



CITY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO



MAY 2023

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND NOTICING MANUAL

# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION ..... 2

PRINCIPLES & CHALLENGES..... 4

GETTING STARTED – QUICK GUIDE ..... 5

STEP 1: UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION ..... 6

STEP 2: DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE ..... 7

STEP 3: IDENTIFY LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT..... 13

STEP 4: DEVELOP ACTION PLAN ..... 18

    Engagement Toolbox..... 19

STEP 5: REVIEW AND EVALUATE ..... 22

APPENDIX..... 23

TEMPLATES..... 23



# INTRODUCTION

Communities work best when residents, organizations, and institutions are engaged and working together for the good of all. San Luis Obispo is no exception. The people who live, work, and play here take enormous pride in this City and care deeply about keeping it healthy and vibrant.

Our City wants to accommodate different perspectives and encourage more residents to be informed and involved in shaping decisions. The City recognizes that participation in public policy decisions and public services, programs and projects is an important aspect of democracy.

Note that marketing of city services is generally managed department by department. For example, the Parks and Recreation Department enrolls residents in classes; the Utilities Department educates the community on water conservation; and SLO Fire Department follows up EMS calls with satisfaction surveys.

While there are elements of marketing in all communication outreach, we're talking about something different here: improving communication efforts so people get involved in decisions on topics that affect them. Ensuring that community members know what's going on and getting them involved in the process will help generate consensus decisions, enhance transparency, and foster greater trust.

The City seeks to offer community members tangible and impactful opportunities to participate, including setting priorities and shaping the future of San Luis Obispo, and thus the City intentionally invests in equitable community engagement.

The following pages are designed to make staff and officials think about the best approach to encourage active and diverse public participation. This guide outlines considerations and steps that staff can use as reference for engaging the public on a wide variety of issues.

## Public Engagement, Defined

What is public engagement? According to the Institute for Local Government, public engagement is defined as the activities by which members of the public become more informed about and/or influence public decisions.<sup>1</sup> It usually includes a combination of providing access to relevant public information, gathering input, discussing, connecting, identifying, and providing choices, and allowing for deliberation on major public decisions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Local Government, "[What is Public Engagement & Why Should I Do It?](#)", Aug. 31, 2016



## Purpose of this Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help City employees:

- Develop a comprehensive, equitable, and consistent approach to public engagement and outreach.
- Provide opportunities to participate for impacted or interested marginalized groups.
- Identify impacted or interested community members and create an engaged and representative group of involved community members.
- Determine the appropriate level of public engagement for each public policy decision, public project, or public program.
- Implement timelines and strategies that fit individual projects and ensure the public has access to accurate and relevant public information.
- Understand how public engagement efforts can be measured.
- Streamline the processes of public engagement both internally and externally.

---

*The City of San Luis Obispo expects City staff to use this manual as a guide for developing public engagement plans for everything from existing public services to new public projects, public policy decisions, significant public events, and more.*

---

## Benefits of Public Engagement

Engaging diverse communities on public projects, policy decisions or changes, or public programs can help City staff in a variety of ways. Some of the benefits include:

- Solutions that best meet the public's needs,
- Fewer project delays caused by needing to rework solutions late in the process or unforeseen controversy,
- Increased support for solutions,
- Less chance of going over budget because the solutions were not acceptable to the public or the project team missed something the public cared about, and
- Increased trust.



# PRINCIPLES & CHALLENGES

When developing your plan, keep in mind the following principles and potential challenges:

**Plan Ahead and Follow Up.** It's important for staff to spend time developing an engagement plan before decisions are made and to follow up once key decisions are made. Give yourself time to prepare the plan, get input and feedback, and implement the plan. Give community members adequate time to be informed, educated, and interested. Likewise, after a decision is made, be sure to do the appropriate follow up to close the loop with key impacted or interested community members, partners, and anyone you engaged throughout the process. If you don't follow up, participants may feel that their contribution was ignored or pointless and may not engage with the City again. This doesn't mean that feedback is automatically implemented, but you must communicate why or why not and how. For example, if you posted a survey to Open City Hall, be sure to post the outcome there once it is known. If you posted a news item to [slocity.org](http://slocity.org), follow up with a news item about the decision.

**Do it Right, Not Rushed.** Focus on striking a balance between what is fair and what is fast. We may have deadlines we need to reach, and it's important to consider those deadlines as you engage the community. But it's more important to think about how you can involve the right people at the right time and get meaningful feedback or input. Take your time and be thoughtful in your approach. It is imperative to engage anyone who may be connected to the project or item, and specifically to engage the people most affected by a decision (i.e., a change in the hours at the pool may not be a large-scale issue but is of keen interest to swimmers). Activities should include demographic surveys/questions to determine if participants are representative of the demographic makeup of San Luis Obispo. No one likes to be surprised by a change or given short notice. Start early and keep in touch.

**Cultivate Community Connections.** The City government cannot solve every issue on its own. We need an engaged community to work with us to solve complex problems. That requires relationship-building and trust. Whether you'd like a more diverse audience to attend your event, more meaningful input, more productive feedback, or new ideas, you cannot do it alone. Cultivate relationships with different community members, community-based organizations, nonprofit groups, and City staff and officials. Ask them for their help getting the word out. Shift the question from "what do you want?" to "what would you do?" and, ultimately, "what should we do, together?" This takes the public out of the role of an individualistic consumer of public services to being part of a team effort to address problems.

**Focus on Quality, Not Just Quantity.** Some groups face barriers that can make establishing relationships or communicating with them more challenging such as language barriers and literacy, and access to technology issues. Place a high value on comprehensive engagement. Extra consideration is needed to ensure that there is equitable access to information for all impacted or interested community members. Reach out to nonprofits, businesses, faith-based or spiritual organizations, and other groups and work with them to help you engage hard-to-reach groups. At the same time, we know the City has limited resources. Time, staffing resources, financial resources, and community interest are all limited. Rather than trying to do it all, focus on actions that will help you solve the problem and focus on getting productive, quality feedback or ideas from a diverse group of people or communities who are impacted by the decision. Give your project the attention it requires and equitably incorporate diverse people, voices, ideas, and information to help lay the groundwork for quality outcome.



# GETTING STARTED – QUICK GUIDE

## **Step 1: Understand the Current Situation**

Before you can develop a successful public engagement plan, it's important to fully understand the situation. This requires some research and analysis. This is not the time to develop tactics for your engagement plan. Rather, this is the time to focus solely on the facts related to the problem you are trying to solve or opportunity you are working to seize. If you don't understand the problem or the opportunity, you will not be able to explain it to someone else. This is your chance to fully understand the issue at hand and lay the groundwork for a successful public engagement plan.

## **Step 2: Define Audiences – Who are impacted or interested?**

It's important to identify who has an interest, in a particular issue, decision or outcome before you can develop a successful public engagement plan. This includes people who will benefit from the decision, people who could be negatively impacted, and those who are simply interested in the topic. This also includes people within the City organization as well as community members and community-based organizations. Likewise, it's important to identify who will make the formal decisions for this topic, issue, or project. Some decisions will be made at the staff level, by Department Heads, by Advisory Bodies, or by City Council. Identifying the impacted or interested community members and decisionmakers early on will help you avoid false expectations and identify the appropriate level of public engagement needed. Also, consider leaning on fellow City staff who already have strong connections with community-based organizations.

## **Step 3: Identify the Appropriate Level of Public Engagement**

Determining the accurate level of engagement is the foundation for your entire plan. Once you have a better understanding of the current situation and your well-defined audiences, now it's important to identify the appropriate level of engagement that is needed. Public engagement does not mean inviting as many people as possible or making a new project profile on every social media platform. Sometimes one event and posting to the City's primary social media accounts is sufficient, other times you'll need several or you will need to create spaces that respond directly to cultural, and language needs to develop an appropriate level of engagement. This guide has tools that can help you determine the appropriate level of engagement depending on both the decisionmakers and the impacted or interested community members. The level of public engagement can range from keeping the public informed to involving the public's participation in the decision-making process. Involving the public early and at the appropriate level can lead to better decisions and helps create community buy-in.

## **Step 4: Develop Engagement Plan, Including Any Follow-Up**

Now that you understand the situation, have defined your audiences, and have identified the appropriate level of engagement, you can develop your action plan. For this, you will need to identify resources, outreach tools, and deadlines. Each task in the action plan should start with a verb. Consider making your plan and timeline available to the public for awareness. For example, "Host 3 focus groups; or "Develop a project landing page on the website."

## **Step 5: Review and Evaluate**

Take the time to evaluate your plan during and after implementation. We are all busy, which means evaluation can get overlooked in the rush to the next assignment or project. However, evaluating what worked - and what didn't work - can lead to future successes.



# STEP 1: UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION

Before you can develop a successful public engagement plan, it's important to fully understand the situation. This requires some research and analysis. This is not the time to develop tactics for your engagement plan. Rather, this is the time to focus solely on the facts related to the problem you are trying to solve or opportunity you are working to seize. If you don't understand the problem or the opportunity, you will not be able to explain it to someone else. This is your chance to fully understand the issue at hand and lay the groundwork for a successful public engagement plan.

A successful public engagement plan will help you determine how a specific course of action will solve a well-defined problem or seize a well-defined opportunity. This is your chance to define that problem or opportunity. Ask yourself the following questions. *Note: Staff members do not have to answer all these questions. Rather, the questions are to get staff member to be thinking about the big picture and whole situation. Staff can use the provided workbook to describe the current situation.*

- What is the problem we are trying to solve?
- What are your objectives or goals for this project?
- How might you measure the success of engagement? (See: *Step 5 – Review and Evaluate* for suggestions)
- What is the action, program, project or policy you need to communicate?
- How significantly will this item affect people?
- Who will make the final decision on this item? Is it a staff decision? Is it subject to advisory body review? Will City Council ultimately receive the item for action?
- What history or past actions has led up to this issue? What has the City done in the past? Who has the City engaged on this topic in the past?
- How are different groups impacted? Is there quantitative data to demonstrate impacts or benefits?
- What resources are available? How much time and money are available?
- Do you have a team to help you, and, if so, what are their roles?
- What does success look like?
- When does outreach need to happen? Is there a current project timeline? Are there milestones or deadlines that need to be met?
- Are there barriers to participation? What are they?
- What group(s) will be the most impacted by this?
- How will underrepresented community members be affected? (Such as but not limited to BIPOC, low-income, disabled, elderly, non-English speakers, families with young children, students, unhoused, and LGBTQIA+.)
- How does work already being done help to address community concerns?
- Who/how will data gathered be input, analyzed, or summarized?
- Are there local, state or federal laws or regulations you need to consider?
- Are there any City staff members or City teams outside of the direct project team who might be impacted by the decision or might have connections with community-based organizations that will be impacted?
- Are there potential financial or economic impacts, positive or negative to the City?
- What might go wrong? How might your approach mitigate for challenges?
- What are you hoping to achieve through improved communications?
- What are the desired outcomes? How will you measure your success?



## STEP 2: DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE



It's important to identify who has an interest, in a particular issue, decision or outcome before you can develop a successful public engagement plan. This includes people who will benefit from the decision, people who could be negatively impacted, and those who are simply interested in the topic. This also includes people within the City organization as well as community members and community-based organizations.

Likewise, it's important to identify who will make the formal decisions for this topic, issue, or project. Some decisions will be made at the staff level, by Department Heads, by Advisory Bodies, or by City Council. Identifying the impacted or interested community members and decisionmakers early on will help you avoid false expectations and identify the appropriate level of public engagement needed. Also, consider leaning on fellow City staff who already have strong connections with community-based organizations.

Much of your success in engaging the public will be based on your understanding of the audiences. It's important to clearly define your audiences to ensure that you can ultimately solve the problem or seize the opportunity. When defining audiences, consider historical context and how such audiences or community groups are now reclaiming their own identities and definitions.

**Note: Please reach out to the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion if you have questions about identities or definitions.**

You will likely have more than one audience. It's a good practice to identify at least three target audiences and define those groups as best as you can. Depending on the complexity of the issue, you may find that you have more than three specific target audiences. Think about both internal staff and external impacted or interested community members<sup>2</sup>. Also include the decisionmakers as part of your specific target audiences. In your engagement plan, use a brief paragraph to describe each well-defined audience.

Pay particular attention to underserved/underrepresented groups who are traditionally harder to reach and engage with but who are still impacted by certain decisions, such as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) community members, low-income, elderly, those with disabilities, non-

---

<sup>2</sup> Community members include people who live here, people who go to school here, people who work here, or people who play here (or any combination of the three).





English speakers, families with young children, students, unhoused, and our LGBTQIA+ community members.

For many underrepresented/underserved community members, providing feedback is often challenging due to language barriers, financial constraints, and time constraints and the need to work, transportation issues, and a lack of childcare. Consider incentivizing their participation by providing non-traditional accommodations that will enable them to participate such as extended hours for feedback, interpretation services, and other incentives such as childcare, food if the meeting is during a typical meal time (breakfast, lunch, dinner).

To start, ask yourself the following questions.

1. **Who will be impacted positively or negatively?** Consider geography (those who live, work or play nearby); consider financial impact (those who might not be able to afford the changes). Consider those who have the most to lose or the most to gain by the decision or outcome.
2. **Who NEEDS to know about this?** Consider if there is a legal requirement or if there are groups with an imperative interest or who have significant influence. Consider whose life or schedule stands to be altered by an aspect of this issue or project.
3. **Who can or will contribute to this conversation?** Consider the interested parties, the experts, outside sources that discuss this same topic, voices with historical knowledge and understanding, etc. Consider who already knows about this issue and is interested.
4. **Who or what is missing?** Consider what obstacles might be preventing them from engaging on this topic. Each impacted or interested community members list should consider:
  - Experts and professionals
  - Clubs and community groups
  - Personal interest groups
  - Underserved/underrepresented populations
5. **Who may not be in favor this project?** Consider groups or individuals who will dislike the idea or be extremely impacted by the decision.
6. **Who could improve this project?** Consider people with unique perspectives or relevant personal experience. For example, people whose kids attend a local school have experiencing traveling on nearby roads at peak times.

### **UNDERSERVED/UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES IN SAN LUIS OBISPO**

The San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) has defined underserved communities as disproportionately burdened areas in the region that are economically distressed and/or historically underrepresented as a part of the local government process. As noted in the City's Climate Adaptation and Safety Element of the General Plan, there are 13 variables that address a wide range of socioeconomic and population-based factors to geographically define areas. The 13 variables are:

- Racial Minority
- Ethnic Minority
- Disability Status
- Household Income
- Free or Reduced-Price Meals
- Educational Attainment
- Language Proficiency
- Renter Affordability
- Housing Ownership Affordability



- Older Adults: Age 75 Years and Older
- Youth: Age 15 Years and Under
- Households with No Vehicle Available
- Households with No Computing Device Available

A detailed and interactive map of these locations can be found on SLOCOG’s website at <https://slocog.org/programs/data-services/gis-mapping/disadvantaged-communities>.

## GROUPS BY INTEREST AREA

Certain topics interest everyone, regardless of an individual’s ability, language, or background. Therefore, it’s important to make sure you engage diverse audiences and understand the barriers of engagement for traditionally underserved or underrepresented communities.

Below are examples of topics or interests and potential impacted or interested community members who can be engaged for each based on the specific City policy or project. **This is not a comprehensive list; instead, the groups listed here are meant to get staff thinking beyond the obvious audiences for these topics.**

For a complete and up-to-date list including media contacts, please contact the City’s Public Communications Program at [communications@slocity.org](mailto:communications@slocity.org).

**Access & Parking:** Neighborhood groups; HOAs and Mobile Home Park communities; Cal Poly students; business owners and managers; property owners and property managers; people who work in SLO but don’t live here; people who visit SLO; people who use alternative modes of transportation than cars; parents of school-aged children; people with disabilities; undocumented community members; other underserved or underrepresented groups that are economically impacted by access and parking changes.



**Arts & Culture:** Literature or writing organizations; visual arts organizations; performing arts organizations; cinema organizations, musicians, architects, cultural and multicultural organizations, members of the business community, hospitality/tourism organizations, organizations that host communitywide events, PCC event grant recipients and applicants, parents of school-aged children, seniors, and other underserved or underrepresented groups that would benefit from arts and cultural programs or events.

**Business, Commerce & Economy:** People who work in SLO, business organizations, local business owners and managers, economic development organizations, tourism and hospitality organizations, local merchants, local chapters of trade or professional development organizations, college programs that focus on business and entrepreneurship, minority-owned businesses and trade organizations, consumers and shoppers, young professionals, etc.





**Child Care & Education:** Organizations that serve youths; PTAs; local youth boards of various nonprofits; K-12 schools and districts (public, private and charter); family-serving organizations; parents who home-school their children; organizations that focus on at-risk, underserved or underrepresented youth and families; local businesses interested in providing child care as an employee benefit; faith-based organizations; recreation programs; literacy and learning programs; foster care families and children; literacy and tutoring organizations; etc.

**Environment:** Contractors and builders; environmental organizations; outdoor and recreation organizations; green or active transportation organizations; wildlife and nature conservation organizations; local K-12 schools; college students focused on environmental-related fields; business owners and managers; homeowners and renters; local native tribes and organizations; underserved and underrepresented groups; etc.

**Housing & Development:** Neighborhood groups, property owners, building and construction contractors and developers, local surveyors and engineers associations, local trade organizations; local housing and homeless service providers; local native tribes and organizations; environmental organizations; wildlife and nature conservation organizations; local college communities (students, faculty, staff, etc.); low-income communities; the “missing middle”; groups that serve community members with disabilities; etc.

**Homelessness:** Social service providers; housing providers; home builders; HASLO and Peoples Self Help Housing; nonprofits that help those at risk of becoming homeless; nonprofits that help those who are homeless; currently unhoused community members; law enforcement agencies; public works agencies; parks maintenance agencies; business owners and managers; homeowners and renters; local native tribes and organizations; underserved and underrepresented groups; etc.

**Neighborhood:** Neighborhood groups or other identified neighborhood areas, NextDoor, Student Community Liaison Committee, Homeowners Associations (owners & renters), Residents for Quality Neighborhoods, Save our Downtown, Alta Vista, Neighborhoods North of Foothill, Cal Poly Black Academic Excellence Center, Cal Poly Black Student Union, Cal Poly Multicultural Center, Cuesta Cultural Center, Latino Outreach Council, NAACP SLO, Northern Chumash, R.A.C.E. Matters SLO, GALA Pride and Diversity Center, Promotores Collaborative of San Luis Obispo, SLO County Undocusupport, Independent Living Resource Center, PathPoint SLO County, Cal Poly Disability Resource Center, Tri-Counties



Regional Center, Cuesta College Disability Support Programs & Services, UCP of SLO, The Link Family Resource Center, Building a Better SLO.

**Safety:** Local law enforcement agencies; local fire safety groups; neighborhood watch groups. currently unhoused community members; park rangers; business owners and managers; homeowners and renters; local native tribes and organizations; people who work in SLO but don't live here; parents of school-aged children; local college communities; people with disabilities; undocumented community members; underserved or underrepresented groups that are disproportionately impacted by crime; etc.

**Recreation:** Recreational sport teams and groups; Spanish-speaking parents; parents of school-aged children; people with disabilities; undocumented community members; low-income families; seniors; homeowners and renters; local native tribes and organizations; local youth organizations and youth boards; local K-12 schools; local colleges; child care organizations; multicultural organizations; young professionals; community gardeners; etc.

**Transportation:** Local law enforcement agencies; local fire safety groups; neighborhood watch groups. currently unhoused community members; contractors and builders; environmental organizations; outdoor and recreation organizations; green or active transportation organizations; wildlife and nature conservation organizations; park rangers; business owners and managers; homeowners and renters; local native tribes and organizations; people who live in SLO but commute elsewhere for work; people who work in SLO but don't live here; Spanish-speaking parents; parents of school-aged children; people with disabilities; undocumented community members; low-income community members; etc.

## UNDERSTANDING SAN LUIS OBISPO'S POPULATION

When identifying audiences and impacted or interested community members, it's important to think about not only the issues but demographics. Each specific target audience will have different lived experiences and different interests, needs, desires, or preferences for communication. According to the US Census Bureau [\(2021\)](#),

there are 47,545 people in San Luis Obispo living in 19,035 households. Of those:

- Age Range:
  - Age 17 and younger: 14.1%
  - Age 18 to 64: 72.6%
  - Age 65+: 13.3%
- Sex:
  - 49.1% are female
  - 50.1% are male
- Language:
  - About 83% speak only English
  - About 17% speak other languages (11% speak Spanish)
- 3.4% are veterans
- Disabilities: 5.6% are under age 65 and live with a disability; There are many types of disabilities which can restrict participation, such as those that affect a person's:
  - Vision
  - Hearing
  - Movement or the ability to get from one place to another
  - Thinking
  - Remembering
  - Learning



- Communicating
- Education:
  - 94.9% high school graduate or higher
  - 51.6% bachelor's degree or higher
- Race and Ethnicity:
  - 82.4% are white alone
  - 33.2% are BIPOC (Non-White Race and Hispanic Origin)
    - 18.5% Hispanic or Latino
    - 7.2% two or more races
    - 5.3% Asian/Asian American/Desi
    - 1.6% Black or African American
    - 0.4% Indigenous or native American
    - 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 1,942 employers
  - 907 men-owned businesses
  - 351 women-owned businesses
  - 259 minority-owned businesses
  - 1,333 nonminority-owned businesses
- 385 people are experiencing homelessness<sup>3</sup>
  - 248 sheltered individuals
  - 137 unsheltered individuals
- Income levels in SLO<sup>4</sup>

INCOME GROUP	AFFORDABLE HOUSING INCOME LEVEL BY NUMBER OF PERSONS IN HOUSEHOLD							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Acutely Low	\$11,500	\$13,100	\$14,750	\$16,400	\$17,700	\$19,000	\$20,350	\$21,650
Extremely Low	\$23,000	\$26,250	\$29,550	\$32,800	\$35,450	\$38,050	\$41,910	\$46,630
Very low	\$38,300	\$43,800	\$49,250	\$54,700	\$59,100	\$63,500	\$67,850	\$72,250
Low	\$61,250	\$70,000	\$78,750	\$87,500	\$94,500	\$101,500	\$108,500	\$115,500
Median*	\$76,450	\$87,350	\$98,300	\$109,200	\$117,950	\$126,650	\$135,400	\$144,150
Moderate*	\$91,750	\$104,850	\$117,950	\$131,050	\$141,550	\$152,000	\$162,500	\$173,000

### HARD-TO-REACH COMMUNITY MEMBERS

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, hard-to-reach populations are group with a real or perceived barrier to full and representative inclusion. This can include groups who are **hard to locate** because they prefer to remain private, **hard to contact** because they are highly mobile, **hard to persuade** because they lack a trust in government, or **hard to interview** because of communication or technology barriers. Traditionally hard-to-reach groups can include youth,

<sup>3</sup> Source: San Luis Obispo County 2022 Point in Time Count, City of San Luis Obispo data

<sup>4</sup> Updated July 2022, from CA State Department of Housing and Community Development official income limits.

\*Median and moderate income shown for reference only. This is not an official Affordable Housing Income Level.



people experiencing homelessness, Limited-English Proficient (LEP) speakers, low-income community members, people with disabilities, and the elderly. These groups may require an extra emphasis on establishing relationships. Likewise, an awareness of barriers people face is vital when creating a public engagement plan. These barriers should always be considered.

### PEOPLE WITH COMMUNICATIONS DISABILITIES

People who have vision, hearing, or speech disabilities (“communication disabilities”) use different ways to communicate.

- For people who are **blind, have vision loss, or are deaf-blind**, this includes providing a qualified reader; information in large print, Braille, or electronically for use with a computer screen-reading program; or an audio recording of printed information. A “qualified” reader means someone who can read effectively, accurately, and impartially.
- For people who are **deaf, have hearing loss, or are deaf-blind**, this includes providing a qualified notetaker; a qualified sign language interpreter, oral interpreter, cued-speech interpreter, or tactile interpreter; real-time captioning; written materials; or a printed script of a stock speech (such as given on a museum or historic house tour). A “qualified” interpreter means someone who can interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively.
- For people who have **speech disabilities**, this may include providing a qualified speech-to-speech transliterator (a person trained to recognize unclear speech and repeat it clearly), especially if the person will be speaking at length. In some situations, keeping paper and pencil on hand so the person can write out words that staff cannot understand or simply allowing more time to communicate with someone who uses a communication board or device may provide effective communication. Always listen attentively and don’t be afraid to ask the person to repeat a word or phrase.

Consult with the person who has a communication disability to discuss what auxiliary aid or service is appropriate. The City is required to give primary consideration to the choice of aid or service requested by the person who has a communication disability. The City must honor the person’s choice, unless another equally effective means of communication is available or that the use of the means chosen would result in an undue burden, which is defined as significant difficulty or expense considering all resources available to fund the project, program, service, or activity and the effect on other expenses or operations. A Department Head should make the decision that the person’s chosen aid or service would result in an undue burden and provide a written statement of the reasons for reaching that conclusion. Even if the choice expressed by the person with a disability would result in an undue burden, the City still has an obligation to provide an alternative aid or service that provides effective communication, if one is available. <sup>5</sup> *Note: For a list of auxiliary aids and services, contact the City’s Public Communications Program at [communications@slocity.org](mailto:communications@slocity.org).*

## STEP 3: IDENTIFY LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

<sup>5</sup> Source: U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, “[ADA Requirements: Effective Communication](#),” Feb.28, 2020





Now that you have identified your decisionmakers and impacted or interested community members, it's time to identify the appropriate level of engagement needed for your project to be successful.




Think of engagement as a spectrum. Expectations, promises and effort will change with each level of the spectrum. For this guide, we are referencing the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process: Inform, Consult, or Collaborate.

Deciding which tools to use depends on a variety of factors, including the overall impact, the level of interest, the decisionmakers and the resources available. This is where the Spectrum of Community Engagement and Impacted or interested community members Mapping tools below are essential. Use these tools to evaluate the level of impact and the group's potential level of concern to identify your public engagement plan's objectives, then prioritize your outreach and choose appropriate methods based on those objectives.

For example, if you are recommending changes to the Municipal Code or updates to Zoning regulations, consider the community's interest in the issue and people it impacts or benefits. Insignificant administrative changes or changes that align our local Municipal Code with State and Federal law would probably fall under "Inform". However, if the changes are related to a hot topic or will have a significant impact or benefit (even if just on a few) or a broad impact or benefit on many, then it would maybe fall under the other categories.



# SPECTRUM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

OBJECTIVES & INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION			
	Inform	Consult	Collaborate
			
<b>Public Participation Goal</b>	Provide the public with balanced and objective information that will create better understanding of the problem, decision, alternatives, opportunities, or solutions.	Gather feedback on goals, processes, shared metrics, or strategies for change.	Partner with the impacted or interested community members in each aspect of the decision, especially to develop alternatives and identify the preferred solution.
<b>Promise to the Public</b>	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will keep you informed about the problem or opportunity; we will look to you for creative and innovative solutions and will incorporate those ideas into recommendations as much as possible.
<b>Decisionmaker</b>	Required if decisionmaker is City staff, Department Heads, City Manager, Advisory Bodies, or City Council.	Required if decisionmaker is City Manager, Advisory Bodies, or City Council  Optional if decisionmaker is City staff or Department Heads	Required if a new solution is needed AND the decisionmaker is City Council;  Optional if decisionmaker is City staff, Department Heads, City Manager, or Advisory Bodies





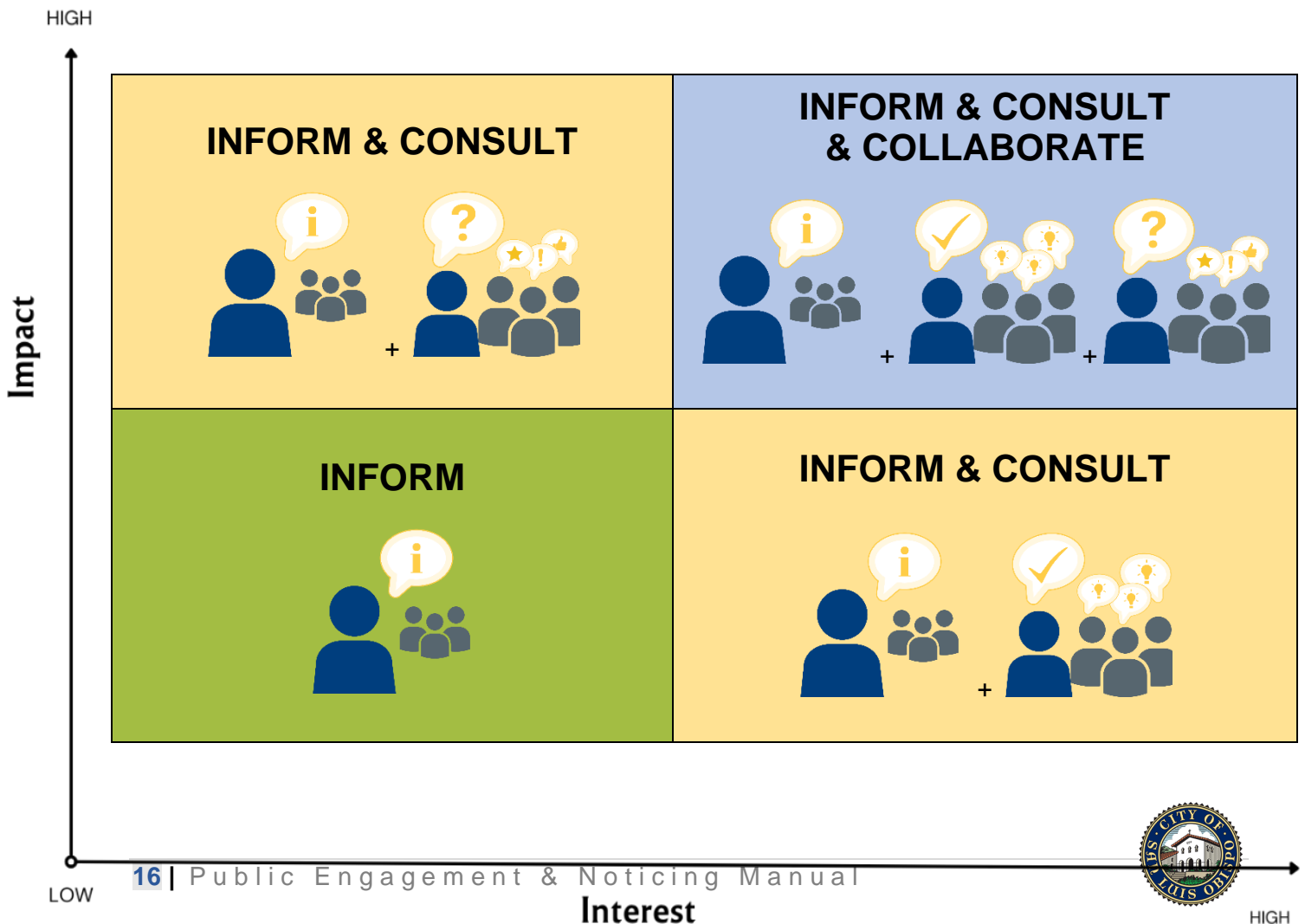
<b>Example Topics</b>	City procedures or process; Existing programs and service; Project updates; Construction impacts	New programs or services; Expanded or changing programs, projects or services; Transportation, transit or parking project, service, or policy changes; General rate or fee increases	Solution without a draft plan yet; New land use or housing policies; New local laws; Major plans (e.g., General Plan, homelessness, DEI, economic dev., housing, climate action)
-----------------------	--	--	--

## AUDIENCE MAPPING

Use the mapping tool below to help you determine the level of engagement for each audience based on their level of interest and the level of impact the decision will have on their lives.

For example, if a group has a high interest in a topic, but it will have a low impact on their lives, you may want to focus on informing and consulting that group. Or if the group has a high interest in the topic and the decision will have a high impact on their lives, you may want to focus on all three levels of engagement throughout the duration of your project.

*Note: This is not the only tool available to identify the appropriate level of engagement, but this tool can help you get started in conjunction with the spectrum tool on the previous page.*





## STEP 4: DEVELOP ACTION PLAN

Now that you understand your audiences and the level of engagement required, use tables on the next few pages to help you identify the best tools and resources needed for your engagement plan.

When developing your action plan:

- choose a mix of digital, print, and other informational materials;
- consider collaborating with community partners such as nonprofits, faith-based and spiritual organizations, schools, and/or businesses to help with outreach;
- choose a mix of in-person and online activities;
- create a timeline, budget, staff time implications (your department and other departments as applicable);
- identify diverse locations to hold meetings with target audiences in mind;
- consider how you might make each stage or task accessible to everyone (Will you need translation or interpretation services? Is the location accessible to people with disabilities and is it easy to find (visible and easy to understand signage)?

**The next few pages provide an Engagement Toolbox with a list of tools that you can use depending on the level of engagement needed.**

Some tools are expected, others are additional. It may take a few minutes to review the tools, but knowing what is available before you start will save you time and effort.

Use the following questions and review the Engagement Toolbox to choose appropriate tools that will help you achieve the best outcomes:

1. Does this satisfy the public's expectations and needs?
2. Does this project have the resources (funds, time, staff, etc.) to properly execute the use of each tool?
3. Is each tool appropriate for the stage of the project?



# Engagement Toolbox



## INFORM

Regardless of who is the decisionmaker, what you do to successfully inform the public of your topic or item varies depending on the audience. This “inform” level of public engagement focuses primarily on one-way communication from the City to community members to inform them about a public project, event, or upcoming meeting. Below are the expectations for staff who need to inform the community, as well as additional information tools that are available, if needed.

### EXPECTATION

- Post information on a highly visible place via department’s section of SLOcity.org
- Share information via City News stories and email updates, in English and Spanish
- Share information via social media, in English and Spanish
- Present information to applicable advisory bodies, if needed
- Share via key contacts and partner organizations
- Notify the public via legal notice, if required  
(The City Clerk’s Office and City Attorney’s Office can assist with identifying whether legal notice is required and in preparing and submitting the notice for publication; the [Community Development Department has its own notification standards](#) for private development projects.)

### ADDITIONAL TOOLS

#### Digital:

- Website landing page
- New section of slocity.org
- City news stories and news releases
- Events (community calendars)
- FAQs
- Regular internal email updates
- City email updates (subscribers)
- City Manager Report slide at Council
- Open City Hall Announcement Email (to Open City Hall members)
- E-newsletters
- E-flyers/blasts
- Text message alerts (opt-in only)
- Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Nextdoor, YouTube, LinkedIn)

#### Direct mail:

- Postcards
- Letters
- Flyers
- Utility bill inserts

#### Special Events:

- Groundbreaking / ribbon cutting
- Speaking engagements (SLO Chamber events, Rotary meetings, etc.)
- A booth at different events, including Expos, Farmers Market, open houses,
- Webinars or information sessions
- Open houses or public facility tour

#### Signage:

- Digital signage in City facilities
- Door hangers
- Posters
- Flyers for community bulletin boards
- Billboards
- Small signs
- Interior signs
- Banners

#### Local news media:

- Media interviews
- Letters to the editor
- Guest articles/contributed stories



#### **Paid ad campaigns:**

- Social media ads
- Print ads
- Search engine ads
- Local news media ads
- Movie theater ads Podcast and radio ads



## **CONSULT**

This “consult” level of public engagement focuses on two-way communication and generally includes instances where local officials ask for the individual views or recommendations of community members about proposed public actions and decisions that have been identified or the scope is limited due to previous Council direction (e.g., study session) or other regulations. Below are the expectations for staff who need to consult the community, and additional consultation tools that are available.

### **EXPECTATION**

All tools listed in “Inform” expectations above, plus one or more of the following:

- Create a more formal Open City Hall topic with a poll, with a survey, formal feedback
- Host a pop-up informational booth in affected or surrounding neighborhoods, if applicable
- Present a study session at a relevant Advisory Body meeting or City Council meeting and note direction and public comment, if applicable
- Host listening sessions to get specific community concerns and understand expectations
- Prepare an item/presentation for a public hearing (if legally required)

### **ADDITIONAL**

Any additional tools listed in “Inform” above, plus:

- Present a study session at a City Council meeting and invite community groups to participate
- Host listening sessions to get specific community concerns and understand expectations
- Listening sessions
- Focus groups
- Special surveys (telephone survey, mailed survey)
- Neighborhood meetings or workshops, using feedback gathering technology





## COLLABORATE

Regardless of who is the decisionmaker, what you do to successfully collaborate with the public of your topic or item varies depending on the audience. This “collaborate” level of public engagement is characterized by two-way communication and refers to open-ended processes through which impacted or interested community members receive or provide new ideas on the topic at hand and feedback to decisionmakers. Below are the expectations for staff who need to collaborate with the community, as well as additional collaboration tools that are available, if needed.

### EXPECTATION

All tools listed in “Inform” and “Consult” expectations above, plus one or more of the following:

- Create an Open City Hall topic with annotations or ideas
- Present a study session at a City Council meeting and invite community groups to participate
- Host focus groups with regular check-ins (before and after the decision is made)
- Request to attend and gather ideas at community-based organization meetings and gatherings
- Host community meetings or workshops, using feedback gathering technology

### ADDITIONAL

Any additional tools listed in “Inform” above, plus:

- Community Ad-hoc Committee
- Community partnership agreements with community-based organizations
- Request to attend community-based organization meetings and gatherings
- Community forums with participant polling, using feedback gathering technology



## STEP 5: REVIEW AND EVALUATE

You may need to adjust your engagement plan as you implement it. Evaluating the effectiveness of your public engagement plan will allow you to adapt and be flexible as you implement the plan. This may require changes to the overall project timeline, such as pushing back decision dates, creating additional informational or educational materials in response to confusion or erroneous rumors that have surfaced, scheduling more meetings with a community group to provide sufficient time to discuss the topics, adding time for a new group of impacted or interested community members not previously identified, or expanding the public engagement process because the level of impact is determined to be greater than previously expected.

Likewise, once you have completed your engagement efforts and are ready to either decide or recommend a decision, it's important to report what you did, who you engaged and how, and whether you satisfied your objectives at the outset of the public engagement planning process. To measure success of your engagement plan, consider:

- **Awareness: Reach and impressions.** Can you quantify the number of opportunities provided to see or hear about the project? Can you quantify how many people it reached within your target audiences? How many people viewed your landing page or opened the news email?
- **Access: Registrations, sign-in data.** How many people registered for or attended your outreach events? Did you collect demographic data on the people who attended either through a sign-in sheet or other means?
- **Sentiment: Registrations, Surveys, Comments, Complaints.** How many people registered for or attended your outreach events? How many surveys were completed? How many active participants did you have? Can you track the number of inquiries, comments, or complaints you got on your project? Was the overall sentiment positive, neutral, or negative?

Some questions to consider when evaluating your public engagement activities:

- What worked?
- What could have gone better?
- Did you reach your project's goals or objectives? How do you know?
- Did your engagement activity adhere to the expectations set out in this guide?
- Were individuals and impacted or interested community members given adequate opportunity to participate in all aspects of the process?
- Who wasn't at the table who should have been?
- What can be done to connect more effectively with and involve them next time?
- Were the tools you chose most appropriate given your unique circumstances and constraints?
- Were the needs of persons with disabilities considered?
- Did you allocate sufficient resources (time, human, and financial)?
- Did you effectively record and analyze the input received?
- Were participants provided with feedback regarding how their contribution was used?
- Were participants generally satisfied with the engagement efforts? Were organizers?



# APPENDIX

- A. [Tips and Recommendations for informational materials, outreach events, and event spaces.](#)
- B. [Public Engagement Plan Workbook](#)
- C. [Size Guide for Promotional Materials](#)
- D. [Communications Roles and Responsibilities](#)
- E. [List of Bilingual Certified Employees](#)
- F. [Contact List by Areas of Interest](#) (For Consult and Collaborate)
- G. Related Processes and Procedures
  - i. [Open City Hall Guidelines and Demographic Questions](#)
  - ii. [Event promotions process and timeline](#)
  - iii. [Ribbon cutting and groundbreaking ceremony planning process and timeline](#)
  - iv. [News release process and timeline](#)
  - v. [Translation to Spanish Process](#)
  - vi. [Guidelines for Public Notice 2022](#)
  - vii. [Hiring a Communications Consultant](#)
  - viii. [Media Relations 101](#)
- H. Evaluation Materials
  - i. [Public Engagement Plan Evaluation Form](#)
  - ii. [Consult and Collaborate Rapid Review – Participants Worksheet](#)
  - iii. [Consult and Collaborate Rapid Review – Local Officials Worksheet](#)

# TEMPLATES & OTHER RESOURCES

- A. [City Templates and Graphics by Department](#)
- B. [News Release/News Story Templates](#)
- C. [Key Messages and Talking Points Template](#)
- D. [Video Script Template](#)
- E. [PowerPoint Template](#)  
(See: [PowerPoint Slide Standards](#) for content style tips)
- F. [Photo Gallery](#) (City Stock Photos)
  - [KBOX Ticket: Communications Support Request](#)
  - [Sustainable Meeting / Event Checklist](#)

