Standard Operating Procedure for Engagement

SOP-E



CITY OF CHARLOTTE

Standard Operating Procedure for Engagement (SOP-E)

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Trust is lost in buckets and gained in drips.

– Stephen M.R. Covey

How to Use the SOP-E

Charlotte's Standard Operating Procedure for Engagement (SOP-E) is designed to guide staff, partners, and stakeholders to foster consistent, inclusive and transparent practices during certain engagement efforts. Follow these steps to effectively navigate and apply the SOP-E:

This SOP-E is applicable, and an Engagement Plan is necessary, for the City of Charlotte's work with stakeholders, *only when both of the following conditions are met:*

- City-initiated projects, programs, initiatives, and other efforts being considered or planned where **there are decision(s) to be made,** *AND*
- On which **stakeholders can help shape those decisions**

If both are true for your project, please continue.

Below are some of the SOP-E highlights:

- In the introduction, the **Purpose and Scope** explains City of Charlotte's foundational engagement goals, including promoting inclusivity, transparency, and respect for diverse communities.
- Further explore **Applicability** to differentiate between efforts that require Engagement Plans and other efforts that involve communities, though are outside the scope of the SOP-E.
- The **Guidance** section explains the engagement planning process including minimum provisions and commitments, and the City of Charlotte Public Participation Spectrum (the "Spectrum") to discover, commit and communicate the public engagement level.
- Review **Accountability & Evaluation** to get started with ways to evaluate the overall Engagement Plan against Charlotte's Engagement Guiding Principles ("Guiding Principles").
- The **Appendix** offers more interaction opportunities, a glossary and Engagement Plan examples.

Staff may already have effective methods in place that align with SOP-E requirements, these are welcome. For newcomers, or those looking for more detailed explanations or new tools to consider, please refer to the City of Charlotte Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit (the "Toolkit").

Always verify the version number and revision date to ensure you're using the latest SOP-E. For any questions or additional guidance, reach out to Nicole Storey at nrstorey@charlottenc.gov.

Introduction

Overview

This SOP-E is a working document intended to evolve through organizational learning, practical application, and ongoing professional development. It provides a framework and guidance for:

- **City staff and partners** as they develop and scope city projects, determine whether an Engagement Plan is necessary, and collaboratively plan, implement, evaluate, and improve engagement efforts
- **Stakeholders** as they participate in good faith to build capacity and help shape city decisions
- **Decision makers** as they support engagement planning and consider community perspectives in their decisions

See a **Key Terms Glossary** in Appendix A.

Purpose & Scope

The city offers a wide range of community services. Prioritizing equity, we foster and sustain robust relationships, enhance awareness and understanding, and promote inclusive engagement. In our decision-making process for certain efforts, we consider stakeholder perspectives along with regulations and policies, funding, and technical and professional expertise.

Equitable engagement effects:

- Better City Decisions – aligned with community needs and priorities
- Increased Public Trust – transparent, inclusive, and accountable engagement
- More Equitable Participation – ensures underrepresented voices are heard
- Greater Project Success – enhances understanding and support
- Social Capital - connects diverse groups
- Welcoming Spaces – safe, comfortable and inviting for all

SOP-E Applicability

This SOP-E is applicable, and an Engagement Plan is necessary, for the City of Charlotte's work with external stakeholders *only* when both of the following conditions are met:

- City-initiated projects, programs, initiatives, and other efforts being considered or planned that **have decision(s) to be made**, *AND*
- **Stakeholders can help shape those decisions**

While the SOP-E primarily focuses on external engagement initiatives, it also serves as a viable model and reference point for internal engagement efforts. A communication plan is recommended for ALL engagement activities, including those outside SOP-E applicability.

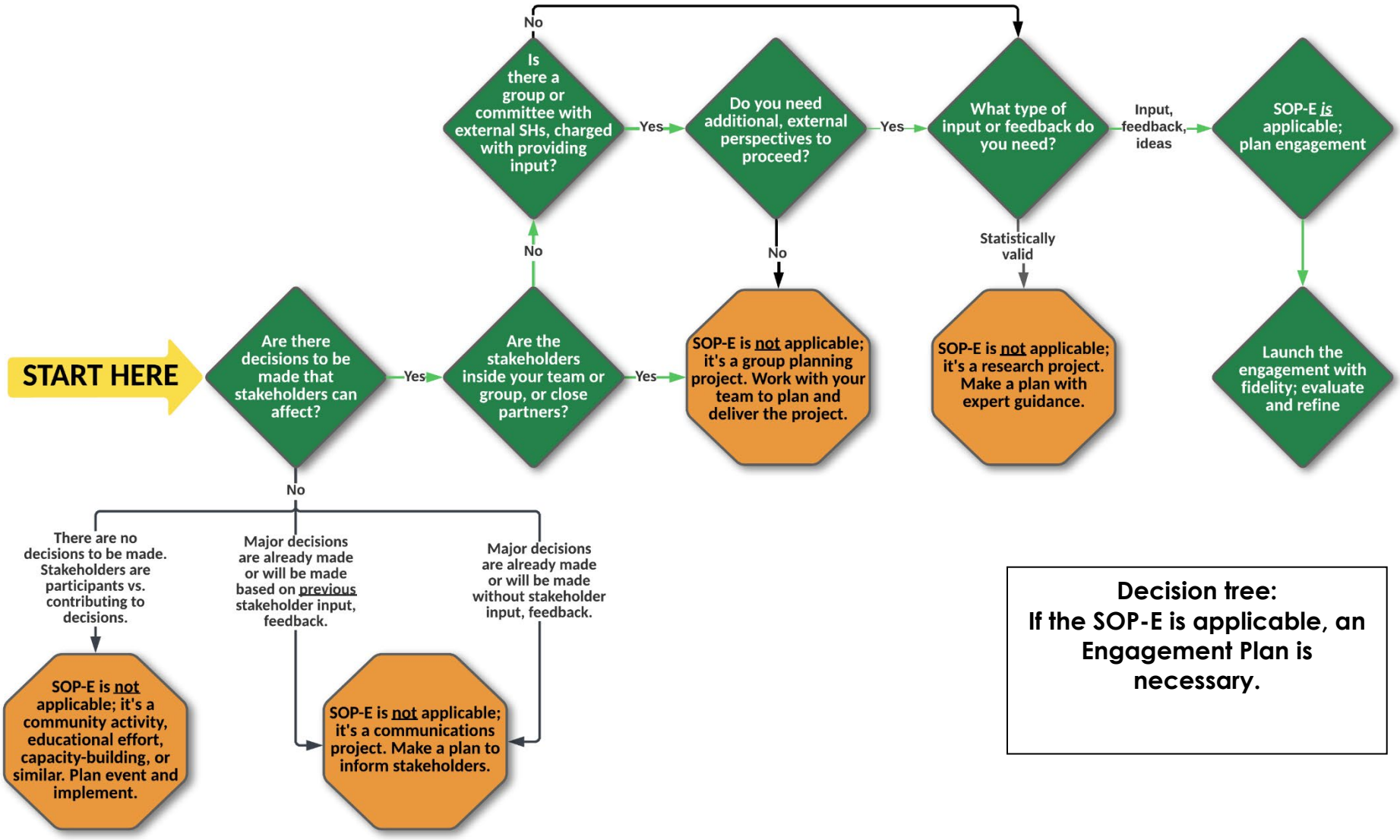
Complementary efforts *outside* the scope of the SOP-E scope may include community activities and events; education or capacity building; program participation; research projects; internal project planning, easements and rights of way negotiation; and communications initiatives where there are no decisions to be made, or where external stakeholders will not have an active, defined role in decision making.

See the SOP-E Applicability Decision Tree on the following page for further guidance.

In addition to project specific city-initiated engagement activities, there are many opportunities for community members and others to proactively interact with the city. An opportunity directory with associated resources for getting started is provided in Appendix B: Additional Ways to Interact with the City.

Figure 1. SOP-E Applicability Decision Tree

Use this decision tree to better understand different types of activities and whether the SOP-E is applicable to your program, project or initiative.



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Guidance for Engagement Planning

Introduction

Supports

The City of Charlotte Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit (the "Toolkit") offers comprehensive context, templates, examples, tools, and support resources for creating an Engagement Plan. Additionally, the staff-led citywide Community Engagement Community of Practice (E-CoP) serves as a valuable resource for exploring best practices, innovative and traditional techniques, community history, resources, and brainstorming support.

Engagement Planning Framework

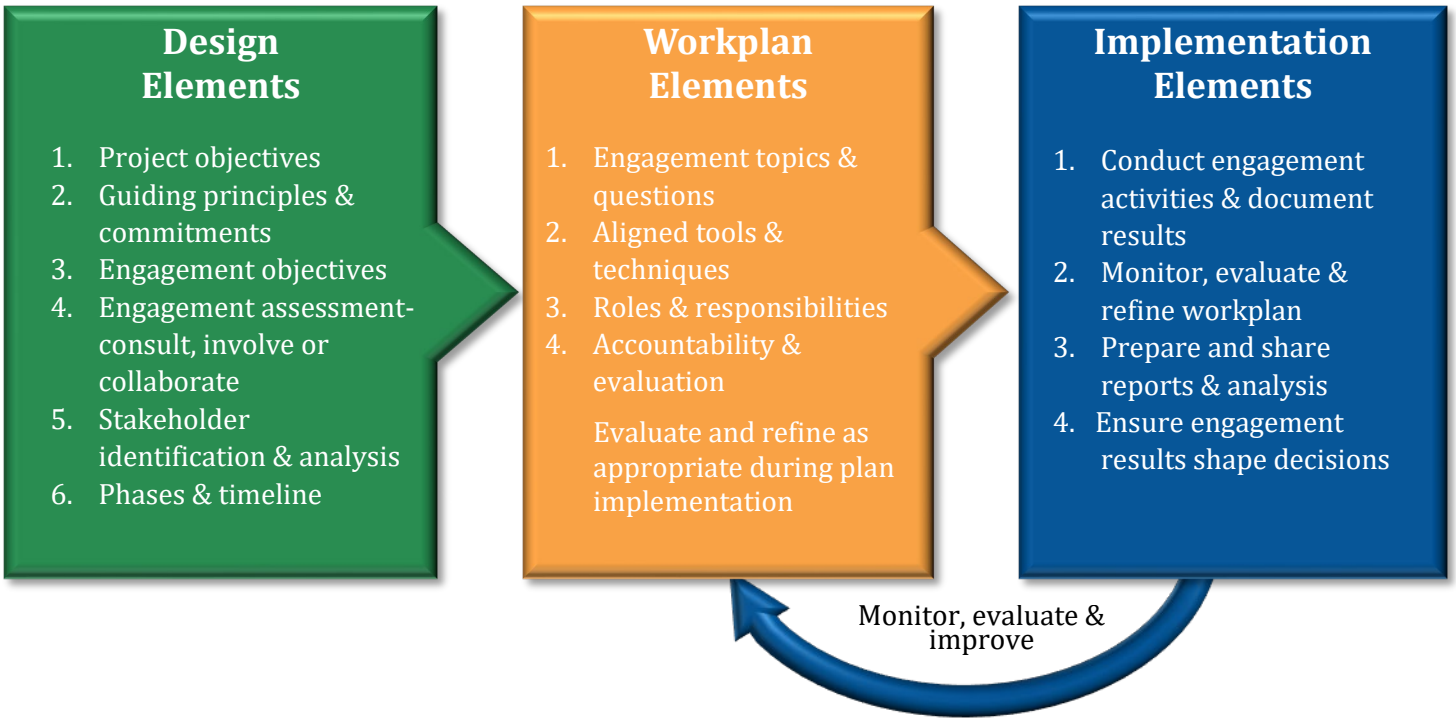
An Engagement Plan is a strategic process and accompanying documentation that outline how the project team will engage and involve stakeholders in decision-making. It's necessary for projects, programs, or initiatives for which this SOP-E is applicable. The framework below outlines the minimum Design and Workplan elements necessary for an Engagement Plan and introduces implementation components.

The Toolkit offers one or more methods to develop the necessary Engagement Plan elements. Alternative or additional methods and elements are encouraged and may be particularly suitable based on the project's funding source, objectives, and regulatory requirements. In case of discrepancies, the most restrictive guidance should be followed.

An Engagement Plan Design Document is intended to be publicly accessible, providing a high-level overview of the engagement design elements via a project website or other platforms. More detailed design elements, workplans, and implementation components are typically maintained internally at the staff level.

See Appendix C.1: Engagement Design Sample Document for a completed Engagement Plan Design Document example.

Figure 2. Engagement Planning Framework Minimum Elements



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Engagement Plan: Design Elements

This section further describes the minimum design phase elements of Engagement Plan preparation.

1. Project Objectives

Briefly describe the project background, key objectives or purpose, and major issues and opportunities. This content is generally drawn from existing descriptions, it should be substantive and easy to understand.

2. Guiding Principles & Commitments

The SOP-E recommends that staff, engagement partners, and participants acknowledge Charlotte's Engagement Guiding Principles, as well as the Core Values and Code of Ethics from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2, www.iap2usa.org). These principles, values, and ethics serve as a guiding star for strategic planning and decision-making in engagement.

Engagement Guiding Principles

These principles were created collaboratively, drawing from experiences, intentions, and best practices. They serve as a framework and a commitment to how the city wishes to present itself within the community. They provide new opportunities to measure effectiveness.

- **Inclusive**: Engagement should be welcoming, providing all community members a reasonable opportunity to contribute.
- **Curious and Collaborative:** Seek to understand, support, and encourage participants to work together to achieve equitable outcomes.
- **Transparent and Accountable:** Provide clarity and transparency about the process, purpose, expectations, and how decision makers will use the results.
- **Open and Timely:** Provide information that is timely, accurate, objective, easily understood, accessible, and balanced.
- **Mutually Trusting and Respectful:** Encourage an environment of genuine and authentic participation, and foster understanding between diverse views, values, and interests.
- **Strategic and Intentional:** Define and communicate measures, listen, revisit, revise as needed.

IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation

Public Participation…

- Is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
- Includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- Promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
- Seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
- Seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
- Provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- Communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

IAP2 Code of Ethics for Public Participation Practitioners

- **Purpose**. We support public participation as a process to make better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders and meet the needs of the decision-making body.
- **Role of Practitioner**. We will enhance the public's participation in the decision-making process and assist decision-makers in being responsive to the public's concerns and suggestions.

- **Trust**. We will undertake and encourage actions that build trust and credibility for the process among all the participants.
- **Defining the Public's Role**. We will carefully consider and accurately portray the public's role in the decision-making process.
- **Openness**. We will encourage the disclosure of all information relevant to the public's understanding and evaluation of a decision.
- **Access to the Process**. We will ensure that stakeholders have fair and equal access to the public participation process and the opportunity to influence decisions.
- **Respect for Communities**. We will avoid strategies that risk polarizing community interests or that appear to "divide and conquer."
- **Advocacy**. We will advocate for the public participation process and will not advocate for interest, party, or project outcome.
- **Commitments**. We ensure that all commitments made to the public, including those by the decision-maker, are made in good faith.
- **Support of the Practice**. We will mentor new practitioners in the field and educate decision-makers and the public about the value and use of public participation.

Source: Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation (www.iap2.org)

3. Engagement Objectives

Engagement objectives specify the purpose and intent of the project's engagement efforts in alignment with the city's Guiding Principles and support the project's purpose, e.g. "Clearly explain engagement effort & what decisions stakeholders can and cannot help shape".

See the City of Charlotte Public Participation Spectrum on page 8 for sample objectives by engagement level, and/or the Toolkit for additional examples and an engagement development worksheet.

4. Engagement Assessment (public decision influence – Consult, Involve or Collaborate)

Using the commitments, project and engagement objectives, apply the **City of Charlotte Public Participation Spectrum on the next page** (the "Spectrum") to conduct a thoughtful, qualitative assessment to "discover" the level of engagement (column) **that best reflects how much impact stakeholders may have on key project decisions.**

The engagement level is determined for the entire project, not for individual methods or activities. The spectrum is not meant to be seen as a progression, or to imply that any level is superior. For multi-year projects with varying decisions over time, separate Engagement Plans may be needed for each major phase.

5. Stakeholder Identification & Analysis

Stakeholders are relevant parties, people or groups who are directly or indirectly affected, positively or negatively, by the city's efforts or actions, or have power over the project, process or outcome. Stakeholder lists will be different for every project.

Identify and analyze stakeholders to prioritize those who can significantly impact the initiative's success or failure, especially the most impacted. Summarize the project's priority stakeholders here.

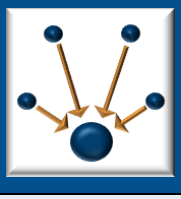
See the Toolkit for additional assistance including a recommended Pre-Engagement Questionnaire for key staff, detailed stakeholder identification and analysis mapping guidance, templates and a facilitation guide.

6. Phases & Timeline

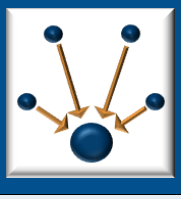
Provide a high-level overview of the engagement approach, phases and timeline.

Table 1. City of Charlotte Public Participation Spectrum

Increasing impact on the decision

	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
			
Public participation goal	**Request stakeholder feedback** on project, program, or initiative analyses, alternatives, and/or decisions.	**Gather input from** stakeholders throughout the process to ensure concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	**Partner** with stakeholders in each aspect of the decision including developing alternatives and identifying the preferred solution.
Promise to the public	The city will keep stakeholders informed, listen to and acknowledge feedback, work to incorporate feedback on the alternatives, and communicate how stakeholder feedback influenced decisions.	The city will work with stakeholders to ensure concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and communicate how stakeholder input influenced decisions.	The city will look to stakeholders for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate advice and recommendations into the decisions to the extent possible.
Examples, Samples and Helpful Hints			
Project examples	• Multiphase, later stage efforts where decisions are limited. • Efforts with extensive technical, regulatory, financial, or legal constraints • Simple efforts with narrow or limited options or choices • *e.g. Strategic Parking Plan, Access Charlotte, Text Amendments, Rezonings, Historic Landmarks Commission proposals*	• Multiphase efforts early in the planning process and with multiple issues and options • Defined planning and similar projects that have multiple issues & options • *e.g. Smart Charlotte, Corridors of Opportunity Playbooks, Charlotte Future 2040, Community Area Plans, Strategic Energy Action Plan (SEAP) update*	• Complex initiatives where problems & solutions are not well defined and would benefit from a more participatory process • Big-picture, large-scale projects that require broader, extensive efforts to shape decisions and/or to ensure successful implementation • *e.g. Arts & Culture Plan, Neighborhood Equity and Stabilization (NEST) Commission, Legacy Commission*
Sample engagement objectives	• Explain overall project • Provide engagement commitments & what they mean for this project • Clearly explain what decisions stakeholders can and can't help shape • Present possible scenarios graphically and as narrative • Ensure feedback is gathered from the full spectrum of priority stakeholders	• Ensure process integrity, transparency and relevance • Use methods that respect and support stakeholder access and meaningful contributions • Create shared learning where stakeholders can understand each other • Ensure underrepresented voices are continually heard • Cultivate lasting relationships w/ sustained participation	• Promote greater understanding by providing opportunities for people to share, hear different perspectives, and learn from each other. • Co-create opportunities that inspire the full spectrum of stakeholders to advance common goals • Co-create the engagement process evaluation, and refinements • Ensure decisionmakers support, so they're prepared for stakeholder's perspectives to shape decisions

Increasing impact on the decision

	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
			
Sample engagement methods *Tailor to align with project scope/content, stakeholder needs, and engagement scale*	• Provide project information, engagement content, and questions for specific feedback. • Apply methods recommended for "Consult" incl comment boards, listening sessions, events feedback stations, intercept and online surveys, roundtables, photo tagging, pop-up booths, etc.	• Provide project information, engagement content, and broader, open-ended and flexible questions for input. • Apply methods recommended for "Involve" incl mind-mapping, storytelling or story gathering (voice, drawings, photos, videos), workshops, small group idea-sharing, etc.	• Provide project information, engagement content, and broader, open-ended and flexible questions to prompt collaboration & discussion. • Apply methods recommended for "Collaborate" incl study or work groups, technical forums, appreciative inquiry, charrettes, focused conversations, class projects, world cafes, deliberative forums, citizen juries, etc.
Sample public outreach text *Communicates engagement level and expectations for the meeting, postcard, flyer, advertisement, etc.*	The purpose of this meeting (or other engagement activity) is to provide information and updates regarding _____. This is an opportunity to learn about the project, ask questions, understand potential impacts and benefits, and provide **feedback** that will be considered during the decision-making process.	The purpose of this meeting (or other engagement activity) is to provide information and updates regarding _____. This is an opportunity to learn about the project, ask questions, understand potential impacts and benefits, and provide **input** that will be considered during the decision-making process.	The purpose of this meeting (or other engagement activity) is to provide information and updates regarding _____. This is an opportunity to learn about the project, ask questions, help identify potential impacts and benefits, and **work together** as a community to identify solutions that address challenges.

Sample public outreach text when there's <u>no planned stakeholder involvement in decision making</u>

The purpose of this meeting (or other communication activity) is to provide information and updates regarding _____. It is an opportunity to learn about the project including how decisions were/will be made, ask questions and understand potential impacts and benefits.

Communications – applicable to <u>all</u> engagement projects

- **Commitment**: There is an obligation to inform the public regardless of the Spectrum engagement level. The city will **inform** stakeholders. We'll communicate regularly with clarity and transparency, providing stakeholders with factual, accessible, timely, and balanced information and updates.
- **Purposes:** Project overview, timeline, current or previous engagement efforts, impacts & decision-making process; provide information resources (website, phone #, FAQs, etc.); and legal notification compliance
- **Tools and techniques:** tailored to each project, may include fact sheets, flyers, handouts, doorhangers, press releases, brochures, social media posts, websites, radio or cable, webinars, briefings, presentations.

Adapted and expanded from the Spectrum for Public Participation, ©International Association for Public Participation

Engagement Plan: Workplan Elements

The section further describes the necessary elements within the Workplan phase of Engagement Plan preparation. See Appendix D Sample Engagement Workplan, and the Toolkit for additional information, templates, and samples.

1. Engagement Topics & Questions

Identify the topics and specific questions on which you're inviting stakeholder input and/or feedback. Focus on the questions necessary to achieve project and engagement objectives.

2. Aligned Tools & Techniques

Select engagement activities and methods that support substantive and meaningful contributions, these may vary by stakeholder group.

See the City of Charlotte Public Participation Spectrum on page 8 for sample tools & techniques by engagement level, and/or the Toolkit for a Methods Matrix highlighting common techniques by audience scale and engagement level, context and purpose.

3. Roles, Responsibilities & Partners

Document who is responsible for the various stakeholder relationships, engagement activities and data collection along with anticipated target dates.

4. Accountability & Evaluation

Identify how you'll evaluate engagement activities in advance, in alignment with relevant project and engagement objectives and the Guiding Principles. These measures are additional to traditional measures which may include number of attendees and number of engagement activities or meetings conducted.

Teams should commit at least one (1) indicator or outcome, along with an associated measure and target for each Guiding Principle in the workplan. Results should be evaluated throughout engagement plan implementation and used to refine the plan and enhance outcomes as appropriate.

Table 2 Guiding Principles Sample Indicators, Measures and Outcomes on the next page presents sample success indicators, outcomes, and measures for each Guiding Principle as a starting place for consideration. Additional suggestions can be found in the Toolkit.



Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

– Barack Obama

Table 2. Guiding Principles Sample Indicators, Measures and Outcomes

Guiding Principle *Charlotte has committed to these principles in our engagement efforts*	Sample Indicators of Success *Engagement processes that align with Charlotte's Guiding Principles are expected to exhibit characteristics such as these*	Sample Desired Outcomes *Adhering to Charlotte's Guiding Principles is expected to result in outcomes and benefits such as these*
Inclusive Engagement should be welcoming, providing all community members a reasonable opportunity to contribute.	• Engagement Plans identify all key stakeholders including those who are underrepresented • The full spectrum of identified key stakeholders participates in engagement processes *Sample evaluation tools:* Routine review of Engagement Plans for thorough stakeholder analysis, and techniques tailored to the needs of different stakeholder groups. *Sample measures:* % of priority stakeholder groups participating, % accessible engagement activity locations	• Participants feel welcomed, included, and respected • City projects are informed and shaped by a diverse set of people, perspectives, ideas, needs, and priorities *Sample evaluation tools:* Short surveys for participants at end of engagement activities with questions related to the process, their learnings, and their experience.
Curious and Collaborative Seek to understand, support and encourage participants to work together to achieve equitable outcomes.	• Tools and techniques actively support mutual listening, learning, and understanding • Engagements embed equity, and staff and participants work to model, teach, and learn as they do the work *Sample evaluation tools:* Routine reviews of Engagement Plans for increases in community members/partners meaningfully participating in engagement design and implementation *Sample measures:* # collaborative activities (e.g., workshops, focus groups), # partnerships with community orgs	• Communities have increased capacity to work across differences to achieve mutually beneficial, equitable results • Community members and city staff increasingly collaborate to plan and implement welcoming, respectful, and rigorous engagement efforts *Sample evaluation tools:* Routine review of staff recommendations and participant survey results for increased success together to reach equitable, consensus-based conclusions
Transparent and Accountable Provide clarity and transparency about the process, purpose, expectations, and how decision makers will use the results.	• Engagement Plans are comprehensive, summaries are publicly shared along with progress updates • Implementation planning is collaborative, stakeholder- oriented, and actively evaluated, and stakeholder feedback shapes improvements *Sample evaluation tools:* Routine review of project websites and communications for substantive engagement designs posted, highlighted, and viewed *Sample measures:* % participants understanding engagement activity purpose, % feedback used in final decisions	• Neighborhoods and communities are better informed about projects, processes, and decisions, and understand their role in shaping decisions • Stakeholders across the diversity spectrum increasingly trust engagement processes and their own opportunities to help shape decisions *Sample evaluation tools:* Across the spectrum of diversity, routine post-process reviews and evaluations include increased participation and trust

Open and Timely Provide information that is timely, accurate, objective, easily understood, accessible, and balanced.	• The city uses multiple means and methods to share information with the full range of community members • The city routinely seeks feedback on the effectiveness of its information sharing and makes timely improvements *Sample evaluation tools:* Routine, short surveys of engagement participants across the spectrum of diversity on communications effectiveness and suggestions for improvement *Sample metrics:* avg time between announcements and events, % participants finding information timely and actionable, avg participant rating for clarity of info	• Communities know about projects, programs, and initiatives that affect them, and opportunities to participate • Stakeholders across the diversity spectrum have multiple, accessible opportunities to contribute to decisions and help improve processes *Sample evaluation tools:* Routine review of staff recommendations and final decisions for documentation of stakeholder impact, publicly shared
Mutually Trusting and Respectful Encourage an environment of genuine and authentic participation, and foster understanding between diverse views, values, and interests.	• Engagement tools and techniques support participants to share a diverse range of perspectives and ideas • Disagreements and conflict are expected, and addressed with civility *Sample evaluation tools:* Routine formative assessments of stakeholder contributions for a diverse range of perspectives *Sample metrics:* % participants reporting increased trust, avg satisfaction with activity environment, # recurring participants	• City decisions are better informed, relevant, and durable • City staff increasingly trust community members to help shape decisions that affect their lives • Participants agree that decision-making processes are fair *Sample evaluation tools:* Short surveys for participants at end of engagement activities with questions related to the process, their learnings, and their experience
Strategic and Intentional Define and communicate indicators of success and outcomes, listen, revisit, revise as needed.	• Engagement planning, processes, implementation, and impacts on decisions are regularly and collaboratively monitored, evaluated, and improved • Equity and stakeholder perspectives are centered in engagement evaluation and improvements *Sample evaluation tools:* Regular reviews of engagement implementation plan for process refinements based on stakeholder evaluations *Sample measures:* # of clearly defined success indicators shared with participants at start, % of engagement activities completed within specified timelines % instances where stakeholder feedback resulted in plan revision	• Community members and city staff increasingly collaborate to plan, implement, evaluate, and improve engagement processes to meet community and city needs • Communities routinely help design and implement rigorous engagement process monitoring, evaluation, and improvements *Sample evaluation tools:* Regular review of Engagement Plan design process for tangible contributions and guidance from key community stakeholders/partners

Engagement Plan: Implementation Elements

Once the Engagement Plan design is complete and the workplan has been drafted, plan implementation including the following elements may begin. The process should be fluid, responsive and updated as needed to ensure continued alignment with the committed engagement level objectives and principles

1. Conduct Activities & Document Results

Implement engagement activities, track progress and record results in the Workplan.

2. Monitor, Evaluate & Refine

Monitoring, evaluating, and refining during the implementation phase is critical to ensuring that the initiative remains effective, inclusive, and aligned with intended goals.

3. Prepare Reports & Analysis

Apply proper preparation to effect necessary data collection, use a structured approach to ensure data collection, documentation, and presentation align with project and engagement objectives, collect data using mixed methods to ensure inclusive perspectives, format reports for accessibility using plain language, visuals like charts, and language translations, use analytical tools to examine participation and feedback for disparities. highlight areas for improvement

Ensure reports explain how community input was collected and incorporated in a manner that upholds the committed engagement level, make them publicly available to build trust. Provide spaces for follow-up discussions to reinforce transparency and maintain a feedback loop.

4. Ensure Results Shape Decisions

Share results publicly. Support consensus when possible. When consensus is infeasible, seek to ensure participants perceive the process as fair.

At the project's end, project managers should communicate received stakeholder feedback, its impact on decisions, alignment with engagement commitments, and lessons learned for future improvements.

Working with Consultants – Request for Proposals (RFPs)

For SOP-E applicable projects, the City should establish the project's intent by defining the project and engagement objectives, the public's role in decision making, and success measures. These foundational Engagement Plan elements inform consultant selection and scope of work.

Consultants collaborate with the project team to complete remaining engagement planning elements, and implementation as defined by the scope of work. The Toolkit includes sample RFP verbiage for equity-centered engagement and an RFP for the city's Cultural Plan which embedded equity and inclusion expectations.

When the people lead, the leaders will follow.
– Mahatma Gandhi



Appendix A: Key Terms Glossary

- **City of Charlotte Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit ("Toolkit"):** a compilation of information, templates and resources to support staff in the preparation of an Engagement Plan.

- **City of Charlotte Public Participation Spectrum ("Spectrum"):** describes a range of roles for stakeholders in decision-making and provides a common language for assessing, communicating and committing the level of impact that stakeholders may have on key project decisions. Charlotte's spectrum is adapted from IAP2's spectrum to reflect practice evolution and the way we work.

- **Engagement Guiding Principles ("Guiding Principles"):** the City of Charlotte's vision and commitment to center equity within engagement initiatives.

- **Engagement Plan:** the strategic planning process and accompanying documentation that outline how the project team will engage and involve stakeholders in decision-making.

- **Engagement Design Document:** a public overview of the engagement commitments and process.

- **Engagement objective:** specifies and helps clarify the purpose and intent of the project's engagement efforts, such as process transparency or informed decision making.

- **Equity:** the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.

- **Evaluation:**

  - **Indicator: s**ignals that help assess progress toward a goal, they give direction but don't always provide detailed measurement. (e.g. high stakeholder engagement)
  - **Measure:** quantifiable data points that will be collected to track progress, may be quantitative or qualitative. (e.g. 500 stakeholders completed survey)
  - **Metric:** calculated or analyzed data based on measures (e.g. 85% stakeholder satisfaction score)
  - **Outcome:** the final result or expected impact of actions taken, show whether objectives were achieved. (e.g. improved public trust)

- **International Association of Public Participation (IAP2):** a global professional organization dedicated to promoting and advancing public participation in decision-making processes across various sectors.

- **Outreach;** the practice of connecting with the public

- **Project objective:** defines what a project aims to achieve, to guide and ensure that the project team and stakeholder's efforts remain aligned with the project's purpose.

- **Stakeholders:** Individuals, groups, or organizations that may be affected—positively or negatively—by a City decision or initiative, or who may influence its development, implementation, or outcomes.

- *The SOP-E recognizes that the term "stakeholder" is interpreted differently across professions and communities. It is retained for organizational consistency while the SOP-E continues to evolve alongside professional practice.*

- **Rightsholders:** indigenous people with current or historic rights to the land connected with the city's project or actions.

Appendix B: Additional Ways to Interact with the City

In addition to city-initiated engagement activities, the following are examples of ongoing opportunities for community members and interested parties to proactively engage with the city.

Participate

- Give public comment: Learn how to provide formal public comment to the City Council
- Contact your City Council member or other officials
- Vote in a City election: Learn about upcoming elections and how to register to vote
- Visit CLT Community to register your neighborhood, access the latest city data, and utilize web-based applications and programs
- Use the CLT+ app to schedule bulky trash pickup, report a pothole, graffiti, or code violation, and more
- Connect with staff to make them aware of needs and opportunities and to learn about available resources

Serve your city and community

- Volunteer with the city, county: Keep Charlotte Beautiful, TreesCharlotte, Adopt-a-Stream, storm drain or bus stop.
- Serve on a board or commission
- Run for local office
- Enhance understanding through opportunities including the Civic Leadership Academy, CMPD Citizens Academy, CLT Aviation Academy, etc.

Get information

- Dial 211 to find out about programs or services in your community or use the online Search Tool
- Dial 311 for questions about water, garbage, recycling, stormwater, housing, neighborhood and business support, transportation, taxes, land use and environmental services, and non-emergency police
- Learn more about neighborhood grants, trash collection, road closures/detours, council meetings, events, and other city services to keep you moving forward. Sign up for email and/or text updates or follow City of Charlotte on social media, Facebook, X (twitter) or Instagram
- Attend public meetings - city council, boards, commissions, etc.
- Use the Open Data Portal to visualize, and download publicly available data
- Visit the Quality of Life Explorer to access and compare data including demographics, education, economics, health, transportation, safety, etc.
- Attend live or view on demand training opportunities to develop new skills and learn about available resource.
- Review Charlotte's Community Resource Directory to identify current local program and resource opportunities
- Visit the Capital Projects Dashboard to learning about current and planned capital projects
- Sign up for the City Speaks newsletter to find the latest information on city initiatives, services, events and programs, and other relevant, trending topics

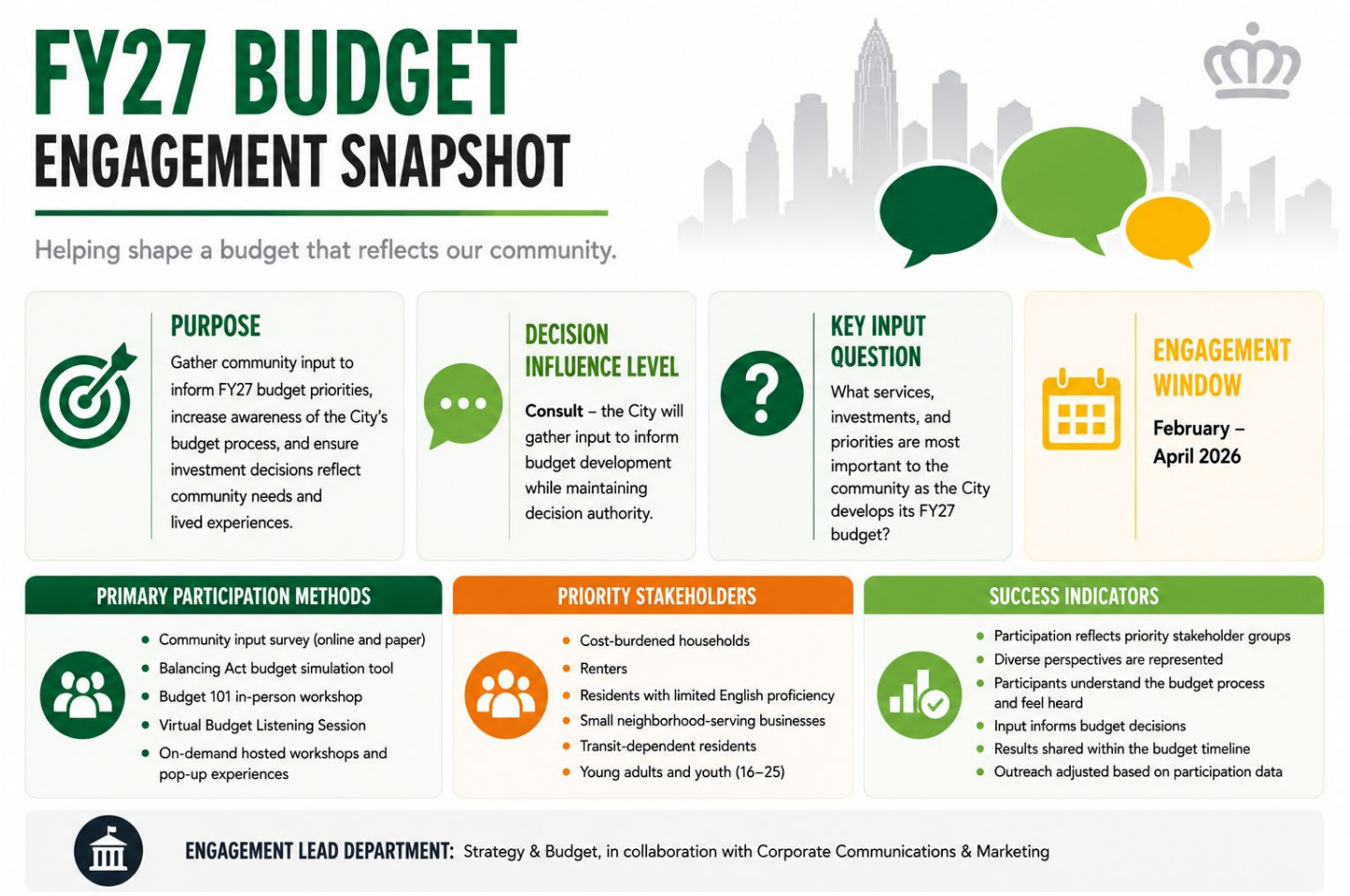
Build community in your neighborhood

- Keep Charlotte Beautiful brings neighbors together to create a cleaner, greener, and more sustainable community. Connect to adopt a street, schedule a clean-up event or borrow clean-up supplies.
- Connect with your neighbors: Say hello in-person and online. Using listservs, emails, texting, and NextDoor all are great ways to get in contact
- Host a neighborhood block party, National Night Out, or other event
- Apply for a Neighborhood Matching Grant, Placemaking Grant, Opportunity Fund or other resource opportunity to enhance your community

Appendix C: Sample Engagement Plan – Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) Annual Budget Engagement

The City of Charlotte conducts annual budget engagement to inform City Council and executive leadership about community priorities, service needs, and funding considerations. This sample engagement plan serves as both the roadmap for FY27 budget engagement and an illustration of the SOP-E's core planning elements.

While each project will differ in scale and complexity, all engagement plans should create a shared understanding of the decision to be made, priority stakeholders, the public's role in decision-making, participation considerations, success measures, accountability, and close-the-loop commitments.



Project Background

The City of Charlotte serves nearly one million residents, along with millions of visitors and commuters, and supports a local economy of over 50,000 businesses. City services are delivered by over 7,000 employees across 26 departments, each responsible for meeting community needs while managing public resources responsibly.

The city's annual budget is the primary tool to fund City services, advance City Council's Strategic Priorities, and plan for continued community growth. It guides how resources are allocated across core services including public safety, transportation, housing, neighborhood services, planning, workforce development, and infrastructure. The scale of the organization and community it serves shapes budget development and implementation.

What the City Budget Includes

The adopted FY 2026 City Budget totals approximately $3.65 billion across all funds, including:

- **General Fund** – core services like public safety, neighborhood services and planning
- **Enterprise Funds** – Aviation, Transit, Water, and Storm Water services
- **Special Revenue Funds** – funds restricted for specific purposes
- **Capital Investment Plan (CIP)** – long-term investments in infrastructure and facilities

A significant portion of the budget supports required costs, including employee compensation and benefits, debt service, contracts, and ongoing operations. The remainder supports discretionary investments that allow the City to address emerging needs, respond to growth, and advance long-term goals. By law, the City must adopt a structurally balanced budget, meaning planned expenditures cannot exceed available revenues.

How Budget Priorities Are Set

Each year, City Council sets and reaffirms Strategic Priorities – currently Well-Managed Government; Great Neighborhoods; Safe Communities; Transportation and Planning; and Workforce and Business Development – to guide funding decisions and long-term planning. These priorities help align public resources with City goals and support careful prioritization among many important needs, while considering service levels and affordability.

How the Budget Is Considered and Adopted

The City of Charlotte's annual budget is developed and adopted through a public process designed to promote transparency, public awareness, and City Council deliberation.

- City staff facilitate engagement to receive public feedback on community perspectives and priorities and prepare a proposed budget based on service needs, revenue projections, financial policies, and City Council's Strategic Priorities.
- City Council reviews the proposed budget through work sessions and public meetings, including at least one formal public hearing, before taking final action.
- Following review, deliberation, and public hearing, City Council adopts the annual budget by majority vote, in accordance with North Carolina law.

Equitable Engagement Guiding Principles & Commitments

The city and this project are committed to upholding the following engagement principles:

- **Inclusive:** Engagement should be welcoming, providing all community members reasonable opportunity to contribute.
- **Curious and Collaborative:** Seek understanding, support and encourage participants to work together to achieve equitable outcomes.
- **Transparent and Accountable:** Provide clarity and transparency about the process, purpose, expectations, and how decision makers will use the results.
- **Open and Timely:** Provide information that is timely, accurate, objective, easily understood, accessible, and balanced.
- **Mutually Trusting and Respectful:** Encourage an environment of genuine and authentic participation, and foster understanding between diverse views, values, and interests.
- **Strategic and Intentional:** Define and communicate indicators of success and outcomes, listen, revise as needed.

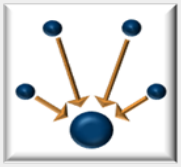
Engagement Objectives

Engagement objectives clarify what participants need to understand, and the input the City is seeking. Specifically, the City aims to:

- Help residents understand how the City budget works, what's included, and how to get involved
- Share clear information about the financial factors and required costs that shape budget decisions
- Invite community input from across neighborhoods and lived experiences to help inform City Council's funding priorities

Engagement Assessment

The public's influence level in FY27 Budget Engagement is Consult, which reflects the City's commitment to meaningful engagement while maintaining clear decision-making authority.

	Consult	
Stakeholder engagement goal	Gather input from stakeholders throughout the study process to ensure concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	
Promise to stakeholders	The city will keep stakeholders informed, listen to, acknowledge and work to incorporate feedback on the alternatives, and communicate how stakeholder input influenced decisions.	

From the City of Charlotte Public Participation Spectrum

Stakeholder Identification & Analysis

The City is committed to equitable engagement. Design prioritizes reducing participation barriers where impacts are greatest, while ensuring opportunities for all. This approach helps surface perspectives that may not be captured through broad outreach alone.

Priority Stakeholders

These stakeholders are prioritized based on differences in exposure to budget impact and participation barriers, not relative importance.

- Cost-burdened households
- Renters
- Residents with limited English proficiency
- Small neighborhood-serving businesses
- Transit-dependent residents
- Young adults and youth (16–25)

See the Stakeholder Identification & Analysis table for the complete stakeholder assessment, including additional stakeholders, resources, impacts, and perceived barrier considerations.

Participation Design Considerations

The following are derived from stakeholder analysis to reduce barriers across stakeholder groups.

- Provide clear, plain-language information about the City budget, how funding decisions affect daily life, and how public input will be considered in the budget development process.
- Offer multiple, accessible participation opportunities—including online, in-person, mobile, paper, and partner-supported options—to accommodate varying schedules, transportation, technology, language, and caregiving needs.
- Meet people where they are by partnering with trusted community organizations, schools, businesses, housing providers, transit locations, and neighborhood events to increase awareness and reach historically underrepresented participants.

Success Measures & Evaluation

Establishing evaluation metrics early focuses the team on meaningful, goal-aligned engagement success, and ensures accountability. Success is measured by quality, access, and representation – not volume alone – allowing for real-time strategic adjustments.

The following metrics guide FY27 budget engagement:

Engagement Guiding Principle	Desired Outcome – What Success Looks Like	Success Metric	How It Will Be Measured	Applicable Activity
Inclusive	Engagement reaches a broader range of lived experiences, especially those most impacted by budget decisions.	% priority stakeholder groups participating	Enhanced survey & RSVP for experience-based segmentation	All activities
Curious & Collaborative	Engagement surfaces different viewpoints and supports learning across perspectives.	Qualitative input reflects multiple perspectives	Review themes from open-ended survey responses and discussion	All activities
Transparent & Accountable	Participants understand the budget consideration process and how their input will be used.	% participants communicate understanding	Survey comprehension questions; meeting poll	Survey; Virtual; In-person
Open & Timely	Information is clear, accessible, and shared early enough to matter.	Engagement results are shared within the budget consideration window	Confirm and compare against budget consideration schedule	All activities
Mutually Trusting & Respectful	Participants feel comfortable sharing honest input.	% participants report feeling heard and respected	Exit survey review; tone of responses	Virtual; In-person
Strategic and Intentional	Engagement is monitored and adjusted during implementation.	Participation data reviewed, used to adjust outreach	Mid-engagement reporting check-in and adjustment	All activities

Feedback Loop

To maintain transparency and strengthen public trust, the city will clearly communicate how community input is reflected in the budget consideration process as follows:

- Publish a public summary following engagement that highlights engagement activities, key themes, areas of alignment and difference across perspectives, and how input will be used.
- Share follow-up communications with participants who provided contact information, thanking them and directing them to engagement summaries and budget resources.
- Document and report engagement outcomes as part of FY27 budget engagement reporting, including how feedback was reviewed and shared with decision-makers.

By closing the loop in clear and accessible ways, the city reinforces transparency, supports accountability, and demonstrates that community participation matters.

Preliminary Stakeholder Analysis

The preliminary stakeholder analysis below maps priority and supporting stakeholder groups against their exposure to budget impact, perceived barriers to participation, and recommended outreach methods.

Stakeholder Group	Category	Impact / Power Assessment	Perceived Impacts	Perceived Barriers to Meaningful Participation	Potential Barrier Mitigation Strategies	Recommended Outreach Methods
Cost-burdened households	Primary stakeholder	High Impact – Low Power	Small budget changes including taxes and utilities have outsized effects on affordability and service access	Time constraints, competing priorities, limited digital access, mobility considerations, child/elder care	Flexible engagement options, low-time-commitment formats, in-person opportunities	Community-organization partnerships, paper surveys with digital option, outreach at service hubs
Renters	Primary stakeholder	High Impact – Low Power	Budget decisions directly affect housing stability, utilities, transportation; historic participation barriers.	Limited time, awareness, distrust of government processes, may feel less invested	On-site engagement, community partner engagement, clear explanation of purpose and use of input	Apartment pop-ups, flyers in common areas, partnerships with tenant organizations, QR codes
Residents with limited English proficiency	Primary stakeholder	High Impact – Low Power	Language barriers restrict access to information and participation	Awareness, language access, lack of translated materials, trust	In-language materials, trusted messengers, culturally appropriate outreach	Translated surveys, in-language facilitators, ethnic media, events
Small neighborhood-serving businesses	Primary stakeholder	High Impact – Lower Power	Budget decisions affect infrastructure, permitting, grants, resource programs and customer access.	Limited time, operational pressures	Concise outreach, relevance to business impacts, use exisitng business outreach opps	Merchant associations, corridor groups, brief surveys, drop-in visits
Transit-dependent residents	Primary stakeholder	High Impact – Low Power	Budget investments directly affect daily mobility, job & healthcare access, time burden	Transportation limitations, scheduling challenges	Meet people where they already are, mobile engagement, utilize CATS comms network?	Transit hub outreach, mobile engagement, posters at stops, SMS reminders
Youth and young adults (ages 16–25)	Primary stakeholder	High Impact – Low Power	Long-term impacts from budget decisions with historically low representation	Awareness, disengagement from traditional civic processes	Peer-based outreach, relevant framing, accessible digital platforms, graphics	Schools and college partnerships, social media, peer-to-peer outreach
City Council and senior leadership	Primary Secondary	Low Impact – High Power	Hold decision authority, may or may not be impacted as service users.	Time constraints, political considerations, competing priorities	Clear, concise synthesis focused on implications	Briefings, dashboards, memos, presentations
General residents (citywide)	Secondary Stakeholder	Low Impact – Low Power	Provide broad perspective and validation.	Awareness, motivation, limited time, government distrust	Broad outreach, simple access points	City website, social media, newsletters, citywide survey

Appendix D: SOP-E Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the purpose of the Standard Operating Procedure for Engagement (SOP-E)?
The SOP-E provides a consistent framework for designing meaningful public participation.

When is the SOP-E applicable?
The SOP-E applies, and an Engagement Plan is recommended, for City-led work when: 1) there is a decision to be made; and 2) external stakeholders are invited to meaningfully shape that decision.

Who owns the Engagement Plan?
The project team. Consultants, when used, collaborate with the project team to complete the plan, adjust as needed and support implementation as defined by the scope of work.

Why is engagement planning important?
It aligns the project team by establishing a shared understanding of the decision, the public's role in decision-making, project-specific stakeholders, and success measures. This reduces project risk while enabling meaningful participation, better-informed decisions, and demonstrated accountability.

How is SOP-E engagement planning different?
SOP-E engagement planning begins with needs determination and stakeholder-centered participation design. The public's role in decision-making, engagement objectives, impacted stakeholders, and success measures are established before selecting the tools and techniques that best support the project.

What are the key elements of an SOP-E aligned Engagement Plan?
Every Engagement Plan establishes the engagement objectives, the public's role in decision-making, stakeholder analysis, success measures, aligned tools and techniques, an implementation timeline, evaluation and adjustment, and how commitments to the public will be honored and communicated.

How is the level of public influence communicated?
Charlotte's Public Participation Spectrum establishes shared vocabulary for communicating how public participation will influence decision-making. Once committed, this becomes the City's promise to the public. The Spectrum communicates three levels of public influence: Consult, Involve, and Collaborate.

Consult: City will gather and consider stakeholder feedback in decision-making.
Involve: City will work with stakeholders to help ensure their participation is reflected in alternatives.
Collaborate: City will partner with stakeholders to develop solutions and identify preferred outcomes.

How is engagement success measured?
Desired outcomes are established before engagement begins to guide engagement design, implementation, and evaluation. Success is measured by indicators such as inclusive participation, meaningful influence on decision-making, transparent communication, demonstrated accountability, and completion of the public feedback loop.

Is an Engagement Plan still necessary if the City hires an engagement consultant?
Yes. The City should establish the Engagement Plan's foundational elements—project and engagement objectives, the public's role in decision-making, and success measures—to inform consultant procurement and work scope.

What guidance applies if the SOP-E conflicts with other engagement requirements?
The SOP-E is a framework. When requirements differ, follow the most restrictive applicable guidance.

Are small projects exempt?
No. Engagement Plans scale to fit project complexity, impacts, and opportunities for public participation.

Where can I find additional resources and support?
Visit the Community Engagement page on CNET for templates, tools and guidance, or contact Nicole Storey, Engagement Practice Manager, at nrstorey@charlottenc.gov.