Equitable Community Engagement Blueprint

Introduction

The Neighborhood Improvement Services Department (NIS) works to preserve and improve quality of life conditions for Durham residents, and to encourage active participation in neighborhood redevelopment and public policy and decision making dialogue. The Community Engagement Team strives to inform, engage, partner and empower the Durham community.

The City has not executed a standardized process for conducting community engagement that is shared or adopted by all Departments. Furthermore, the City has not developed an equitable community engagement process that ensures that its outreach or information-gathering approaches include an intentional effort to engage a representation of the City's diversity. The Community Engagement Team of NIS, to match the goal of encouraging active participation in neighborhood redevelopment and public policy and decision making dialogue, has created an Equitable Community Engagement Blueprint through conversation with other departments and community leaders.

Background

The City of Durham strives to be a welcoming, diverse and innovative community. Equity and resident engagement are key components of the City's FY2019-2021 Strategic Plan, includes Advance a More Inclusive and Equitable Durham, Shared Economic Prosperity, and the Language Access Plan.

> *"Many current inequities are sustained by historical legacies and structures and systems that repeat patterns of exclusion. Institutions and structures have continued to create and perpetuate inequities, despite the lack of explicit intention. Without intentional intervention, institutions and structures will continue to perpetuate racial inequities. Government has the ability to implement policy change at multiple levels and across multiple sectors to drive larger systemic change. Routine use of a racial equity tool explicitly integrates racial equity into governmental operations."*
> *(Government Alliance on Race & Equity, 2018)*

In order to create strategies for equity to achieve the City's vision of an excellent and sustainable quality of life for all residents, the City must engage the community in an equitable way.

"The planning process lays the groundwork for all the decisions and strategies that contribute to equitable development...an Equitable Development project must be responsive to existing neighborhood conditions and people who may be affected by the project" (CUNY Institute for State & Local Government, 2018)

On August 6, 2018, City Council directed staff to "create an engagement plan that will allow the City to create a racial equity plan regarding the Belt Line." This request was made in response to resident concerns about the equity of the engagement previously conducted for the Durham Belt Line Trail Master Plan. To guide this engagement plan and other future engagement efforts, the City's Community Engagement Team began the development of this Equitable Community Engagement Blueprint.

During the 90-day period following the City Council directive, the Community Engagement Team met with community members and City staff to develop this Blueprint. The process outlined in this document was refined and applied to create the Durham Belt Line Trail Equitable Engagement Plan. Portions of the Blueprint also informed the community engagement for the disposition of surplus property located at 103 S. Driver St.

The City consults with thousands of community members each year to gather feedback on multiple initiatives and projects. These efforts have informed and guided the development of numerous City initiatives, policies, and codes. It is essential that, as a community, the City can build on existing trust and address inequities at all levels. This Blueprint will expand on existing successes provide consistent, meaningful and equitable engagement opportunities.

Goal

This Blueprint was developed to advance equitable community engagement across the City of Durham by offering specific guidelines that can be adapted and replicated across City initiatives. It prescribes intentional engagement methodologies and procedures to ensure historically underrepresented communities are included in the City's planning and decision-making processes. The Blueprint includes recommendations for prioritizing the expenditure of engagement resources in underrepresented communities, specifically residents that will be most impacted by City initiatives. The goal of this Blueprint is measurable equitable engagement, increased awareness of City initiatives, minimized adverse effects and maximized benefits for low-wealth communities and communities of color.

Key Blueprint elements:

- Define equitable community engagement

- Identify the key components of an equitable engagement plan

- Offer engagement strategies and tools to guide City engagement efforts

Use

This document is a guide to help City staff equitably engage the community as they develop and complete City initiatives. This guide is not a one-size-fits-all blueprint, and not all City initiatives will require a detailed engagement plan. Impact will be the determining factor for use of the Blueprint.

The Blueprint will remain a working document with current and upcoming initiatives serving as pilots to build increasingly effective equitable community engagement strategies. To further expand this Blueprint, intentional community engagement is required.

Foundations of Equitable Community Engagement

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is any process that seeks the community's input to ensure that the City's decision-making is well informed. For the City of Durham, community engagement creates opportunities for people to contribute to City decision-making.

Engagement helps build cooperative and trusting relationships between the City and the community.

"Meaningful community engagement is about having representation from the whole community, not just a small voice, but hearing from all people. It is about an open, two-way dialogue. It gives opportunities for the community to propose ideas and come up with collective solutions. It is about offering an effective, inclusive approach to seek diverse opinions. And, it is an ongoing conversation that allows the community to help define and shape the City's future." (City of Mississauga, 2017)

Principles of Community Engagement

The City should adopt a set of values and principles to guide community engagement. Below are example principles from another City.

- *Right to be involved*
- *Contribution will be thoughtfully considered*
- *Recognize the needs of all*
- *Seek out involvement*
- *Participants design participation*
- *Adequate information*
- *Known effect of participation*
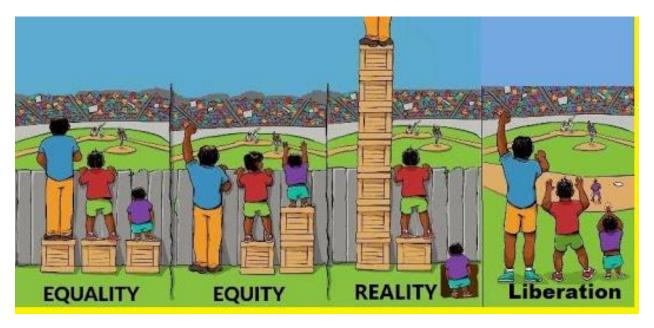 - *(City of Minneapolis, 2016)*

Plans generally cover these themes: accessibility, accountability, power-sharing, inclusion, information, timeliness, transparency. The principles the City chooses to adopt should be rooted in racial equity.

What is Equitable Community Engagement?

Community engagement alone is not enough. It needs to be equitable. For engagement to be equitable, it must aim for participation from a group representative of a community's geography, race/ethnicity, age, gender, and other demographic characteristics. It must place specific emphasis on those who will be most adversely impacted by the project and those who are most often marginalized in these conversations.

"Regions are equitable when all residents, regardless of their race/ethnicity, nativity, neighborhood of residence, or other characteristics, are fully able to participate in the region's economic vitality, contribute to the region's readiness for the future, and connect to those region's assets and resources. Even further, those in leadership positions ask who needs to be at the table in each discussion and ensures they are invited." (Turner, 2015)

Equitable Community Engagement starts by recognizing the reality that systemic barriers cause certain populations to have less access to city processes. To overcome those barriers, the City must invest engagement resources towards the people who are often underrepresented in participation.

(Achievement Network, 2018)

Key Components for Equitable Community Engagement

Shift the engagement paradigm.
For engagement to be equitable, the paradigm must shift to measure who participated, in addition to how many people. The onus is on the City to invest the resources to ensure underrepresented demographics have a voice in the process. It is not enough to say someone is not in the room, the City must ask why.

Collect baseline data.
Developing a baseline of who is currently participating in government processes is critical towards creating equitable engagement plans. Data will allow the City to know who is underrepresented in engagement to create intentional strategies to reach them.

Center race in any equitable engagement.

The United States and Durham have been stratified historically by race with racism ingrained in all institutions. For this reason, race is going to be a central component of any equitable engagement plan. Intentional efforts centered on race are critical to repairing the trust necessary for true authentic engagement.

Also measure age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, renter/owner, income, educational level, and language.

While centering race, the City will also measure age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, renter/owner, income, and educational level. Many of these categories are underrepresented and will be important towards creating the baseline to inform future strategy. The City must also focus on the intersections of identities in data collection because people hold onto multiple identities. These categories are not all inclusive and as outreach is conducted, the City needs to allow for flexibility to allow for other demographic data to be included.

Go to community.

To reach community members that are less likely to participate in government processes because of structural barriers, the City needs to go to the community. If the City expects community to always come to them, the people with the least amount of barriers will continue to participate. Going to the community can include a variety of engagement activities, such as door knocking, events in the neighborhood or at heavily trafficked businesses, meetings/events hosted in partnership with local religious organizations or neighborhood groups.

History matters. Understand previous government impacts.

The United States and City of Durham have a long history of racism embedded into government structures and decisions. Staff conducting engagement must know the history of the area. For example, when conducting outreach in Hayti, the history of Durham Freeway and the impact on the residents is critical. When engaging residents in Northeast Central Durham, knowing the history of redlining is important.

Be flexible. There will be shifts to the process.

The City must work from the assumption it is possible to engage every population in the City. If methods did not reach a group representative of the population of the city, methods will be altered. Benchmarks need to be numerical and based on whom the City is reaching. Different methods will be tried until the people who will be most adversely impacted and underrepresented are at the table. This is key to transparency principles and important for long-term trust.

Establish accountability groups consisting of underrepresented groups.

When the City creates steering committees or other groups intended to represent resident needs, there must be intentional efforts to ensure historically underrepresented groups are actively participating.

Steps to Build an Equitable Community Engagement Plan

This five-step approach is designed to help project teams develop a coordinated plan for equitably engaging the community.

Step 1: What level of engagement should we use?

Step 2: Who should we engage?

Step 3: How should we engage?

Step 4: How will we measure successful engagement?

Step 5: How will we build for the long-term?

Step 1: What level of engagement should we use?

1a. Be Transparent

Why it Matters

Transparency is one of the most important elements of any engagement. Many communities do not engage because they do not trust the government. They have participated in processes before, only to feel like their voices weren't heard. This step is essential to clearly communicating about the project and setting community expectations for involvement.

Questions for Planning

- What decisions have already been made? How?
- Who has already been part of the discussions?
- Where is there still room to influence the project?
- What is the timeline?
- What money has been spent already? What money is budgeted? What money is being applied for (grants, etc)?

Information Sources

- Project Departments

1b. Define the Impact

Why it Matters

Not all City initiatives require the same level of engagement. Engagement efforts differ based on the impact in residents' lives. For example, closing a street for a day impacts a resident differently than developing a new master plan for parks in the city.

Information Sources

- Project Departments
- Community Partners

Questions for Planning

For example, the City of Arlington uses the following indicators to help decide the appropriate engagement level for a capital projects. *(Arlington County's Office of Communications and Public Engagement, 2018)*

	✓	Indicators for Engagement Level
Communicate		Project **would not** interrupt service and/or traffic for an extended period of time (typically < one month)
		Residents and/or businesses **would not** be disrupted for an extended period (typically < 6 months)
		Project is a direct replacement of infrastructure, materials or other in the same location

	✓	Indicators for Engagement Level
Communicate & **Consult**		Project addresses a public health and/or safety concern
		Project **would not** cause loss of or significant** change to facility, program or service to community
		Project changes may be triggered by legislative, regulatory or policy requirements.

	✓	Indicators for Engagement Level
Communicate, Consult & **Involve**		Project included in approved County Plan (e.g., Master, Sector, Corridor, CIP)
		Project **would** fundamentally change the size, capacity, and/or intensity of use of space, roadway, etc.
		Project **would** cause loss of or significant** change to a facility/program/service for broader Arlington
		Project could have significant** impacts on nearby residents and/or businesses (e.g., health/safety, traffic, parking, loss of mature trees, adverse construction impacts)
		Strong community interest (support, concern, differing views, opposition) anticipated for project

	✓	Indicators for Engagement Level
Communicate, Consult, Involve & **Collaborate**		Project **not** a capital maintenance or operations project
		Multiple commissions and/or advisory boards would typically provide input on this type of project
		Project did **not** originate from a previously approved County Plan (e.g., Master, Sector, Corridor, CIP)
		County Board/County Manager has provided high-level direction (e.g., construction of public buildings, studies)

* *Levels of engagement are adapted from the IAP2 spectrum published by International Association of Public Participation; see www.iap2.org.*
** *Significance can be assessed, in part, by answering context questions in Step 1.*

1c. Identify the Engagement Level

Why it Matters

Engagement efforts differ based on the impact in residents' lives. Based on perceived impact, departments will decide on the level of engagement needed. Departments need to maintain flexibility because the City could underestimate impact and need to increase the level of engagement after the project begins. The level of engagement also helps identify appropriate engagement methods, as depicted in the IAP2 spectrum below. This framework, from International Association of Public Participation, is one of the most widely used tools for community engagement. (IAP2, 2018)

Questions for Planning

- What do we think could be the impact of the project on the community? On the city?
- What is the goal of our engagement?
- What is the level of engagement? (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower)
- To meet this goal, what do we seek from community members?

Information Sources

- Project Departments
- Community Partners

iap2 public participation spectrum

developed by the international association for public participation

Increasing Level of Public Impact →

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns 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 THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advise and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	• Fact sheets • Websites • Open houses	• Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings	• Workshops • Deliberate polling	• Citizen Advisory committees • Consensus-building • Participatory decision-making	• Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions

Step 2: Who should we engage?

2a. Define the Engagement Audience

Why it Matters

Equitable engagement involves participation from a group representative of the community, with emphasis on those most impacted by the project and those most often underrepresented. The populations most at risk and historically underrepresented will be the priority of equitable engagement efforts. Critical demographic factors to discuss are, but not limited to…

- age
- gender

Questions for Planning

- What are the demographics…
  - of residents and organizations who will be impacted?
  - of the City?
- Which groups of people…
  - are more vulnerable to impacts?
  - are historically less likely to participate in engagement ?
  - are usually overrepresented in City engagement processes?

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- disability
- sexual orientation
- renter/owner
- race/ethnicity
- income
- educational level
- language

Information Sources

- Dataworks
- Project Departments
- Community Partners

2b. Identify Community Partners

Why it Matters

Trusted local organizations and leaders have the ability to more effectively engage groups that are less likely to participate in City processes. Working through these partners is critical to encourage participation of the populations most likely to be adversely impacted or historically underrepresented populations in our engagement planning. The more the City is able to partner with trusted community groups throughout the process, the more equitable the outreach will be.

The partner organizations should be rooted in the community and their membership and staff should be representative, and comprised, of hard to reach groups.

These community partners should be involved in planning engagement. The City should also resource these organizations to ensure that their partnership does not have an adverse impact on the organizations or community leaders. Community partners should be included in planning engagement efforts.

Questions for Planning

- Who are the trusted groups / leaders that work with impacted populations in this area?
- Are there community led projects or activities in the area?
- What non-people assets in the area may assist with engagement? (e.g. parks)
- What resources are necessary to support the partnership?

Information Sources

- NIS Community Engagement
- Community Partners

2c. Coordinate with Government Departments

Why it Matters

A lack of coordination between City community engagement efforts is naturally inequitable. (Which groups have time to participate in 10 surveys and three public meetings in one week?) The City has dozens of projects occurring simultaneous, often impacting the same groups and the same geographies. Neighborhoods and community members are constantly affected by

Questions for Planning

- What other City departments should we coordinate with?
- What other feedback do we expect?
- What other City projects connect with this project?
- What does the City already know?
- Community concerns?
- Community history?

an intersection of issues.

By coordinating engagement related to City initiatives that impact the same populations, City and resident resources may be used more efficiently, and engagement overall improves. Coordinating department should be collaborating in planning engagement efforts. Reallocating engagement resources will create additional capacity to execute equitably. Departmental coordination will free up resources previously used for multiple, uncoordinated engagement processes. In addition, to effectively go to community to engage, the City will host fewer meetings, freeing up additional staff resources.

- Information collected from departments? (e.g. surveys)

Information Sources
- Government Departments

Step 3: How should we engage the community?

3. Define Potential Barriers and Opportunities

Why it Matters

In order to engage populations that are most at risk and historically underrepresented in City engagement, the City must understand the barriers they face.

Barriers may be physical (e.g. lack of childcare or transportation) and invisible (e.g. lack of trust in government institutions).

- Lack of childcare- Provide childcare
- Lack of transportation- Go to their home / neighborhood
- Varying work schedules- Vary engagement times
- Lack of trust- Partner with a local community group

By defining every barrier, the City can create strategies to overcome them. It is especially valuable to identify opportunities within the community to addresses barriers, such as hiring a community childcare provider to provide childcare during an engagement event. This asset-based perspective helps use provide more accessible engagement opportunities.

Questions for Planning
- What barriers might prevent certain populations from participating?
- How can we overcome?
- What engagement method might be best?
- Additional resources we need to be accessible? (e.g. translation, transportation)
- What opportunities exist within the community that help overcome those barriers?

Information Sources
- Community Partners
- NIS Community Engagement

Step 4: How will we measure successful engagement?

4. Collect Data & Evaluate

Why it Matters

Measuring participation is the only way to ensure equity.

Throughout every stage of our process, the City needs to collect demographic data from participants. By comparing this information to the identified audiences and the City overall, the City will know how well City residents are being engaged. Regular evaluation of this engagement information will help the City understand which strategies work, which ones don't, and help adjust engagement efforts accordingly.

This data will help keep the City accountable for equitable engagement. As these practices evolve, the City needs to carefully the role of privacy and intersectionality in data collection and evaluation. (For example, a woman of color who is renter might have from a women of color who is a homeowner.)

Questions for Planning

- What demographic data will we collect?
- What benchmarks are we comparing demographic data to?
- How will we evaluate success?
- How will we decide to shift our methods if we are not reaching the most impacted and most often underrepresented?

Information Sources

- Project Departments
- Dataworks

Step 5: How will we build for the long-term?

5a. Grow Community Capacity

Why it Matters

Engagement that builds community capacity will create a stronger partner for the future, and help increase trust between the City and the community.

Community organizations are critical to any equitable engagement efforts, but most of the trusted organizations are under resourced. In addition to providing resources for the specific project, it is important to brainstorm how efforts can help build the long term capacity of these organizations.

Through regular City partnership with community-rooted organizations, these organizations will increase their ability to engage effectively.

Questions for Planning

- How will share information about local groups for people to get involved with?
- How will we provide training opportunities for existing and potential leaders?
- How will we connect groups to resources and grant opportunities?

Information Sources

- Community Partners
- NIS Community Engagement

5b. Continue Engagement

Why it Matters

Questions for Planning

Inequitable development and inauthentic engagement has created a lack of trust that serves as a barrier to true engagement with marginalized communities. To overcome that barrier, the city needs to have consistent engagement, beyond one time projects.

The City will always have the need to engage impacted communities. Community Engagement is long term and relational. Relationships will support future community engagement.

- How will we ensure those engaged know the impact they had on the process?
- How will we maintain relationships with residents and groups?
- How will we support community groups after the project is over?

Information Sources
- Project Departments
- NIS Community Engagement

Implementation

Roles

Neighborhood Improvement Services' Community Engagement Team will serve as consultants to develop equitable community engagement plans. Using the Blueprint, they will assist departments in developing engagement plans and identifying the community-rooted organizations to partner with during the process.

Next Steps

To effectively implement an equitable community engagement strategy, the City needs to take the following actions:

1. **Adopt definitions of key components of equitable community engagement.**

   These elements are essential to engagement work. To encourage citywide adoption of these elements, it is important for these components to be adopted and promoted by the City Council.

   - Core Principles of Community Engagement
   - Definition of Equity
   - Data standards and benchmarks

2. **Expand this Blueprint.**

   This document, created in less than three months with limited input from City and community partners, represents key components for equitable community engagement. However, it does not represent a comprehensive City strategy for equitable community engagement. To develop such a strategy requires more time and engagement from City and community partners. This process will be continuously improved as the City pilots the Blueprint and uses it to develop engagement plans for various City initiatives.

3. **Develop a strategy for implementing the Blueprint.**

   The shift to an equitable, coordinated community engagement process will require reallocation of resources, adoption of new processes and tools (such as a shared survey platform), and training opportunities to develop staff and community capacity to lead equitable community engagement (such as individual training for awareness, understanding, strategizing to overcome implicit bias).

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Blueprint created by Department of Neighborhood Improvement Services Community Engagement Team, with input from City staff and community leaders.