



# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

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As our growing community continues to diversify and change, the importance of public engagement is essential – and at the heart of our roles as public servants.

Quality public engagement depends on high levels of public trust and organizational competence.

Providing our City Council quality public input assists our elected leaders in making difficult decisions, and ensures community voices are heard on issues that affect them.

These decisions are made under the following conditions:

- Changing the course of existing policy
- Developing a new initiative or new service
- Responding to external events

The City of Issaquah engages with the public to:

- Identify community perspectives
- Shape effective public policy
- Inform community members on important issues and outcomes
- Address communitywide and neighborhood-specific concerns

Recognizing there's no one way to conduct effective engagement, we've developed a flexible toolkit to suggest strategies and assist project managers in the development of customized engagement plans. Depending on the issue/topic, intended audience and available timeframe, this toolkit allows project managers to scale engagement efforts to fit the community's needs and interests.

In addition, this toolkit sets a common language among departments, elected leaders and others as we strive to develop effective engagement programs. It aligns all of us – including City Council members and staff – around engagement expectations for a range of projects.

## OUR ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

- Deliver information on complex issues in a consistent and understandable format.
- Determine the right level of engagement with the right groups at the right time.
- Provide engagement opportunities early in the process.
- Train staff across all departments in effective engagement practices.
- Successfully communicate public perceptions and feedback to council.
- Identify interrelationships of projects and policies over time.

## FIVE STEPS TO ENGAGEMENT

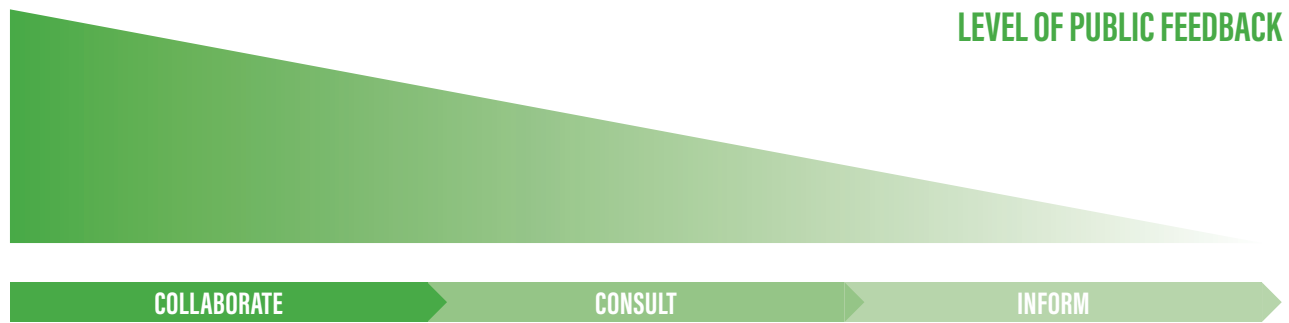
This toolkit outlines five steps you can take to ensure your project properly includes public engagement.

- 1 Assess readiness
- 2 Determine engagement level
- 3 Identify stakeholders
- 4 Select the right tools
- 5 Report and evaluate

**B**efore you start an engagement process – it’s time to assess if you are ready! Start by answering these questions. Before you move on to the next steps, be sure you can answer “yes” or “somewhat” to most of these questions to ensure your efforts will be effective.

<b>? QUESTIONS</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>SOMEWHAT</b>	<b>NO</b>
Is the issue/topic you need engagement on clearly defined? Is engagement being sought on all or nearly all aspects of the project, or only one or a few?			
Is this issue/topic of high interest or importance within the community?			
Will this issue/topic have a significant impact?			
Is this issue/topic highly visible within the community?			
Do you know who the ultimate decision maker is?			
Have you identified a project lead for engagement?			
Have you identified what success looks like (more participants, more diversity, ongoing communication, etc.)?			
Are there opportunities to combine outreach efforts on multiple issues/projects or repurpose data from previous engagement efforts?			
Do you know when engagement should be completed?			
Is there enough time for meaningful engagement?			
Does the City have the resources to effectively support a public involvement process?			
Is everyone participating in the process ready for meaningful public involvement?			
Have you involved community partners, the City’s Communication’s Team, consultants and staff from other departments who will be involved in the process or affected by the outcomes?			

There are three types of engagement, depending on the level of public feedback needed. Large-scale projects may travel through all three levels of engagement, starting with collaboration and ending with informing the community. In turn, the tools and audiences may also change throughout your project.



## COLLABORATE

Collaborate with the community from the beginning of a project to develop alternatives and identify preferred options. This is co-creation at its best! These projects are often long-term and visionary. Examples include:

- Central Issaquah Plan
- Walk 'n' Roll Plan
- Aging in Issaquah

## CONSULT

Consult with community members by educating them on a limited number of options or drafts, and asking for feedback. This option is best for projects that have already been informed via collaboration, or need engineering, design or other staff/consultant expertise to refine before engagement is effective. Please note: Some projects are first shaped by – or may be entirely the result of – code requirements, laws, engineering and public safety best practices that the City must follow. Examples include:

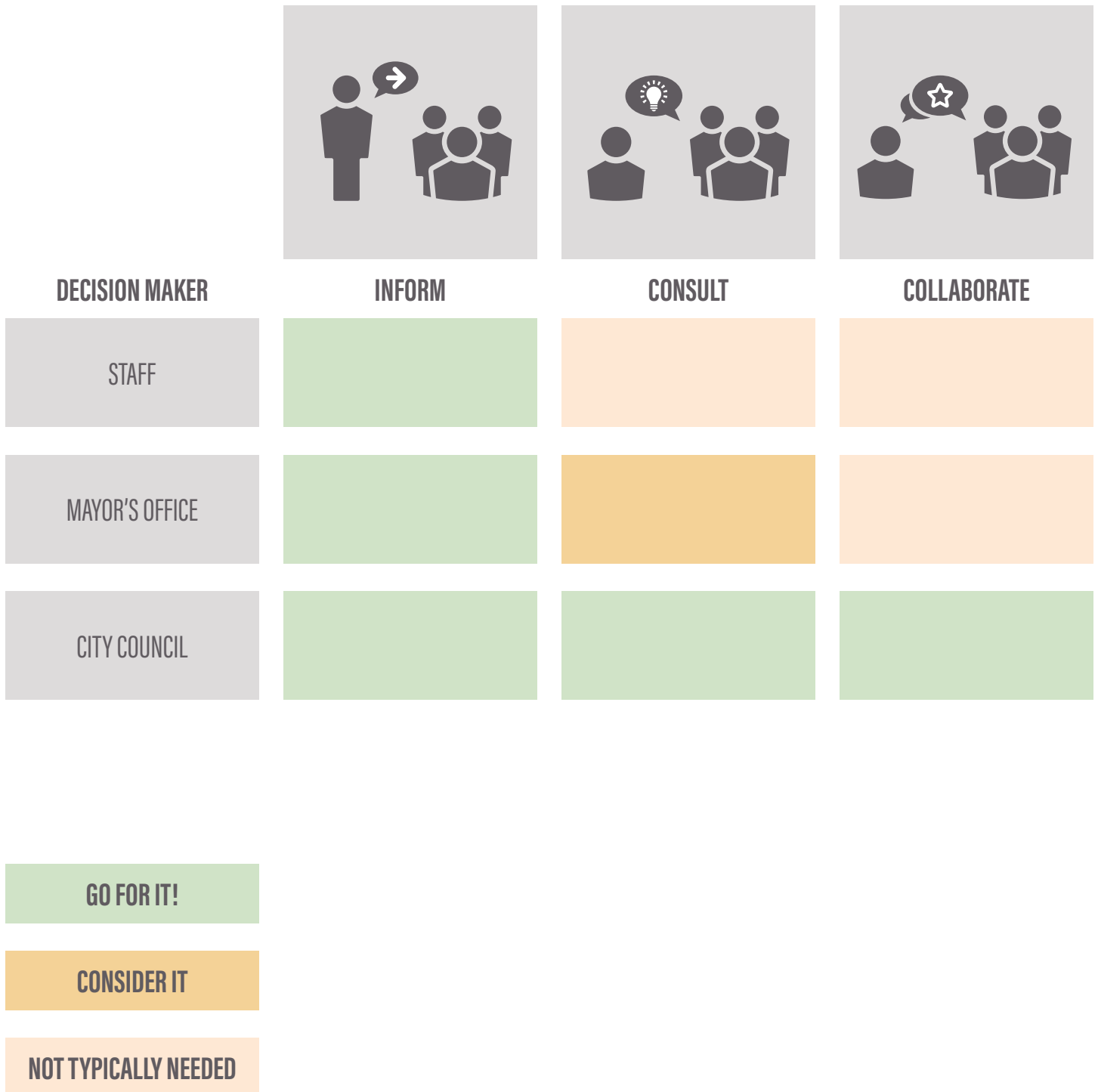
- Vote for your favorite playground design
- Build-a-road exercise
- Provide feedback on a proposed ordinance or agenda bill
- Provide feedback on the proposed budget
- Prioritize Capital Improvement Plan projects

## INFORM

Inform community members about a decision that is already made. This one-way outreach “push” provides the public with objective information to increase awareness of a decision and its impact. Please note: Some projects are first shaped by – or may be entirely the result of – code requirements, laws, engineering and public safety best practices that the City must follow. Examples include:

- Certain types of infrastructure improvements
- Road closures
- Fee increases
- Changes in service
- Emergency information

Identify where your project fits best on this chart.



**W**ho should you engage with? Consider all types of community groups, neighborhoods and audiences. Identify stakeholders at the beginning of a project — and notify them of key decision points or opportunities to provide input. Stakeholders provide community expertise that enhances the engagement process. They can also help you reach more and broader networks. Here's a sample list to get you thinking - there are plenty of other community groups that could be added, depending on your project.

GROUPS/AUDIENCES	ISSAQUAH-SPECIFIC EXAMPLES
ARTS/CULTURE	Village Theatre, artEAST, ArtWalk, Gas Station Blues, International Music Day, Concerts on the Green, Issaquah Philanthropic Orchestra, Issaquah Singers
BUSINESS	Greater Issaquah Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Issaquah Association, local businesses, large corporations, employers
FAITH ORGANIZATIONS	
COMMUNITY AT LARGE	Issaquah Farmers Market, Meet the Mayor, Salmon Days, Fourth of July, Wine Walk, Concerts on the Green, National Night Out, Issaquah Library
EDUCATION	Issaquah School District, individual schools, PTSAs, Issaquah Schools Foundation
GOVERNMENT	City Council, boards, commissions, volunteers, other agencies (Issaquah School District, King County, Metro, Sound Transit, State, etc.)
HUMAN SERVICES	Issaquah Food & Clothing Bank, Friends of Youth, Eastside Baby Corner, Catholic Community Services, Issaquah Community Services, AtWork!
MEDIA	Issaquah/Sammamish Reporter, The Seattle Times, Puget Sound Business Journal, TV (KOMO, KING, KIRO, KCPQ), Connections newspaper
MOBILITY	Cascade Bicycle Club, Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative, Getting Around Issaquah Together, pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, drivers
NEIGHBORHOODS	Issaquah Highlands, Talus, Squak, Providence Point, Olde Town, Central Issaquah, Newport, Montreux, Greenwood Point, North Issaquah, Lakeside, Sycamore
NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING	Cultural Bridges for Education, Chinese Information & Service Center, Issaquah Highlands cultural organizations
NONPROFITS	Friends of Lake Sammamish State Park, Issaquah History Museums, Friends of the Issaquah Salmon Hatchery
OUTDOORS	Issaquah Alps Trails Club, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, Friends of Lake Sammamish State Park
PROPERTY OWNERS	Commercial brokers, real estate professionals
STUDENTS	Issaquah School District, Issaquah Youth Advisory Board, Youth Center, Gibson Ek School
PARKS & RECREATION	Park and trail users, Parks and Recreation customers, Issaquah Soccer Club, Issaquah Lacrosse Club, Issaquah Little League, Issaquah Football Club
SENIORS	Issaquah Senior Center, Providence Point, Eastside Friends of Seniors, Timber Ridge, University House



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Ask yourself - or even better, your team! - these questions to ensure you are reaching stakeholders.

 Who may be affected by this issue?

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 Who can contribute to a solution that will meet the needs of a wide range of stakeholders and public audiences?

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 Who can't be left out?

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 What other City departments should be involved?

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 How does your project relate to others on which the City is currently conducting engagement?

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 How should City Council members be involved?

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Most engagement efforts will benefit from multiple strategies to inform, consult and collaborate with community. Be sure to leverage the City's "inform" tools to get the word out about opportunities for residents to make their voices heard. Please check all that apply.

### COLLABORATE

- Open City Hall (online engagement tool)
- Neighborhood meeting
- Focus groups
- Board/commission meetings
- Workshop
- Task force/committees (best for complex, long-range projects that need a group to study in-depth)

### CONSULT

- Open City Hall (online engagement tool)
- Neighborhood meeting
- Leverage existing event (i.e. Concerts on the Green, Issaquah Farmers Market, etc.)
- Focus groups
- Telephone/mailed surveys
- Board/Commission meetings
- Open house

### INFORM

- Website
- Issaquah Insider (eNews) article
- Social media (Facebook, Nextdoor, Twitter, etc.)
- Video
- E-blast subscriber list
- Personalized emails to stakeholders
- Phone calls
- Media notification
- Printed materials (handouts, letters, postcards, flyers, door hangers, banners, posters, etc.)
- Radio 1700 AM
- Variable message boards
- Podcast
- Signage/posters (onsite and throughout the community)

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

### ✓ Checklist

Ready to host a community event? Here's a quick checklist:

- Spread the word about your event! The City's Communication Team is here to help. Ensure you provide enough lead time for staff and community members to plan ahead. Typically, at least a month of lead time is necessary in order to effectively get the word out through the City's available platforms.
- Select a venue that will accommodate your audience. Venue ideas include:
  - Tibbetts Manor
  - Community Center
  - Blakely Hall
  - Pickering Barn
  - City Hall – Eagle Room
  - City Hall – Council Chambers
  - City parks
  - Issaquah Senior Center
  - Train Depot
  - Hailstone Feed Store
  - Gibson Hall
- Ensure you've included enough staff to help facilitate the event. To request trained facilitators, [fill out this form](#) on The Quah.
- Plan for what you'll need. Support Services staff can also help with supplies; fill out this form on The Quah. Consider bringing:
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Tables, chairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Large format paper and pens
<input type="checkbox"/> Laptop, projector, screen	<input type="checkbox"/> Easels
<input type="checkbox"/> Sheets for attendees to sign in and sign up for future updates	<input type="checkbox"/> Comment cards, ballpoint pens
<input type="checkbox"/> Refreshments	<input type="checkbox"/> Nametags
<input type="checkbox"/> Visual aides (posters, maps, PowerPoints, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> "What's Next" explanation
- Always provide comment cards for those who prefer to provide written input. If a community member wants to provide input later, ensure project contact information is available and/or offer a meeting with key staff.
- Ensure you have a plan for following-up with participants.

## CONVENIENT TIMES, LOCATIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY

Whenever possible, public meetings — including workshops, neighborhood meetings and open houses and other events — should be held in facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities and/or to people who rely on public transportation. In addition to hosting meetings at convenient locations, consider various times during the week or weekend to accommodate all community members.

## TYPES OF MEETINGS

There are several options for organizing a community event to leverage engagement. Typical formats include:



### WORKSHOP

- Best for collaborating with community members.
- Starts with a presentation from staff or a consultant.
- Participants break into smaller groups to discuss, brainstorm and develop ideas on key questions/issues (ensure there are enough facilitators to assist each group).
- Groups reconvene to share ideas.
- Staff takes detailed notes during the report-outs.



### NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

- Best for collaborating or consulting with community members.
- Staff travels to a neighborhood location, instead of inviting participants to City Hall.
- Starts with a presentation (oftentimes specific to that neighborhood), followed by facilitated discussion.
- Staff take detailed notes to facilitate follow-ups.



### LEVERAGE EXISTING EVENTS

- Best for consulting with community members.
- Host a City booth or table at an existing event.
- Staff are available to explain visuals, and guide participants through the engagement process (filling out comment cards, completing a survey, etc).
- Works best when staff have conceptual plans/ideas to present and receive feedback on.



### OPEN HOUSE

- Best for consulting with community members.
- Staff are available at informational stations (instead of delivering formal presentations) that present conceptual plans/ideas.
- Notes are taken on large format paper so participants can see that their feedback was heard.
- Staff take detailed notes to facilitate follow-ups.
- Can feature interactive exercises (example: "build a road").

 **OPEN CITY HALL**

Open City Hall is Issaquah's online community engagement tool, which enables the City to reach more community members than in-person meetings alone.

The tool, which offers a variety of tools to collect feedback (surveys, polls, maps, build-a-budget) and analyze results (demographics, common themes, responses by neighborhood).

For easier analysis and reporting afterwards, materials presented online – along with feedback requested – should mirror in-person engagement efforts.

Learn more by visiting the City's tool, or request a full demo from the City's Communications Team.

## WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE ENGAGEMENT

### CONTACT INFORMATION

No matter the tools you use, ensure you collect contact information from those you are engaging with. This way, you can update them on your project progress along the way, and inform them when a decision is made.

### TELL THE STORY

Also, when possible, explain your full engagement process to those you are communicating with. This ensures community members know what's already happened, and what the next steps are.

In order to identify issues, measure success and adjust plans accordingly, it's important to monitor and evaluate your project throughout the entire process.

Once you've conducted engagement for your project, now is the time to use it! Ensure you share your engagement process – and results – with:

- Those who provided input (use the contact information you collected during the engagement process to close the loop).
- The larger community (using the City's "inform" tools).
- The decision makers. For large-scale projects – especially those that include collaboration (and sometimes consulting) – provide your results via agenda bills and/or committee or full council presentations. When possible, package the actual feedback for council members to review, and be sure to provide a recap.

It's important to note that effective engagement can draw out competing values and doesn't always provide clear consensus.

Afterwards, take time to evaluate and reflect on your engagement process. Find ways to ask your participants for feedback on the engagement process itself. Ideas include asking the question at the end of a public meeting, via email or in an online survey.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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|---|--|
| ❓ Was my engagement topic clearly defined?                                  | ❓ What was the feedback from the decision makers?              |
| ❓ Did I make adequate efforts to engage those most affected by the project? | ❓ Was there enough time allotted for meaningful engagement?    |
| ❓ Was my project successful? Why or why not?                                | ❓ What other resources did I need?                             |
| ❓ Was the project delivered on time?  | ❓ Do the tools and/or activities achieve inclusive engagement? |
| ❓ What was the feedback from community members?                             | ❓ What should I plan for next time?                            |
|   | ❓ Who else should I have partnered with?                       |

The following engagement toolkits served as valuable resources, and were often incorporated into this customized version for the City of Issaquah.

- City of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: "Public Involvement: Guidelines, tools and worksheets for successful community engagement"
- City of San Luis Obispo, California: "Public Engagement and Noticing Manual"
- Oregon Metro: "Public Engagement Guide"
- City of Seattle, Washington: "Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide"



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