



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Strategy

Version 3
April 12, 2024



Share Your Thoughts!

The Town of Okotoks is seeking your input on services the Town provides to residents. Your participation is essential to help us effectively evaluate and optimize services and will be used to inform future decision-making.

Okotoks
Historic Past, Sustainable Future

2022 Citizen Satisfaction Survey

(May 6 - 23, 2022)



Our Commitment

The Town of Okotoks' vision is a vibrant, resilient, and connected community that fosters the wellbeing of land and people; a community to call home. To help make this vision a reality, we need to understand the public's thoughts on the issues facing our community.

Community engagement is any process that involves the public in problem solving or decision-making and uses public input to make sustainable decisions.

Although we have skilled technical employees working across the Town, no one knows the community and its nuances better than the people living and doing business in it every day. When we engage, their input becomes part of the decision-making process. The Town believes decisions are improved by engaging the community on issues that affect them. We are committed to using community engagement as a way to hear all community voices, create meaningful connections and shape the future of our town together.

The Town believes meaningful community engagement will build relationships, increase shared understanding, and lead to better solutions and a stronger community. Governments benefit from hearing diverse perspectives and understanding the public's interests, concerns, and priorities, and the public gains a greater understanding of roles, responsibilities and requirements. We will strive for community engagement that is honest, transparent and accessible to help accomplish these things.

Understanding why we engage

VISION for ENGAGEMENT

The Okotoks community is meaningfully engaged in a way that builds relationships and shared understanding, so their voices are heard and involvement can help strengthen decisions and shape our community.

SUPPORTING VALUES

Community Engagement directly supports several values that are part of the Okotoks Strategic Plan. These values are a collective expression of what is most important to the Town:

- A citizen focus
- Transparent & accountable
- Diverse, equitable, inclusive and accessible
- A committed Town team



Why does it matter?



Through the engagement process and the Town’s four guiding engagement principles (see page 9), we will listen to what the community has to say, and share how the input gathered contributes to Town projects and decisions.

Why does community engagement matter?

Appropriate and meaningful community engagement:

- Brings people together to consider a variety of perspectives and listen to each other’s views
- Helps develop a shared understanding of issues and positions of participants
- Builds better relationships between citizens and the Town and creates a more active, involved community
- Helps Administration and Council understand the needs of the community

Effective community engagement:

- Enhances the legitimacy of decisions and establishes direction on issues or projects
- Provides decision-makers with information and feedback to help make informed decisions on what matters to engagement participants
- Leads to better solutions
- Produces better policies that are informed by interested parties
- Builds stronger communities



Terminology: Community engagement, public engagement, public participation, involvement, consultation and input are terms that are often used interchangeably. For consistency throughout our organization, the Town of Okotoks will use **Community Engagement** as our term to describe engaging the public in the decision making process.



Community Engagement Process: Understanding why we engage



Community Engagement Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Town of Okotoks is committed to the following guiding principles every time we engage with the public. These are the foundations of our practice. Our actions, guided by these principles, will create a positive culture of engagement.



1. ACCOUNTABLE

We believe in upholding commitments made to the public by demonstrating how processes and outcomes are consistent with the approved plans for engagement. We are a learning organization. By monitoring and evaluating our community engagement processes and outcomes, we are able to learn from our experiences, track our progress, and improve over time.



3. TRANSPARENT

Clear, timely and complete information is provided to ensure community engagement processes and decisions are shared and understood.



2. EQUITABLE

Diverse opportunities are provided to our community so that perspectives and ideas from all interested parties are considered in the decision-making process.



4. RELATIONAL

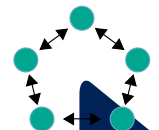
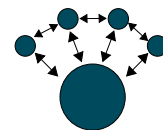
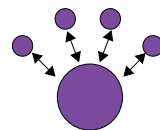
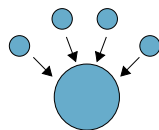
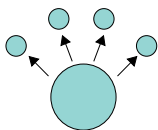
We value the people we are engaging with and put them in the center of our processes, building relationships, understanding and trust.

Following best practices

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES

The Town follows the best practices from the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) organization on how to appropriately engage interested parties. We will build community engagement plans using the IAP2 spectrum below to assist in guiding the level of participation (i.e. engagement) that best fits the needs of the situation. Based on IAP2, the steps to planning community engagement include looking externally at impacts to interested parties, expectations, difficulty in solving the problem, potential for outrage, etc. It also requires us to look at what we are able to accomplish internally.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



Degree of engagement, time and resources increase

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
GOAL	To provide balanced and objective information to assist the public in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives, and decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to make sure that 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	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 work with you to ensure 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.

Increasing impact on decision

©International Association for Public Participation www.iap2.org

Using this toolkit

This toolkit will be used by all staff and consultants when planning for and conducting community engagement activities. All community engagement should be based on the guiding principles and 4-phase approach in the subsequent sections, which follows the Town's Community Engagement Policy.

When a developer/consultant is engaging the Okotoks community in a project.

Whether done in-house or by a consultant, the Community Engagement team must be made aware of all community engagement activities taking place on behalf of the Town. In order to see the benefits of organized and coordinated engagement, and identify opportunities for synergies and learning, all engagements need to be tracked by the Town in one centralized place.

Who does what? Roles and responsibilities

There are several different groups that play a role in planning, implementing and evaluating community engagement initiatives undertaken by the Town of Okotoks.

Town Council

Town Council is formally responsible for making decisions that represent the interests and values of the community. Council members, play an important role as decision-makers and advocates:

- Connect with the community to help identify issues that may need community engagement.
- Consider input obtained through community engagement in decision making and provide rationale for decisions reached.
- Promote and support engagement participation from a wide range of interested parties.
- Direct community members to the established processes for gathering and compiling input.

Staff

Town staff lead the planning, implementation of, and reporting of, engagement initiatives. They are also responsible for developing and applying professional expertise in the area of community engagement, and for sharing technical expertise to provide background and advice on decisions being made. Staff responsibilities include the following:

- Help identify issues that may require community engagement and opportunities for public input to make a meaningful difference to decisions.
- Provide engagement opportunities that are open, transparent and available to those who are affected by the decisions.
- Promote and support engagement participation from a wide range of interested parties.
- Report community engagement findings to participants and the public in a timely manner, and share how input has been used in the decision-making process.
- Work together with the community to continuously improve the engagement process.
- Encourage the community to increase their understanding about local issues and their role in the Town's decision-making processes.

Community

Community members contribute to informed decision-making and the quality of life in their community by sharing their ideas, experiences, and concerns in a constructive and respectful way. Their contributions can include the following:

- Help identify community needs and priorities.
- Identify barriers to participation.
- Make efforts to stay current and learn more about issues within the community.
- Understand the community's role in the Town's decision-making process.
- Participate in engagement initiatives and encourage others to participate.
- Express points of view respectfully and contribute ideas while respecting opposing perspectives.
- Be willing to listen to and learn from other community members.
- Vote in local government elections.

Roles & Responsibilities

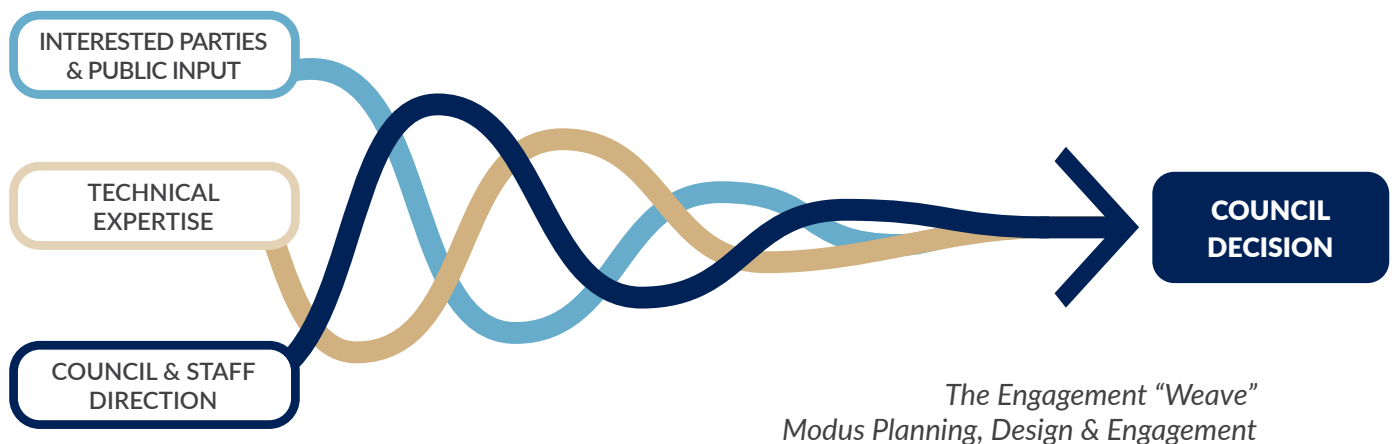
Who do we engage? The Engagement Weave

Community Engagement is, by its very nature, a relational commitment. Multiple audiences must work together to achieve the community's vision.

No single input, comment, or activity determines the outcome, and Council (as the elected decision-makers) ultimately reserve the right to decide.



The engagement “weave” diagram shows how these different groups work together over time to ensure Council has the information they need to make an informed and balanced decision.



When Do We Engage?

When developing a new project or considering changes to a service or program, it is necessary to assess whether the public needs to be engaged in the decision. Community engagement may not be required or suitable in every case, but when it is, it is important to engage with residents as early as possible. When engagement does not occur or is rushed, there may be negative impacts to the project schedule, costs, and public support.

Early dialogue is important in determining when and to what extent community engagement is needed.

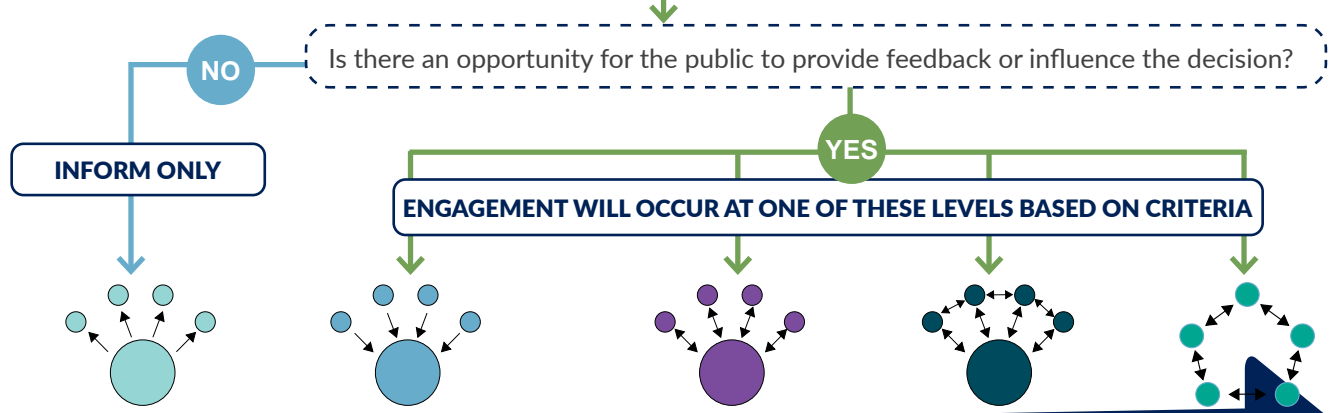
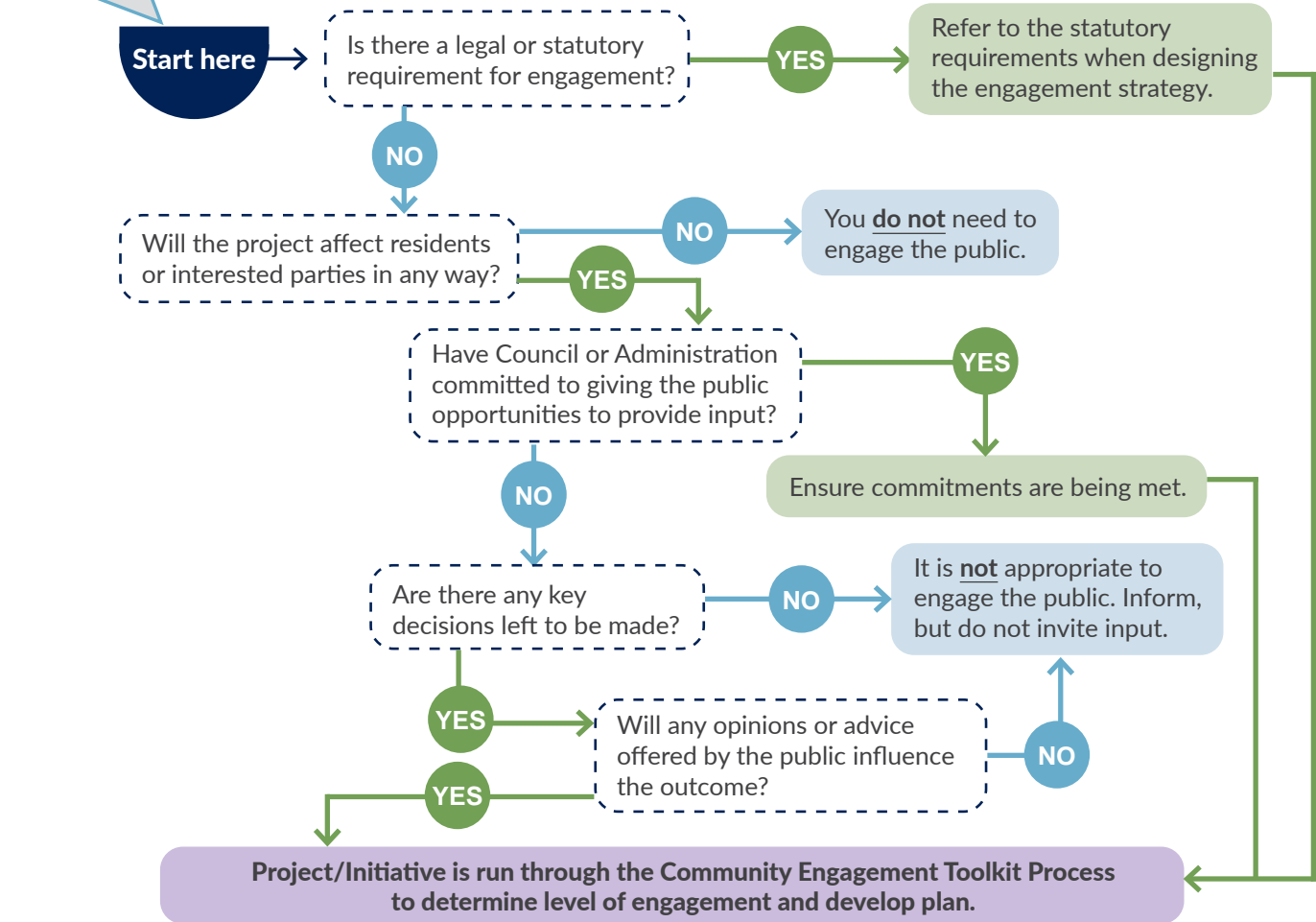
In Alberta, the *Municipal Government Act* outline the minimum requirements for when local governments must engage.

Early dialogue is important in determining when and to what extent engagement is needed.



What Level of Engagement does a project need?

WHEN DO WE ENGAGE?



Degree of engagement, time and resources increase

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PROMISE	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 work with you to ensure 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.

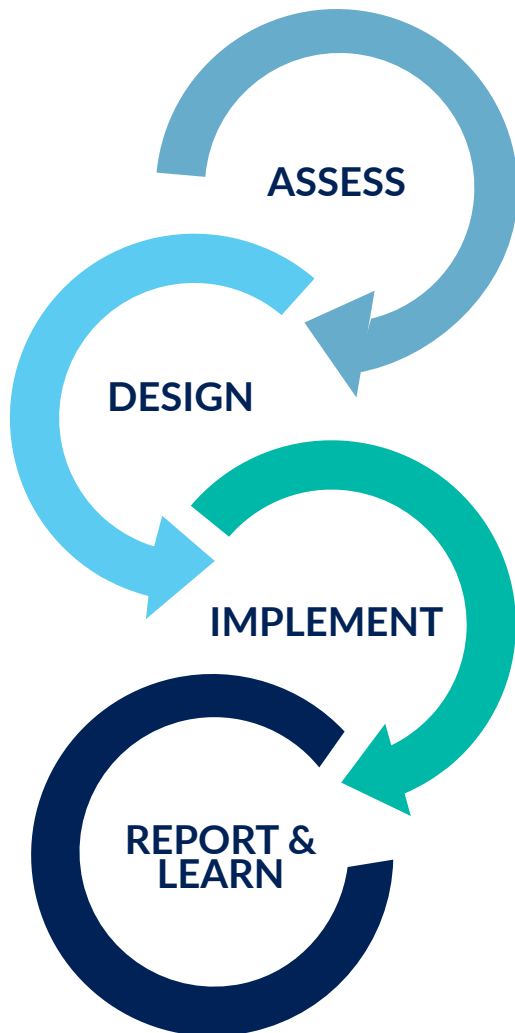
Increasing impact on decision



Phases of Engagement

PHASES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Town of Okotoks has 4 phases of community engagement:



ASSESS:

- Clarify the issue and purpose of engagement
- Identify and understand audiences
- Determine the level of influence
- Confirm commitment to engagement

DESIGN:

- Phasing of engagement
- Engagement objectives
- Engagement methods
- Communications to support engagement
- Evaluation

IMPLEMENT:

- Write engagement questions
- Raise awareness + invite people
- Facilitation design

REPORT + LEARN:

- Data/input analysis
- Report back
- Evaluate
- Share learnings

Terms of Engagement

Terms of Engagement

The Town has developed some ground rules to establish respectful and constructive discussions during each community engagement.



1. Be open to new ideas and opinions



2. Respect each other – listen when others are speaking and be aware of your own body language



3. Allow everyone a chance to share their perspectives



4. Listen actively



5. Share your story, experience and point of view



6. Respectfully ask questions to gain a better understanding



7. Stay on topic



8. Respect each other's time. If you would like to discuss the topic more, take the opportunity to stay after the meeting and share your ideas with the engagement team



9. The goal is not to agree, it is to gain deeper understanding of the issues and opportunities