, making it easier for residents to participate in a familiar and trusted environment.
- **Promote engagement opportunities:** Collaborators can act as key communicators by sharing information about engagement activities within their networks, helping to raise awareness and encourage participation. They can use their platforms and communication channels to amplify the City's engagement efforts and increase overall participation.
- **Evaluate and suggest improvements:** Collaborators play an active role in evaluating the outcomes of engagement activities, offering suggestions for improvement to ensure continuous enhancement of engagement processes.

Considerations for Collaborating

When working with community collaborators, City staff should be mindful of the following:

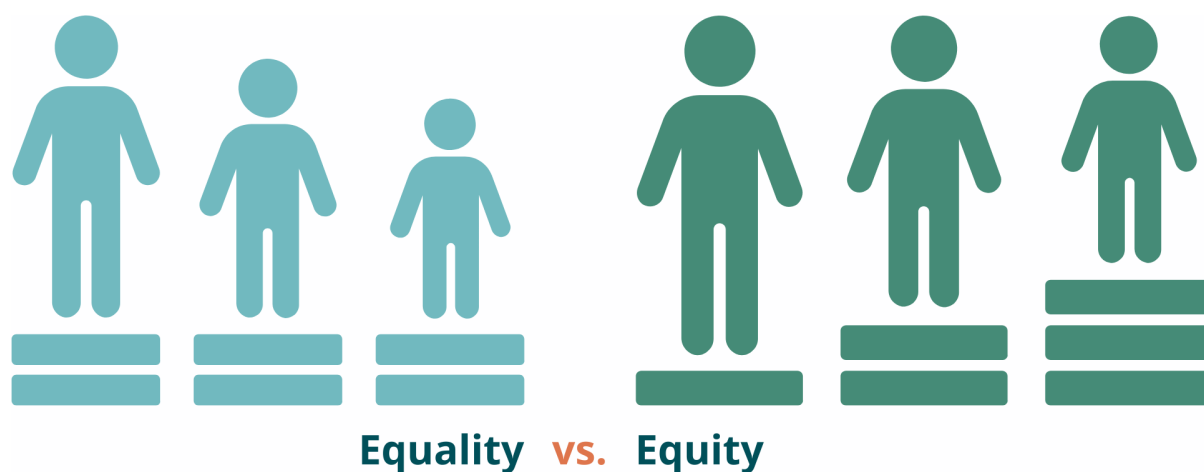
- **Build trust and strong relationships:** Establish clear, consistent communication and foster long-term relationships. Trust is key to successful collaboration and ensuring that collaborators feel valued.
- **Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity:** Recognize the community's diverse needs, especially when engaging with equity-deserving or Indigenous populations. Work with collaborators to ensure engagement strategies are culturally appropriate and inclusive.
- **Flexibility and adaptability:** Be open to adapting methods and timelines to suit community needs. Co-create strategies with collaborators to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
- **Clear roles and expectations:** Clearly define roles and responsibilities to ensure everyone understands their contributions and the project's scope.
- **Provide support and resources:** Offer necessary resources and support to help collaborators engage effectively, including training, compensation and addressing any logistical barriers like transportation or accessibility.
- **Accountability and follow-through:** Maintain transparency by regularly updating collaborators on engagement progress and ensuring feedback is acted upon.
- **Evaluation and continuous improvement:** After each engagement, reflect on the collaboration's effectiveness and gather feedback for continuous improvement.

Equity Considerations

Equity is central to the City of Courtenay's public engagement efforts. To foster a fair and inclusive community, the City is committed to ensuring that engagement processes do more than simply include diverse voices—they must actively address the disparities that marginalized groups face and strive to create equal opportunities for participation and influence.

What is equity?

Equity involves ensuring that all community members, particularly those from historically marginalized groups, have access to the resources and opportunities they need to participate in decision-making processes. Unlike equality, which treats everyone similarly, equity recognizes that people face different barriers based on their identities and lived experiences.



To achieve equity, the City will provide differentiated support, remove barriers to participation, and create spaces where all voices can be heard, valued and influence decisions.

Equity is about more than just fair treatment—it's about **justice and fairness in the process**. This involves identifying and addressing the barriers historically underrepresented or marginalized groups experience and sharing power, so everyone has a meaningful voice in shaping outcomes. In the context of public engagement, equity is the foundation of inclusive decision-making that leads to more innovative and effective solutions.

Guidelines for equity in public engagement

- **Invite authentic and accountable participation:** Engagement must be genuine, with no predetermined conclusions or expected outcomes. Staff should be open to community input, set realistic expectations about participants' influence on decisions, and follow through on commitments to build trust.

- **Plan early and proactively:** Design the engagement process with equity in mind, addressing potential barriers to participation before they arise. Plan all aspects—budgets, timelines, outreach and evaluation—to maximize inclusion and ensure a responsive process.
- **Engage the internal diversity of the community:** Apply an intersectional approach to engage a broad spectrum of voices within a community. Recognize that people with shared identities may experience issues differently and ensure diverse perspectives are heard.
- **Work in reciprocal relationships with communities:** Build trusting, collaborative relationships with communities, sharing power and co-creating accessible, mutually beneficial engagement processes.
- **Tailor engagement plans to context:** Adapt engagement strategies based on the specific needs of the topic, community and participants. Ensure resources are equitably distributed to address the needs of those facing the most significant barriers to participation.

Using a Trauma-Informed Approach

What is a trauma-informed approach?

A trauma-informed approach recognizes the widespread impact of historic, intergenerational and more recent trauma on individuals and communities and integrates this understanding into engagement practices. It involves creating safe, supportive and respectful spaces where people can participate without fear of re-traumatization. This approach considers the emotional, psychological and physical effects of past trauma—whether from personal experiences, community-wide events, or systemic violence—and adapts engagement strategies to ensure that all participants feel safe, respected and heard.

Why is a trauma-informed approach critical?

Many community members may have experienced trauma that affects their ability to engage in traditional public processes. Trauma can arise from various sources, including personal experiences of violence, loss, discrimination, or the impacts of historical and ongoing injustices, such as colonialism and racism. Engagement processes can unintentionally re-traumatize individuals when these experiences are not acknowledged, leading to disengagement, distrust and harm.

A trauma-informed approach fosters an environment of trust and safety, essential for building meaningful relationships and ensuring that all community members, particularly those from marginalized or vulnerable groups, feel empowered to participate. Public engagement processes can be more inclusive, equitable and effective by considering trauma.

Key practices for trauma-informed engagement

- **Use empowering language:** Adopt empathetic and supportive language, allowing participants to share what they are comfortable with.

- **Set clear expectations:** Clarify how the City will use feedback and ensure participants understand their influence. Offer different engagement options based on comfort levels.
- **Acknowledge historical trauma:** Recognize the impact of collective trauma, especially for Indigenous and marginalized communities. Create culturally safe spaces for engagement.
- **Provide flexibility:** Offer various participation options, such as surveys or one-on-one discussions, etc., to accommodate diverse needs.
- **Follow up and offer support:** Provide participants with information on how the City will use their input and offer access to additional resources or follow-up opportunities.
- **Foster a non-judgmental atmosphere:** Create an environment where all participants feel respected, ensuring they can share openly without fear of judgment.
- **Protect personal information:** Ensure participants' identities and experiences are safeguarded. Communicate how data will be used, stored, and shared, and offer anonymous participation options when possible. Remove identifying markers, such as names, roles, or visual identifiers, to protect confidentiality and privacy when sharing engagement findings.

7. Indigenous Engagement

Two Frameworks, Side by Side

This engagement framework is being developed alongside a Reconciliation Framework, which will outline formal government-to-government relations between the City of Courtenay and local First Nations rights holders. While the Reconciliation Framework establishes the protocols and commitments for formal relationships directly with First Nations, this engagement framework focuses on creating inclusive and respectful opportunities for Indigenous voices to inform the City's engagement projects, focusing on the urban Indigenous community through local urban Indigenous organizations.

This document aims to create space for Indigenous perspectives in the City's broader engagement processes. By recognizing the unique knowledge, history and lived experiences of Indigenous peoples, the City commits to creating engagement opportunities that are culturally appropriate, accessible and meaningful. These efforts aim to strengthen relationships, foster trust and ensure Indigenous voices are integral to shaping the policies, programs and initiatives impacting the entire community.

Engaging Indigenous Communities

This section of the framework is informed directly by feedback gathered during the Indigenous engagement workshop held in September 2024 and aligns with the City's commitment to advancing reconciliation.

1. Acknowledging diversity

Indigenous communities in Courtenay are diverse, making up 7.6% of the overall population¹, encompassing urban Indigenous populations, Métis, Inuit and local First Nations. This is important to highlight as Courtenay's Indigenous population is higher than the provincial average of 5.9%. The framework must reflect this diversity by tailoring engagement approaches to each group's unique needs and experiences. Engagement strategies must differentiate between urban Indigenous residents and local First Nations to avoid misconceptions and foster mutual understanding and protocols.

2. Creating culturally safe spaces

The City commits to designing culturally appropriate and welcoming engagement processes. This includes offering food, childcare, transportation and holding events in accessible spaces that are welcoming to the Indigenous community.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia defines cultural safety as: *A culturally safe environment is physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually safe. There is recognition of, and respect for, the cultural identities of others, without challenge or denial of an individual's identity, who they are, or what they need. Culturally unsafe environments diminish, demean, or disempower the cultural identity and well-being of an individual.*²

City-led engagement must prioritize cultural safety to reduce systemic barriers and support meaningful participation.

3. Providing multiple channels for participation

Engagement opportunities must be accessible and flexible. Recognizing that not all participants feel comfortable in group settings, the City will offer multiple ways to provide feedback, including online platforms, anonymous surveys and one-on-one conversations. This variety of engagement options ensures that Indigenous community members can be heard.

4. Addressing unconscious biases

The City recognizes that unconscious bias can influence engagement processes—shaping who participates, whose voices we amplify and how we interpret feedback. To foster equitable engagement with Indigenous communities, City staff will actively work to identify and challenge

¹ [Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census - Courtenay \(Census subdivision\)](#)

² [AP Indigenous Cultural Safety Standard - DAP](#)

biases that may impact decision-making. This includes ensuring that Indigenous perspectives are not filtered through dominant narratives, dismissed due to preconceived assumptions, or undervalued compared to other knowledge systems. By embedding awareness of unconscious bias into engagement planning and facilitation, the City will create more inclusive spaces where Indigenous voices are recognized as contributors to shaping policies, programs and initiatives.

5. Commitment to action on feedback

The City will commit to demonstrating how feedback from Indigenous communities influences decisions and outcomes, ensuring transparency in how input is integrated into City policies and projects. This will include clear communication about how community suggestions have been implemented, ensuring that Indigenous voices are visibly reflected in tangible changes.

6. Addressing historical context and healing

Engagement processes will acknowledge colonialism's historical and ongoing impacts, providing opportunities for healing and reflection as part of the reconciliation journey. This approach allows the City to work alongside Indigenous communities to foster mutual understanding, healing and a commitment to co-creating a shared future built on respect and trust.

7. Embedding cultural safety training

City staff will participate in ongoing cultural safety training to build awareness and competency in engaging with Indigenous communities. Training will address the impacts of colonialism, systemic racism and trauma, equipping staff to interact respectfully and effectively with Indigenous residents.

8. Building trust and transparency

Trust is the foundation of meaningful engagement. The City will focus on long-term relationship building by developing formal engagement protocols, such as memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or relationship agreements, that outline expectations for collaboration as part of the Reconciliation Framework.

9. Continuous improvement and feedback loops

The framework will include mechanisms for regular feedback from Indigenous communities, ensuring that the City remains responsive to evolving needs. Continuous improvement will keep engagement practices relevant and practical, fostering a dynamic and inclusive approach.

Meaningful Territorial Acknowledgements

Territorial acknowledgements should move beyond scripted statements to reflect authentic, personal connections and the diversity of Indigenous populations. They should be a meaningful part of engagement activities, setting a tone of respect and recognition for the land, its history and Indigenous communities' ongoing presence and contributions.

We provide these considerations and examples to help guide you, but it's important to note that you don't need to include all of them. You may find that other elements are meaningful and relevant to your specific context. As long as the acknowledgement is authentic and genuine, it will set the right tone for your engagement.

Begin with Personal Reflection

Start by reflecting on your relationship with the land, its history and the Indigenous peoples who have stewarded it. Share a brief, personal connection that acknowledges your role in upholding reconciliation. This might include:

- Your gratitude for being on the land
- How you, in your work or life, aim to contribute to reconciliation
- A recognition of the colonial history that impacts Indigenous communities today

Example:

"I'm grateful to live and work on these lands, where I continue to learn about the histories and contributions of the Indigenous peoples who have stewarded this territory for generations. As a municipal employee, I am committed to fostering relationships built on respect and collaboration."

Acknowledge the Land and Its Stewards

Recognize the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Indigenous nations whose lands you are on. This should be specific, accurate and spoken with care.

Example:

"I respectfully acknowledge that the land we gather on is on the Unceded Traditional Territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land."

Contextualize the Acknowledgement

Link the acknowledgment to the purpose of the gathering or the work being undertaken. This step makes the statement more actionable and less perfunctory.

Example:

"As we discuss community engagement today, it's important to reflect on how our work can better include Indigenous voices and honour the knowledge, experiences and rights of the K'ómoks First Nation and urban Indigenous communities."

Commit to Continued Learning and Action

Acknowledge that territorial acknowledgements are only a small part of the broader reconciliation process and commit to ongoing learning and action. This helps move the conversation from symbolic recognition to tangible efforts toward reconciliation and meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities.

Example:

I understand that a territorial acknowledgment is only the first step in a much larger journey. True reconciliation requires ongoing learning and unlearning, as well as active engagement with Indigenous communities, where we listen with open minds, honour their rights, and take real, sustained action. Our commitment to learning from and working alongside Indigenous peoples is not just about words but about building deeper, lasting relationships grounded in respect, trust and shared purpose.

Acknowledge the Diversity of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous communities are diverse, encompassing many nations, cultures, languages and traditions. To avoid generalizations, it is essential to recognize the unique histories and perspectives within Indigenous communities. The acknowledgment should reflect the rich diversity of the local Indigenous peoples, including urban Indigenous populations, Métis, Inuit and First Nations.

Example:

Indigenous peoples are diverse, with distinct cultures, languages and histories. It is essential to recognize the complexity of their identities and avoid generalizations. Acknowledging this diversity will foster a deeper, more respectful understanding of the communities we engage with.

Role of Non-Indigenous Allies in Reconciliation

As non-Indigenous individuals and institutions, it's important to reflect on our roles within the context of colonial history and its present-day impacts. Reconciliation requires active participation from everyone, including non-Indigenous allies, who must work towards decolonization and contribute to positive change.

Example:

As non-Indigenous individuals, we have a responsibility to reflect on our roles within colonial history and its present-day impacts. Reconciliation requires active participation from all, and we must continually work to decolonize our practices and institutions.

4. Feedback and Reporting

Effective feedback and reporting ensure the community's voice is reflected in decision-making. This section outlines how the City of Courtenay will collect, analyze and report feedback in an inclusive, transparent and responsive way to community needs.

Feedback Collection

Once the City collects feedback from various engagement activities, the next step is to analyze it to ensure all voices are heard, especially those from impacted and equity-deserving groups. The City will focus on organizing and cross-referencing feedback based on key demographic categories and ensuring that feedback is weighted appropriately.

1. Compile and prepare data for analysis:

- Compile feedback from surveys, pop-up events, open houses, 1:1 meetings, workshops and interviews into a centralized spreadsheet. Summarize quantitative data and organize qualitative responses by key themes, such as concerns or preferences. Prepare the data for analysis by identifying common patterns, summarizing trends (e.g., satisfaction levels or support) and grouping feedback by issues or participant types (e.g., business owners, residents) to uncover key insights.

2. Anonymize data:

- Feedback should be anonymized before analysis to protect participants' privacy and ensure confidentiality. Remove personal identifiers such as names, contact information, and any role-based or visual markers that could reveal an individual's identity. Where relevant, aggregate demographic data to prevent the identification of specific individuals, particularly in smaller or equity-deserving groups.
- In engagement summaries and reports, use direct quotes to highlight key themes but present them without identifying details. When sharing qualitative feedback from equity-deserving communities, ensure that individuals cannot be singled out or inadvertently identified through their responses.

3. Cross-tabulation and demographic breakdown:

- Organize collected feedback using relevant demographic categories such as age, gender, geographic location, income, and Indigenous identity. This will allow City staff to understand better how different groups feel about the issues and whether certain groups are underrepresented in the feedback process.
- Cross-tabulate data to identify patterns and trends within specific groups. For example, feedback from youth versus seniors or residents in different neighbourhoods can be compared to see if there are differing concerns or levels of support for the project.

4. Weighting feedback from key demographics:

- For projects that impact specific groups more directly (e.g., accessibility issues for people with disabilities or environmental concerns for Indigenous communities), the City should prioritize feedback from those directly affected.
- Similarly, in cases where feedback from marginalized groups (e.g., Indigenous communities, low-income residents) is underrepresented but key to the project, you can consider weighing their feedback more heavily to ensure their perspectives are appropriately reflected in the analysis.

Analysis and Reporting

Once feedback is organized, the City will analyze the data to identify key themes, issues and community sentiments. We will combine both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive view of the feedback.

1. Combining data:

- **Quantitative data:** We will analyze survey responses from closed-ended questions and other structured feedback (for example, a voting exercise) for patterns and trends. The data should provide insights into overall support, satisfaction and areas of concern, allowing for clear conclusions about the community's sentiment.
- **Qualitative data:** We will analyze open-ended responses, focus group feedback and notes from workshops and meetings for recurring themes and key insights. This qualitative data will provide a deeper context behind the numerical data, allowing the City to understand the reasons behind community opinions.

2. Equity in analysis:

- When analyzing feedback, the City will, where possible, identify if certain equity-deserving groups have specific concerns that need to be addressed. For example, if low-income residents raise concerns about housing affordability or Indigenous communities express issues with land use, we should prioritize these insights in the analysis.

3. Transparency in reporting:

- Feedback will be reported transparently, with clear summaries of how it will influence decision-making. Reports will include quantitative data (e.g., percentage support and satisfaction levels) and qualitative insights (e.g., comments, suggestions and concerns) to view community input comprehensively.
- The City will include demographic breakdowns in reports to ensure that the diversity of input is represented. We will acknowledge if certain groups are underrepresented and outline the actions the City will take to address this in future engagements.

Closing the Loop

Ensuring participants know how their feedback has influenced decisions is key to maintaining trust and encouraging ongoing community involvement. The City will use various tools to close the loop and demonstrate how feedback has been incorporated into decision-making.

Communicating the impact of feedback:

- Use visual summaries, such as infographics or charts, to present key findings clearly and accessibly. Share these summaries through multiple channels to ensure broad accessibility.
- Send newsletters, public updates or engagement summaries to participants.

5. Continuous Improvement

Evaluation Metrics

To measure the success of engagement activities and assess their impact, it is important to develop **key performance indicators (KPIs)** that track both the process and outcomes of public engagement. These metrics will help the City evaluate how well it is meeting its engagement goals and identify areas for improvement.

- **Diversity of participation:** The City will track the demographic diversity of participants (e.g., age, gender, income, ethnicity, geography) to ensure that feedback is representative of the community. A key goal will be to reach underrepresented groups, including equity-deserving populations and assess whether engagement activities are inclusive and accessible.
- **Implementation of feedback:** The City will track the implementation of community feedback by documenting how feedback is used to shape project outcomes or decision-making. At the end of every engagement, the City will take the high-level themes received through feedback and articulate how feedback was used to inform the outcomes and, where possible, why other feedback couldn't be implemented.
- **Engagement reach and impact:** The City will measure the reach of engagement activities (e.g., how many people we engaged through events, social media, or other channels) and assess the impact of engagement on community awareness or behaviour, especially regarding key community issues.

Policy Updates

It is crucial to conduct regular reviews of the engagement framework to maintain alignment with community needs and best practices. These reviews will ensure that the City's approach to public engagement remains flexible, inclusive and effective.

- **Biannual reviews:** The City will schedule reviews of the engagement framework and communication strategy every two years to assess its effectiveness and make necessary adjustments. This review process will involve analyzing feedback from community members, interest holders and staff to identify gaps in the current approach.
- **Incorporating best practices:** The City will stay updated on best practices in public engagement and incorporate emerging strategies or new tools (e.g., digital engagement platforms innovative outreach techniques) into the framework as the budget allows. These updates will help the City improve its engagement practices and better serve the community.
- **Adapting to community needs:** The review process will also assess whether the engagement methods meet the needs of diverse community members, particularly marginalized or underrepresented groups. If new barriers are identified (e.g., technological access, language barriers), the City will adapt the framework to address these challenges.

Capacity and Training

Building internal capacity for effective and inclusive public engagement requires ongoing staff training and development. Investing in staff skills ensures that engagement methods are implemented professionally and effectively, with cultural competency and community sensitivity at the forefront.

- **Cultural competency training:** The City will offer cultural competency training to help staff better support the unique needs and perspectives of Indigenous communities, racialized groups, people with disabilities and other marginalized populations. This training will help staff navigate sensitive cultural issues and engage with respect and understanding.
- **Continuous learning:** Encourage a culture of continuous learning by providing opportunities for staff to attend workshops, conferences, or webinars focused on conflict resolution, emerging trends and best practices in public engagement. This will keep staff updated on new engagement tools and methodologies.
- **Building relationships with community collaborators:** The City will continue to develop ongoing relationships with collaborators, including Indigenous organizations, advocacy groups and local non-profits, to leverage their expertise and networks. These collaborations can support the City's engagement efforts, especially in reaching underserved communities.