



County of Yolo

Administrative Policies and Procedure Manual

TITLE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	DEPARTMENT: County Administrator's Office
TYPE: POLICY	DATE: November #, 2018

A. VALUE STATEMENT

Through proactive and meaningful community engagement efforts, the County and public can work together to enhance the quality of life for all Yolo County residents.

B. PURPOSE

This policy is meant to serve as a guide and foundation for staff on best practices in community engagement when working with the public in any form or capacity and can apply to all facets of County operations including financial, asset management, environmental, community services, health and human services, public safety, strategic planning, and day to day operations.

It is the responsibility of the County to engage the community in order to ensure transparency and accountability in government while also establishing an organizational culture that is responsive to the values, needs, and concerns of the public. The County prioritizes a culture of operational excellence, supporting the principles of community engagement and empowerment. Through effective community engagement the County shall seek to consistently engage the public for the purposes of informing, consulting, involving, collaborating with, and empowering the community.

Effective community engagement can benefit local government in several ways, as detailed by the Institute for Local Government¹, including:

- Improved decision making and actions, with better outcomes for the public and local agencies
- Increased community buy-in and support
- Clearer identification of the public's values, ideas, and recommendations
- Well-informed residents
- Enhanced constructive discussion and decision making
- Efficient project implementation with less need to revisit again
- Increased trust between members of the public and local government

¹ Institute for Local Government. (2017). "Shaping the Future Together: TIERS Framework for Practical Public Engagement at the Local Level."

- Higher rates of community participation and leadership development²

By investing in a comprehensive community engagement policy, the County seeks to attain these benefits.

C. DEFINITIONS AND KEY PRINCIPLES

I. Definition:

For the purposes of this policy, community engagement, also known as public engagement, is defined as various methods of outreach conducted to provide the public with information or gather their input to assist in local government decision-making.³

II. Key Principles:

- a. The County shall conduct community engagement that is inclusive and accessible to all groups and residents incorporating all ages, abilities, races/ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and cultural backgrounds.
- b. The County shall provide information that is clear, easy to understand, and accessible to all.
- c. The County shall appropriately consider and incorporate public input gathered.
- d. The County will regularly report to the Board on public engagement efforts.
- e. The County shall work to create an environment where all County departments are encouraged to continue developing their engagement capabilities and to make engagement an integral part of departmental planning and operations.
- f. The County shall build skills and knowledge across County departments to conduct community engagement activities and processes.

D. PROTOCOL

I. Planning

To ensure effective engagement, time should be taken to carefully plan out community engagement efforts.

- a. *Purpose:* Staff should determine the purpose or goal of conducting the community engagement and structure it accordingly. The purpose of community engagement can take several forms:
 - 1) Inform: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions
 - 2) Consult: To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or potential solutions
 - 3) Involve: To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
 - 4) Collaborate: To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

²

³ Institute for Local Government. (2016). "What is Public Engagement & Why Should I do it?"

- 5) Empower: To provide the public with the information and resources necessary to assist them in making a final decision. This method of public engagement only applies to a project where the final decision legally rests in the hands of the public, such as an election issue.⁴
- b. *Community Landscape*: The population and geographic region that staff are seeking to engage should be carefully considered. Time should be taken to identify the key stakeholders in the community to ensure their notice and/or involvement (such as residents and ratepayers, community and cultural organizations, businesses, service clubs, public and non-profit partners). Ultimately, community engagement by the County shall be inclusive and accessible to all groups and residents incorporating all ages, races/ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and cultural backgrounds.
- c. *Constraints and Resources*: Staff should consider and plan for potential constraints (i.e. project timeline, budget, and available staff) and resources (i.e. staff, digital needs, and meeting locations).
- d. *Develop Engagement Approach*: The approach to community engagement should be structured on the purpose of the outreach, community landscape, constraints, and resources. Based on these factors the engagement can take many different forms and be a combination of more than one.
 - 1) Smaller engagement efforts could include focus groups, small group meetings, pop-up booths at fairs or farmers markets, or ‘coffee shop’ style meetings with key stakeholders.
 - 2) Larger engagement efforts could include workshops, large public meetings, or facilitated group discussions.
 - 3) Digital media, including social media, is another form of engagement. Staff can inform the community through websites and online newsletters as well as consult the public with surveys or polls.

II. Outreach

Once a purpose is defined and an engagement approach is in place, staff should conduct outreach in an effective and thoughtful manner.

- a. *Public Outreach*: It is the job of staff to ensure the public receives proper notice for a community engagement effort. The notice should be provided in a timely manner, utilize various forms of media, be clearly understandable, and be accessible to all.
 - 1) Any outreach must be conducted in accordance with a department’s public information process.
 - 2) The County’s Communication Coordinator and/or Community Outreach Work Group are available to staff as a resource to provide guidance and feedback on community engagement efforts.

⁴ International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). (2014). “IAP2’s Public Participation Spectrum”.

- 3) Staff should consider using a variety of outreach efforts that best fit their community engagement approach. This can include print (press releases, flyers, direct mailings), electronic (emails, radio, social media, websites, videos), and personal contact (calling key community members, going door to door, hanging flyers at post offices).
- 4) For media outreach, efforts should be undertaken to provide materials translated into the languages of various ethnic groups in the County. The County's Public Information Officer can also assist with outreach to non-English language media.
- 5) Materials should avoid government jargon, provide short descriptions, include pertinent meeting details (time, location, etc.), and list contact information.

III. Engagement

Once plans are in place and outreach has been conducted, the engagement effort should be implemented with adjustments made as needed.

- a. *Meeting Logistics*: If meetings are utilized as a tool of community engagement, proper logistical preparation must occur. Staff should consider several factors:
 - What meeting hours are best for the public?
 - Is the meeting location accessible via public transit?
 - Is the meeting where people are already present?
 - Is the meeting location neutral?
 - Are bilingual materials available?
 - What accommodations may be made for families with young children (ex. time of the meeting, amenities, etc.)?
 - What audio visual equipment is needed?
 - Is an interpreter needed?

NOTE: The County has a list of staff available to serve as interpreters/translators with the cost for the employee's time paid for by the requesting department. This list may be accessed by contacting Human Resources.
- b. *Meeting Facilitation*: The purpose for each community engagement, how feedback will be utilized, and the next steps in the process should be clearly provided to the public. Additionally, people receive and provide information in different ways based on their prominent learning style (such as visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic). Staff should facilitate meetings in a way that allows participation for individuals in a variety of formats. Examples include: a verbal presentation, visual pictures/charts, a summary handout, and/or ways for attendees to write their input.

IV. Evaluate

After an engagement effort staff should review the information gathered and appropriately incorporate it into the decision-making process. This information should then be shared with the public and details of the engagement effort shared with the Board of Supervisors or other appropriate sponsoring authority.

- a. It is the responsibility of staff to report back to the community to inform them of progress, how their input was utilized, and any final decisions. This is crucial in order to ensure that staff are engaging the public throughout the process. It also provides transparency and assurance to the community and shows that their participation is valued. The best method for reporting back to the community will vary by project, but would ideally utilize the preferred method of contact (i.e. email, newsletter, public meeting, etc.) identified by the community when staff conducted their initial outreach.
- b. Community engagement successes and opportunities for improvement should be communicated with staff in your department to help improve future efforts.
- c. Staff should inform the Board of Supervisors of community engagement efforts undertaken for a particular project or decision by providing a summary of the engagement efforts in the “Collaboration” section of the staff report. The County Administrator’s Office will also inform the Board of Supervisors, on an annual basis, of the County’s community engagement programming and efforts.

E. RESOURCES

- I. The County shall provide a “Community Engagement” webpage to supply staff with tools, templates, and other helpful information to assist in the implementation of effective community engagement efforts.