mayors innovation project

BUILDING CIVIC MUSCLE BY DELIVERING RESULTS

SUMMER 2026 POLICY MEETING
JULY 22-24 · MADISON,WI

Between the demands of daily life and the friction of navigating bureaucracy, engaging with local government can feel less like empowerment and more like a burden. This friction fuels a cycle of burnout, civic withdrawal, and growing distrust. True civic health—where community members actively participate and governments genuinely respond—has a massive, documented impact. Stronger civic engagement directly correlates with improved public safety, better physical and mental health outcomes, crisis response, and stronger educational systems. But how do we unlock these benefits when community bandwidth is at an all-time low? This panel explores actionable strategies to build civic muscle through efforts that simplify systems and build trust through quick, visible, and responsive actions that demonstrate community input matters.



CIVIC HEALTH & THE HIGH ROAD

A “high road” approach to civic health treats community engagement not as a bureaucratic afterthought, but as essential infrastructure for shared prosperity. When civic participation feels burdensome, it breeds burnout, withdrawal, and distrust. Conversely, a high road framework flips this dynamic by investing in people and democratizing local governance.

On the high road, civic health goes beyond occasional voting or attending public hearings. It is an inclusive ecosystem where community members have the actual bandwidth, trust, and structural power to shape their neighborhoods. It means transforming public participation from an exhausting chore into an accessible, empowering, and collective habit.

THE CITY’S ROLE

The city’s role is to dismantle systemic friction and actively “build civic muscle.” Rather than expecting overburdened residents to navigate complex bureaucracies, high road cities modernize and simplify their systems. They build trust by delivering quick, visible, and responsive actions that explicitly prove community input directly shapes policy and budget priorities.

WHY IT MATTERS

Investing in civic health yields a massive compounding return. Stronger, more equitable civic engagement is directly linked to safer neighborhoods, better public health outcomes, resilient crisis response, and more robust educational systems. Ultimately, a high road city recognizes that a healthy democracy is the foundation of a thriving, resilient economy.



DISCLAIMER

For length, clarity, and printing purposes, many of these sources have been abbreviated and/or edited from their original form. To read the full, unabbreviated resources from this book, please visit our website or view them on the usb drive provided in your meeting materials.

RESOURCES

PAGE	
1	"Ten steps toward a better democracy," Matt Leighninger, The Fullcrum, Nov. 27, 2024.
7	"Disconnected but Hopeful: What a New Survey Reveals About Civic Life in America," National Civic League, Sep. 30, 2025.
12	"Jaime Kinder and the grassroots revolution in Meadville," Lucy Corrie-Tannen, PA Humanities, Aug 27, 2025.
16	"Pa. city council recognizes ambulance service for efficiency, service," Mike Crowley, EMS 1, Oct. 6, 2026.
19	"City of Tulsa Launches Office of Health and Well-being," City of Tulsa, OK, Aug. 20, 2025.
21	"Mayor's Office of Children, Youth, and Families Celebrates Measurable Progress, February Anniversary," City of Tulsa, OK, Feb. 6, 2026.
25	"Meaningful public participation is achieved with intention." City of Charlotte, NC, 2026.
26	Pages excerpted from, "Standard Operating Procedure for Engagement (SOP-E)," City of Charlotte, NC, 2026.
40	"The Madison city workers helping Spanish, Chinese, Hmong speakers," Enjoyiana Nururdin, Cap Times, Jul. 9, 2026.



Ten steps toward a better democracy



VisionsofAmerica/Joe Sohm/Getty Images

By Matt Leighninger
Nov 27, 2024

No matter who they voted for on Election Day, it has become clear that most Americans agree on at least one thing: Our current form of democracy no longer works. Almost three-quarters of us agree that "the U.S. used to be a good example of democracy, but isn't anymore." The question before us now is whether we can build a better one.

Two years ago, I wrote two parallel essays about the attitudes of party elites: " Why Progressives Don't Get Democracy " and " Why Conservatives Don't Get Democracy." In this presidential campaign, the two parties spent over $10 billion between them. The Harris campaign emphasized the threat posed by Donald Trump and implied that if voters would simply elect Democrats, democracy would be saved, Americans could leave the work of governance to experts and elected officials, and we could all relax into post-Trump normalcy. The Trump campaign claimed that its candidate could almost single-handedly solve the nation's problems and avoided using the term "democracy" altogether.

The limited, frustrating and expensive version of democracy we have today, where parties tout voting as the main way for Americans to participate in governance, isn't compelling to Democratic, Republican or independent voters. Our system has failed to deliver the benefits and changes we want. It doesn't make people feel like they have a voice, or that they matter.

At the local level, Americans remain heavily involved in democratic activities that show how much they *can* matter. In fact, our Healthy Democracy Ecosystem Map shows 10,000 groups and organizations in America doing democracy-strengthening work: supporting service and volunteerism, expanding civic education, supporting youth leadership, and providing civic technologies and media, among many other valuable pursuits. These democracy-builders include Democrats, Republicans and independents, and they are working all over the country.

My organization, the National Civic League, was established at another time when the country was dealing with polarization, urban-rural divides and economic inequality; it was founded in 1894, by Teddy Roosevelt and Louis Brandeis. Over the following 20 years, it helped convert activities and innovations into systemic changes to democracy, including the model city charter, the ballot initiative and referendum process, and suffrage for women. That civic infrastructure served us well overall; now the system needs an upgrade, badly.

The Building Civic Bridges Act, championed in Congress by Reps. Derek Kilmer (D-Wash.) and Andy Barr (R-Ky.) and Sens. Chris Coons (D-Del.) and Todd Young (R-Ind.), would provide a bipartisan foundation for better civic infrastructure. What are the innovations and reforms that could be incorporated in that infrastructure? Here are 10:

1. Make citizens' assemblies part of our policymaking process. In a citizens' assembly, a group of ordinary citizens comes together to learn about, deliberate on and make recommendations about an important public issue. These groups typically range from 30 to 100 people, and they are carefully assembled to represent the community in terms of age, gender, race, politics and other demographics. The group meets for a number of days over several weeks or months and submits its final recommendations either to elected officials (who have committed upfront to carefully considering them) or to the voters who will consider them when voting on a ballot initiative. Like our jury system, assemblies rely on the ability of diverse people to learn, weigh evidence and find common ground.

2. Let people vote directly on more issues and policies. The use of initiatives and referenda arose during that earlier period of innovation a century ago. They have been

successful recently in expanding Medicaid and protecting reproductive rights. It is a reform in need of an upgrade: Ballot measures are often written in confusing language, and voters don't always know enough about the issue. But when combined with citizen's assemblies, digital tools like ActiVote, uses of generative AI to summarize and translate, and other opportunities for learning and discussion, they can produce changes in places where legislatures are gridlocked or out of touch with citizens.

3. Give people a say on budgets. Participatory budgeting (PB) was one of the first ideas to spread around the world during the recent period of democracy innovation. In PB, citizens generate and refine ideas for how to spend a pot of money, ranging from hundreds to millions of dollars. Participants often work in teams that connect with experts and staff, leading to a vote where everyone in the community can evaluate the ideas and allocate the funds. Some PB processes have a second tier in which neighborhood participants are selected to advise the overall city budget. PB has been shown to reduce inequality, improve health and boost voter turnout.

4. Change official public meetings. Most of the meetings held by city councils, school boards, planning commissions, state agencies and other bodies continue to use the same format they have for decades: People are allowed three minutes at the microphone to address the officials, on any topic they choose, with almost no interaction between citizens, officials or staff. These meetings produce frustration on the part of both citizens and officials, allow extreme voices to dominate discussion and seem to erode public trust. Small-group deliberations and digital tools can make these sessions more civil, informed and productive, and allow people to participate meaningfully before and after the meetings.

5. Use digital tools to support in-person deliberation. Fifteen years ago, it seemed as though the internet would revolutionize democracy; more recently, it seems just as likely to destroy it. Digital tools offer so many ways to help people brainstorm ideas, rate public services, identify problems, aggregate opinions, raise money, envision policy options, share neighborhood information and craft statements that reflect the consensus of a group. We have learned that these tools need to be used in concert, and they must be connected to in-person discussion: Technological communication and face-to-face interaction have different strengths and complement each other well. This sort of tech-enabled deliberation is particularly important for helping people decide how to maximize the positives, and minimize the dangers, of artificial intelligence.

6. Renovate the civic associations that represent the "ground floor" of democracy. The associations that should be most accessible to ordinary people are in bad shape. Neighborhood groups, local online networks, parent councils, citizen academies, and local boards and commissions should offer ways for people to connect, build bridges, solve problems and give input to government. Instead, most are run by a few exhausted volunteers who usually aren't representative of the larger community. Many tech tools could be helpful — but so could the more old-fashioned approach of highly regular meetings, centered on food, that are primarily social events with a bit of public engagement.

7. Give voters more meaningful roles in campaigns. Candidates currently spend massive amounts of money on ads and one-way messaging. If they engaged voters in more of a two-way discussion, using deliberative processes and tech tools to jointly develop key aspects of their platforms, they might gain supporters, inform citizens and refocus races on policies rather than personalities. Having established that pattern during the campaign, officials would be more comfortable engaging citizens when in office — and citizens would be more likely to get engaged.

8. Regularly review and update city charters and the legal framework for democracy. Most city charters have a review clause: Every 10 years or so, the city must by law create a commission to evaluate the charter (which is essentially the constitution for the city) and decide if it should be updated. This makes sense: Our legal frameworks for democracy should fit the needs and goals of citizens today. One reason why official public meetings are so dysfunctional is that the open meetings laws in some states were written in the 1970s and are hard to interpret for the internet. In other, younger democracies, there is more innovation in part because charters and constitutions were established more recently, and people know they can be changed when they aren't working well.

9. Use award programs and international exchanges to celebrate and learn from successes. For 75 years, the All-America City Award has recognized the work of communities in using inclusive civic engagement to address critical issues. Those local successes should be lifted up, as well as innovations and reforms in other countries. We have federal agencies that support democracy abroad, but none that focus on democracy at home; as a result, we have fallen behind many other countries, where people have implemented a wide range of reforms. Events like the World Forum on Democracy and the Global Innovations in Democracy parliamentary exchange bring elected officials and others together to learn from one another.

10. **Measure and evaluate democracy.** It is hard to improve something if you aren't measuring it, and for decades practically the only way we have measured democracy is by tracking voter turnout. There are many tools and technologies we can use to rate, evaluate and assess our civic opportunities. Above all, we need to know how people react to different innovations and reforms, and what they think about their community as a result of these changes: Do they feel more connected to others, are they getting the information they need, do they have a more meaningful say on decisions they care about and is their volunteerism supported and honored? Fundamentally, do they feel like they matter and belong?

There are no magic bullets on this list. In fact, some of these innovations don't work so well on their own and need to be combined with other ideas. All of the ideas on the list should be considered potential ingredients of a comprehensive package of reforms — like the one we crafted 100 years ago.

While none of these items are labeled specifically as "bridge-building" or "civic education," all of them serve those ends. Many of them can reduce partisan polarization by bringing diverse people together around decisions or issues of shared concern. All of them further civic education, and help defeat misinformation, by creating settings where people learn together.

Do Americans want these kinds of reforms? The biggest challenge is that most citizens — and even most officials — are unaware that these ideas exist. But when they find out about them, such as in the national Yankelovich Democracy Monitor opinion poll conducted by Public Agenda, they support them. "The democratic reforms Americans favor are the ones that give people the most direct power over decisions — specifically participatory budgeting, ballot initiatives, and citizen juries," stated the report. Support was strong, ranging from 66 percent to 83 percent, and did not vary greatly between Democratic and Republican respondents.

If the incoming Trump administration wants to live up the long Republican tradition of supporting individual rights and local control of decision-making, it should advocate for some of these ideas. But if it doesn't, there are other ways to move forward: the democracy reforms of a century ago started at the local and state levels, and we can do that again now. And in Congress, the Building Civic Bridges Act offers the hope of federal support for local innovation. The Healthy Democracy Ecosystem Map highlights just how much of that innovation is already taking place and identifies access points for volunteers and funders looking for places to help.



Renovating our democracy seems like a big job. But the green shoots of innovation have grown despite an overall lack of attention, funding and government support. They are developing steadily here and thriving even more in other countries. We are already devoting resources to our political system: billions of dollars and countless hours of labor for campaigns. By making even a fraction of that effort to support innovation and reform, we can help Americans achieve the democracy they want.

Leighninger directs the Center for Democracy Innovation at the National Civic League.



A new national survey finds that while many Americans feel left out of local decision-making and disconnected from their neighbors, they remain eager for better ways to participate. The findings reveal a mix of frustration, and hope about the state of civic life today.

The community survey is still live — take a few minutes to **share your thoughts on local involvement** and the civic innovation tools that could help make participation easier and more meaningful.

The survey, a collaboration between the National Civic League and ActiVote, a voter information and democracy app established in 2017, offers a snap shot of how residents experience and imagine civic participation today.

Responses ranged from approximately 700 to just over 900 per question. Results were weighted using ActiVote's **standard methodology**, which contributed to their recognition as the **eighth best pollster** in the country for the 2024 election.

According to the survey, less than one in ten residents say they receive public information on time. Two-thirds believe that when decisions are made in their community, it's "the usual suspects" who show up and dominate the process. And only 7% feel a strong sense of belonging where they live.

This mix of frustration and disconnection raises a key question: what might bring residents back in? Americans have clear ideas about how to strengthen democracy. They favor more opportunities for direct participation, such as ballot initiatives and online engagement tools; they also support citizen assemblies that bring diverse residents together to learn and make recommendations. Above all, they want to see public meetings redesigned to be more participatory, inclusive, and effective.

Public Information: Rarely On Time

Less than nine percent of people overall say they receive public information on time, a figure that cuts across rural, suburban, and urban communities. The sense of delay is widespread, but not felt equally everywhere.

Urban residents may have better access to information, with nearly half reporting that information is at least "sometimes timely." By contrast, suburban respondents stood out for their frustration: more than a third said information usually arrives late, and they reported the highest share of "too late" responses.

The findings show that while timeliness is a universal concern, better communication will be essential for restoring trust and drawing more people into civic life.

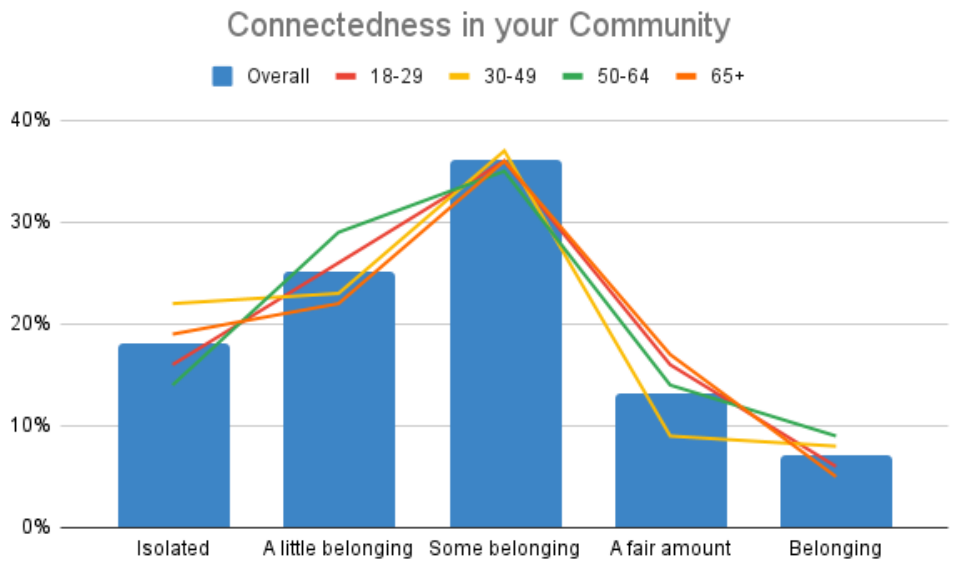
Decision-Making: The "Usual Suspects"

If delayed information leaves residents frustrated, decision-making leaves them feeling excluded. Sixty-five percent of respondents said community decisions are dominated by the 'usual suspects,' a view consistent across age, politics, education, income, and geography.

Confidence in broad participation is low. Only nine percent of respondents said their community usually or always has good turnout in decision-making, suggesting little faith in processes being open or representative. That sense of exclusion doesn't end at the meeting table; it extends to how people feel about belonging in their communities.

Connectedness: A Weak Sense of Belonging

Exclusion doesn't only show up in processes. It also shapes how people feel about their community connections more broadly. Only seven percent say they feel a strong connection to where they live. By contrast, nearly half report feeling little or no connection at all, with 18 percent saying they feel isolated and another 25 percent describing only "a little belonging."



Most fall in the middle, with 36 percent reporting 'some belonging' and 13 percent 'a fair amount' not fully disconnected, but not deeply rooted either.

The gaps are particularly clear by age. Older adults are somewhat more likely to report connection, while young adults stand out for their disconnection, with over one in five saying they feel isolated. Differences also appear across race and ethnicity. White respondents leaned toward "some belonging," black respondents were more likely to say they felt only "a little belonging," and Latino respondents were most likely to report a strong sense of belonging. Education plays a role as well, with college graduates somewhat more likely to feel connected than those with only a high school education.

Taken together with the findings on timeliness and decision-making, a pattern emerges. Fewer than one in ten say public information arrives on time, two-thirds say the same small group dominates decisions, and nearly half feel little or no belonging at all.

Barriers to Involvement

Even when residents want to take part in local decision-making, many feel unable to do so. Nearly half cited lack of time as the biggest barrier, and another 37 percent doubted that their involvement would make an impact — revealing both structural and trust-related challenges.

These barriers echo earlier findings: when information is late, decisions feel dominated, and belonging is weak, residents assume their voices won't matter. The result is a participation paradox — people want a voice, but the system feels inaccessible, unimpactful, and closed off.

What Would Encourage Participation

Despite these barriers, residents are clear about what might draw them back in. Nearly half said they would be more likely

to get involved if leaders and residents could work together more directly. This reflects a desire for partnership and co-decision making, not just opportunities to comment on decisions already made. Another 48 percent pointed to digital options, underscoring the importance of lowering the barriers of time and logistics by making participation easier and more flexible.

Fewer people were motivated by the prospect of more enjoyable meetings with food, music, or social activities. Just 37 percent said those kinds of enhancements would make them more likely to participate. The lesson is that while enjoyable elements might help, the real motivators are substance and accessibility. Residents want engagement that matters and formats that fit into their lives.

New Civic Engagement Models

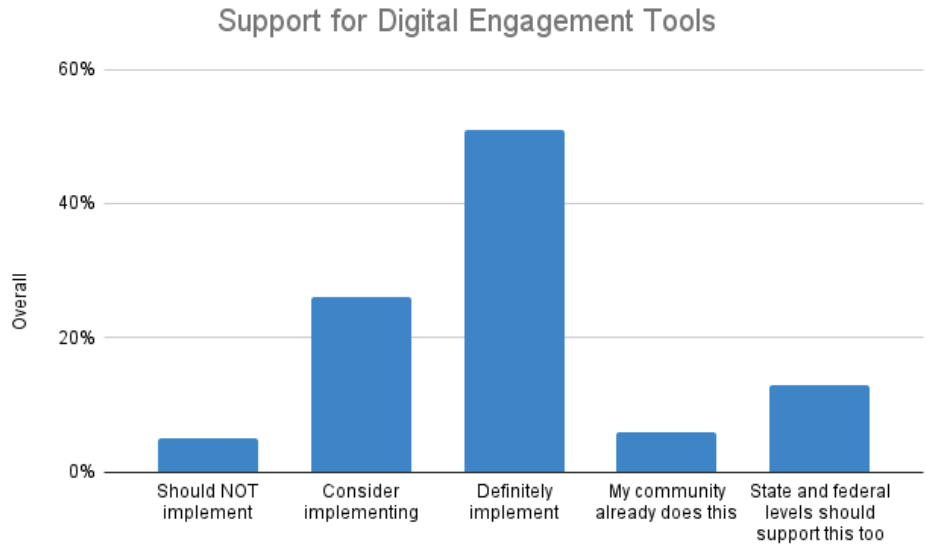
If residents feel shut out of current processes, they are also eager to reimagine how engagement might work. The survey revealed strong support for new and existing models of civic participation, though some stood out more than others.

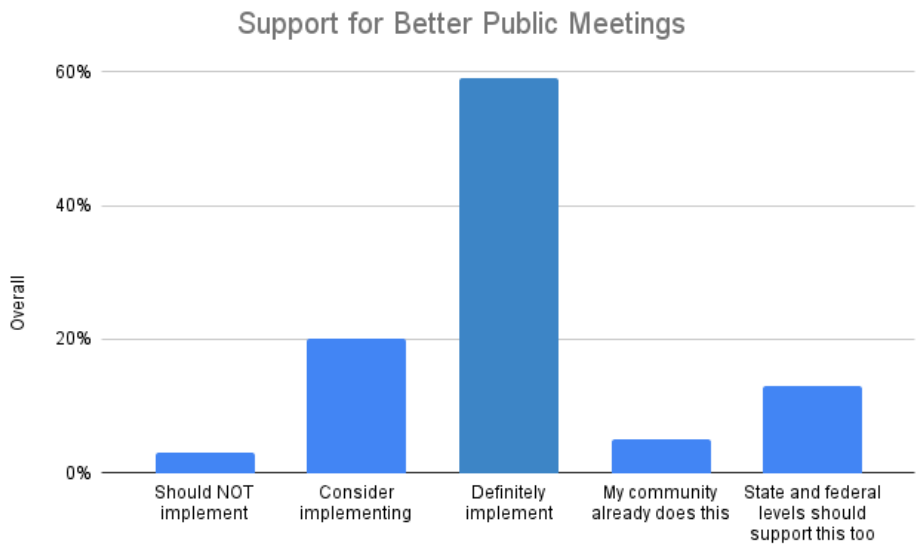
Direct democracy, allowing residents to vote directly on policy issues, was one of the most popular ideas. (Only some states allow direct democracy via ballot initiatives and referenda; its use in local

democracy varies dramatically. It is not a part of our federal governance model.) Sixty-one percent said they would like to see it implemented in some form, and enthusiasm was especially high among younger and lower-income respondents.

When asked about local governance structures, respondents expressed more enthusiasm for citizen assemblies than for neighborhood councils. Assemblies, which bring together a randomly-selected group of residents to deliberate on issues, earned support from 61 percent of respondents, compared with 48 percent for councils. The difference suggests that while neighborhood councils feel familiar, assemblies are viewed as a more innovative and inclusive approach, an alternative to the "usual suspects" dynamic that many say dominates decision-making today.

Two of the most widely supported ideas were digital participation tools and community survey panels. Roughly seven in ten respondents favored digital tools, and two-thirds supported survey panels—both with minimal opposition and broad bipartisan backing. These options cut across age, income, and education levels, making them among the most accessible and least polarizing reforms. Taken together, they show a clear appetite for engagement methods that are practical, flexible, and inclusive—tools that fit into busy lives and provide meaningful ways for residents to be heard.





But the clearest message came from responses about public meetings themselves. More than three-quarters of respondents said meetings should be improved, making it the most widely supported reform of all those tested. Unlike abstract or experimental approaches, the demand for better meetings speaks directly to people's lived experience. Meetings are where frustrations about timeliness, exclusivity, and impact converge and improving them is seen as the single most important step local governments can take.

Together, these results highlight a path forward. Residents are open to bold ideas like direct democracy and citizen assemblies, but they are especially eager for practical reforms that make participation easier, more accessible, and more impactful. Fixing the basics, timely information, inclusive meetings, opportunities for real collaboration, may be the surest way to rebuild trust and strengthen civic life.

Jaime Kinder and the grassroots revolution in Meadville

August 27, 2025



Meadville Mayor Jamie Kinder addresses the crowd gathered at the State Capitol in Harrisburg to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of Community Heart & Soul in Pennsylvania in May 2025. Kinder credits her participation in PA Heart & Soul with her entry into civic engagement and service.

By Lucy Corrie-Tannen (PA Humanities intern, Haverford College)

Meadville mayor Jaime Kinder is very clear about one thing: the PA Heart & Soul process was not a magical solution to her town's problems.

In fact, when it first wrapped up, it sparked difficult conversations and challenged the status quo. But Meadville's response demonstrated that residents had begun to take agency in shaping their community. Their understanding of what it means to be part of a community had shifted, revealing what can happen when people truly believe their voices deserve to be heard.

"The Heart and Soul process shifted the mindset of people," Kinder said. "All those people that have never been listened to, all those people who didn't know they were valued or had a say, because of this process realized that they were as important as everyone else, they were as important as the council members."

In 2016, Jaime Kinder wasn't yet mayor. She wasn't involved in Meadville politics at all; like many in her hometown, she was just trying to make ends meet. She felt very little sense of community, and disconnected from the city council.

"Oftentimes we are just living our lives and don't know about a lot because all of the capacity is just surviving… just making sure my kids are okay, just making sure we have a roof over our heads," Kinder explained. "I didn't pay much attention to our local government because it didn't pay attention to people like me."

Then PA Heart & Soul came to Meadville. Heart & Soul is a resident-driven process designed to help towns build stronger, healthier, and more economically vibrant futures. At its core, Heart & Soul relies on stories. Volunteer team members go out into the community and talk to residents to find out what they love about their town and what their hopes and dreams are for the future. Then, they determine how they can build that future together through the collection and prioritization of action ideas and plans that reflect their shared values.



Meadville residents share their thoughts about their community at a storygathering event.

Kinder admits that she started attending the Heart & Soul story gathering and listening sessions out of simple nosiness. As she continued participating in the sessions, she became one of many community members who shared their opinions on Meadville's present and future. As weeks turned to months, she became more and more involved in the community, joining boosters and the local chapter of the NAACP. Slowly, Kinder and Meadville learned what they wanted their town to look like.

When the Meadville Heart & Soul team released their Community Action Plan, however, things did not go according to plan. Among the values it identified as central to Meadville residents were health and safety, education, nature, and inclusion. It was this last item that created new challenges.



Meadville residents gather to draft their community value statements using data gleaned from hundreds of stories gathered by the Heart & Soul team.

Kinder recalls the pushback from Meadville leadership when the status quo was challenged. Though the town had welcomed the idea of Heart & Soul, Kinder said they resisted the action plan when its results pointed to difficulties with inclusion within the community. That resistance ended up inspiring transformation within town leadership.

In the next election cycle, Heart & Soul coordinator Autumn Vogel and bus driver Larry McKnight ran for City Council with a platform based on the action report. They won. Hoping to ignite even more policy change in Meadville, they were inspired to ask others they had met through Heart & Soul to run for office.

Kinder was their choice for mayor, which surprised her. In her mind, she was just a regular person, someone who made mistakes, someone who wasn't perfect. But Kinder won the mayoral race, becoming the first Black woman to be elected mayor of Meadville. It turned out a regular person who wasn't perfect– but who cared deeply about making Meadville a better place for everyone– was exactly what the town wanted and needed.

"When you put people first, it does move your bottom line, and that's what comes out of Heart & Soul. You see how this process is absolutely revolutionary in bringing people together and bringing community back to municipalities."

Changes in elected officials aside, the biggest change in Meadville has been that "we stopped planning for someone to come and save us," Kinder reflects. Instead, Kinder and the rest of the Meadville City Council took their cues from the Heart & Soul report and a new system of cogovernance to proactively introduce a range of new policies and programs aimed at improving the quality of life in Meadville. Since Kinder's election, Meadville has implemented a climate action plan and a rental inspection agency, restored pension payments to firemen and police, and passed Pennsylvania's first non-retaliation ordinance between tenants and landlords. The program Kinder is most proud of is their municipal ambulance program: today, every ambulance ride is free for Meadville residents.

Meadville also refocused their efforts on drawing residents into community life instead of trying to attract tourists, making Meadville work for those who walked its streets every day.

“Poor people, people who need to buy everything here, that’s who pushes the economy,” Kinder explained.

In fact, these new programs have allowed Meadville to balance its budget these past three years, a feat Kinder is proud of after decades spent in a deficit. It’s a feat that proves effective budgeting can still be people-centered.

“When you put people first, it does move your bottom line, and that’s what comes out of Heart & Soul,” Kinder said. “You see how this process is absolutely revolutionary in bringing people together and bringing community back to municipalities.”

Insight about what matters most to residents turns into community value statements through the Heart & Soul process.

Kinder is running for reelection this year. She was unopposed in the Democratic primaries this spring and is now looking toward the future of Meadville. One area she wants to focus on more is expanding access to green spaces.

Overall, though, what Kinder most wants is to maintain the momentum of the moment in Meadville.

Today, the community finally has a voice, and the government is finally working for the community. The feeling of living in Meadville has finally changed. Residents now know local government is theirs for the shaping. They know they share struggles, hopes, and dreams with their neighbors. Even if they, like Jaime Kinder in 2016, are just making ends meet, they have a “feeling” – as Kinder describes it – that things are better than before.

Though it wasn’t straightforward or easy, Kinder is adamant that PA Heart & Soul was transformative in getting Meadville to where they are today.

“Every single community should have to go through this process,” she said.

PA Heart & Soul is made possible by generous funding from Community Heart & Soul, the PA Department of Community & Economic Development, the PA Department of Conversation and Natural Resources, Route 6 Alliance and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Pa. city council recognizes ambulance service for efficiency, service

The Meadville Central Fire Department was recognized for initial progress with an increasing call volume

October 06, 2023 06:29 PM

By Mike Crowley
The Meadville Tribune

MEADVILLE, Pa. — A six-month check-up for the Meadville Central Fire Department ambulance service resulted in not just a clean bill of health but an evaluation that was worthy of what one Meadville City Council member called a "gold star."

The report to council showed the ambulance service working efficiently, serving more people than expected and taking in 50 percent more in revenue per call than the projected break-even point.

Council members who had supported the launch of the ambulance service earlier this year were quick to tout the presentation by Emergency Medical Services Coordinator Evan Kardosh as a vindication of a move that had drawn skepticism from some quarters.

"It sounds to me like investing in our services was one of our best decisions," Mayor Jaime Kinder said after Kardosh concluded. "We just really appreciate you being able to give that level of care to the people who live here — I mean, they deserve that. That's fantastic."

Councilwoman Gretchen Myers recalled encountering doubts about the plan that was announced in December, approved in February and put into action 26 weeks ago today.

"I had people who were like, 'What are they doing? You're wrecking the city,'" Myers said, "so this is really, really great information."

From the April 5 launch through Sept. 30, Kardosh told council, the EMS service has responded to 970 ambulance calls, transporting 850 patients with an average response time of 3 minutes, 18 seconds.

No response times within the city have exceeded 8 minutes, Kardosh said, and the fire department has handled all but two of the calls it has received. Two calls were preemptively turned over to another agency to allow a quicker response when Meadville Central units were responding to other emergencies, according to Kardosh.

Call volume has exceeded expectations: Kardosh said the department is responding to 7.2 calls per day; at that rate, crews would handle more than 2,600 calls over a year, which would be a 44 percent increase over the record-setting pace last year, before the ambulance service had been established.

The data, Kardosh said, shows "that there's definitely a need, that our services are being utilized." The need extends beyond the city, with the department responding to 50 calls in 13 additional municipalities when handling calls for other agencies, taking crews "as far as East Mead Township and north of Cambridge Springs," he added.

Regarding revenue, Kardosh said that based on the available 13 weeks of billing, the department has received an average of $419 per call — well over the $279 per call that was estimated as the break-even point when the program was being developed.

So far, the department has received nearly $137,000 in insurance payments. Nearly 56 percent of the revenue has come from Medicare and Medicaid. Commercial insurance accounted for nearly 22 percent and payments from uninsured patients accounted for another 22 percent, according to Kardosh.

"It's been a fantastic process," he said.

Councilwoman Autumn Vogel, who attended the meeting via telephone, echoed other members in thanking Kardosh for what was unanimously viewed as good news.

"I think the ambulance service is just like a gold star in terms of — it is an amazing public service that we've been able to offer and also," Vogel told Kardosh, "the way that you and your team have just been so clear and communicative with the public."

Councilman Jim Roha was the lone council member to vote against the plan. Roha argued in favor of a more conservative approach and called for a "trial run" that would not commit the city to major expenses such as purchasing ambulances and hiring new staff.

Roha on Tuesday said he had not doubted the department's ability to do the job but had questioned the wisdom of putting the city in the ambulance business.

"When it was first proposed, I had a philosophical problem with competing against private industry," he said after the meeting. "I was not skeptical of the job they would do, I was just skeptical of whether we should be interfering with private industry."

After a half-year, Roha said he was "keeping an open mind" regarding the EMS division and his ultimate evaluation would be strongly influenced by additional data concerning revenue.

“I still haven’t seen the final numbers,” he said. “Billing is one thing, but when you get the money is a whole different matter. So I don’t know if we have spent more in salaries and benefits than we have generated in actual cash receipts. I don’t know the answer to that.”

Launching the EMS division requires the addition of four full-time paramedics and the creation of Kardosh’s EMS coordinator position. The paramedic positions came with starting annual salaries of $48,082 as well as benefits that include health insurance and defined contribution retirement plans, according to City Manager Maryann Menanno, and the EMS coordinator position came with an annual salary of $58,150 plus benefits.

The city also spent $58,500 on two used ambulances. Approximately $38,000 of the cost was funded through state grants, according to Finance Manager Tim Groves.

After hearing Kardosh’s report, Kinder was particularly taken with his account of how the department has taken a “whole community approach” in working with some uninsured patients to help them explore ways to secure coverage.

“It is a beautiful thing that not only are we picking people up and saving their lives, but we’re also helping them in the long run,” she said. “You guys are just doing a wonderful job.”

(c)2023 The Meadville Tribune (Meadville, Pa.)

Aug 20, 2025

City of Tulsa Launches Office of Health and Well-being

$260,000 in Funding Provided by Community Care, George Kaiser Family Foundation to Launch Office



City leaders announce the launch of the new Office of Health and Well-being

On Tuesday, the City of Tulsa, Community Care, and other community and healthcare partners announced the creation of Tulsa's first Office of Health and Well-being.

The Office is being created to improve health outcomes across Tulsa by aligning resources, sharing data, and fostering collaboration among healthcare providers, public health agencies, and community organizers.

To launch this work, the Office has secured over $260,000 in multi-year corporate funding - including $210,000 from Community Care, along with a $50,000 grant from the George Kaiser Family Foundation (GKFF).

"This is an investment in the health of our community and in the future of Tulsa," Mayor Monroe Nichols said. "This Office will connect the dots between healthcare, education, economic opportunity, and public safety so that all Tulsans have the chance to thrive. I'm deeply thankful for our friends at Community Care, Dr. Pasha, and so many others working to make Tulsa a healthier and more resilient city."

The Office's goals include:

- Convening healthcare stakeholders to share resources, reduce duplication, and align strategies through a Health Coalition;
- Using the Neighborhood Conditions Index (NCI) to target areas with the greatest health disparities; and
- Advancing citywide mental health initiatives

"The city charter tasks us with protecting 'the public peace, health, order, morals, and safety, and to promote the general welfare of the City of Tulsa and its inhabitants,'" District 4 City Councilor Laura Bellis said. "It is incumbent on city government to support healthy families, healthy neighborhoods, and a healthy economy. Our city is fortunate to be a healthcare hub for the region; embedding an office to collaborate with and bolster our public health infrastructure is critical to advancing the well-being of our community."

Dr. Jabraan Pasha, a longtime physician and public health advocate who will serve as Chief Health Officer for the Office, noted that health outcomes are closely tied to other community indicators.

"When you map Tulsa's highest unemployment rates, lowest educational attainment, and highest crime rates, you'll find the same neighborhoods with the poorest health outcomes," Dr. Pasha said. "Health is not just the absence of disease - it's about connection to care, opportunity, and community. Our office will make those connections."

By coordinating efforts and addressing systemic gaps, the Office aims to both save lives and reduce costs for hospitals, insurers, and public agencies.

"We are honored to partner with the City of Tulsa to support the needs of our neighbors," said Josiah Sutton, President and CEO of Community Care. "As the largest locally-owned health plan in Oklahoma, we believe this partnership will make a meaningful difference in the health and well-being of our communities."

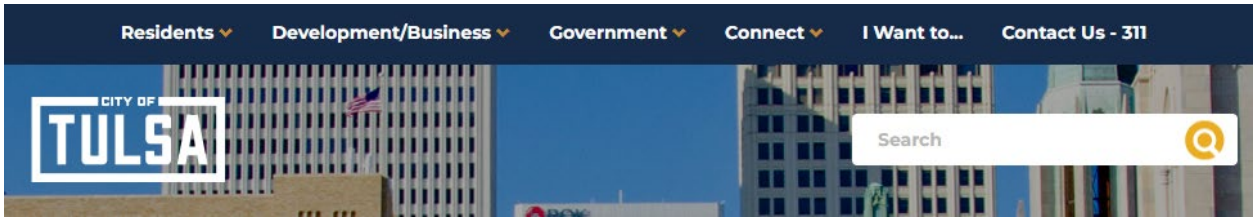
Philanthropic donations will be used for:

- The hiring of a Director of Programming to lead new projects, enhance operations, and strengthen data analysis;
- The operation of the office's day-to-day needs and activities;
- Data analysis and community engagement opportunities; and
- Pilot programs and initiatives that result from cross-collaborative efforts

In the coming months, the Office will announce a Health Coalition to support the work of the Office.

It's important to note that no public funding was used for the creation of this Office. In the coming weeks, a donation from Community Care will go before the Tulsa City Council for approval.

For more information about the Office of Community Health and Well-being, visit http://www.cityoftulsa.org/mayor.



Mayor's Office of Children, Youth, and Families Celebrates Measurable Progress, February Anniversary

2/6/2026

The Mayor's Office of Children, Youth, and Families (MOCYF) is coming up on its one-year anniversary, marking a pivotal step in Tulsa's long-term strategy to place 15,000 additional children and youth on a path to economic mobility by 2030.

Based on data available to date, Tulsa has reached 61% of its 2024-2025 school year target - with additional data still coming in.

While many organizations, agencies, and institutions serve children and youth in Tulsa - the city of Tulsa has historically lacked a coordinated system to help align goals, investments, and accountability around shared outcomes. Without that alignment, efforts have often been fragmented, limiting their maximum collective impact.

"As a City, we have a responsibility to build a community that delivers real results for our residents. Our educational leaders and partners are fully committed to our youth, but we all must accept the role and stand with our partners to confront the challenges before us. If we fail to act, we fail our community," Mayor Monroe Nichols said. "The progress we make on public safety, homelessness, and housing directly shapes the future of our children and families. They deserve more, and I'm encouraged to see our City prioritizing support for our partners and our children, youth, and families as we move this vital work forward."

While much of MOCYF's first year of operation was about convening partners and setting up the civic infrastructure to make the Office successful for the long term, early indicators from the first planning year and the 2024-2025 school year show notable movement in several areas that the office will continue to track in the years ahead, including:

- 159 additional children enrolled in Pre-K, representing a 2.9% increase in kindergarten readiness
- 203 additional 8th graders tested proficient in math
- Chronic absenteeism declined by 836 students
- Housing stability supports were expanded to prevent student displacement

MOCYF has set an aspirational target of 705 additional youth reaching key cradle-to-career milestones above the 2024-2025 baseline. Currently, approximately 100,000 Tulsa children and

youth are meeting milestones tied to economic mobility; by 2030, an additional 15,000 youth must be on this path. The bulleted figures above reflect interim progress toward that long-term goal. Based on data available to date, Tulsa has reached 61% of its 2024-2025 school year target.

Final results for high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment and completion, and workforce entry will be incorporated as state and national data are released. All data are countywide and include the three Tulsa school districts.

As additional data become available, overall progress toward the 705-youth target, and ultimately the 15,000-youth target by 2030, will be updated.

A Shared Goal: 15,000 More Youth on a Path to Economic Mobility

As background, Mayor Nichols and the Tulsa City Council identified the importance of a framework around children, youth, and families during the 2025 Mayor-Council retreat. Moving toward that goal - in February of 2025, Mayor Nichols issued an executive order to establish MOCYF and the Tulsa Children's Cabinet. Subsequently, the Tulsa City Council approved funding for the Office during the FY26 budget cycle.

"This first year was about doing the hard but intentional work that sustainable change requires," Deputy Mayor Krystal Reyes said. "I'm proud of the progress we have made so far to stand up a new office that is focused on how to expand our efforts to create better outcomes as a community. Because of this foundational work, we are now positioned to move faster and smarter together to deliver better outcomes for children and families."

At the center of MOCYF's work is Know Your Number, Tulsa's cradle-to-career framework for youth economic mobility. Developed in partnership with Impact Tulsa, Know Your Number tracks the milestones most predictive of long-term success - from kindergarten readiness and early literacy to high school graduation, postsecondary completion, and workforce entry.

The goal is not 15,000 youth meeting these milestones in a single year or program. Instead, it reflects cumulative, year-over-year progress: each year, Tulsa aims to help more youth reach key milestones than the baseline year, adding those cumulative gains together through 2030.

Action Alliances: Turning Shared Goals into Coordinated Action

One of the most significant accomplishments of 2025 was the design and launch of Action Alliances as part of the Tulsa Children's Cabinet - the primary mechanism through which Tulsa's shared goals are translated into on-the-ground change.

Action Alliances are cross-sector, outcome-focused groups of existing partners including local leaders, educators, service providers and community members or those who work directly with families and children - who align strategy, resources, and accountability around a shared result for children, youth, and families.

The Action Alliances relay important information to the Children's Cabinet on the barriers to economic mobility experienced by children and youth and the possible solutions to address these

system or policy barriers. Many members of Action Alliances are members of existing working groups, citywide efforts, or cross disciplinary teams working on many of the issues that the Children's Cabinet focuses on.

The goal of including Action Alliances in the Children's Cabinet is to give their existing work more legs and to connect their knowledge and experience directly to the decisions that system leaders are uniquely positioned to address such as resource allocation, policy changes, investment decisions and others.

Rather than creating new programs, Action Alliances are working to:

- Provide structured feedback to the Tulsa Children's Cabinet and the Mayor to inform policy and investment decisions
- Coordinate action at the neighborhood and place-based level
- Test, refine, and scale what works
- Identify barriers across systems

In October 2025, MOCYF hosted an Action Alliance interest meeting that drew more than 120 participants, including 50 youth, demonstrating strong community demand for aligned, outcomes-driven collaboration. Throughout the year, Alliances will report progress to the Tulsa Children's Cabinet and community members, ensuring transparency and shared accountability.

Action Alliances will start to inform pilots and investment decisions, ensuring future funding is guided by data, lived experience, and coordinated strategy instead of siloed efforts.

Building the Civic Infrastructure Tulsa Never Had

In 2025, MOCYF's focus on laying the foundation for this work was made possible by building the tools, governance, and mechanisms required for sustained progress.

Below are some additional 2025 accomplishments:

Governance & Leadership

- Executive Order issued creating MOCYF and the Children's Cabinet
- Tulsa Children's Cabinet launched, with six cabinet meetings held
- 36 cross-sector leaders engaged

Tools, Data, & Alignment

- First version of Tulsa Children's Fiscal Map launched to show public and private investments in children. After incorporating additional stakeholder input, a publicly available version is expected to be online this spring.

- Cradle-to-career outcome framework (Know Your Number) adopted, which shows how progress will be tracked to achieve 15,000 additional children and youth on a path to economic mobility and thriving by 2030.
- National partners secured to support our work, including Bloomberg Philanthropies, Harvard EdRedesign, StriveTogether, FUSE, Burns Institute, Hunt Institute, WJWI, and others.
- Through the FUSE national partnership, Tulsa has an executive fellow working with MOCYF to create a landscape analysis of Tulsa's youth workforce ecosystem and who will develop recommendations on how to increase the number of youth accessing internships and career opportunities.

Early Systems Shifts & Pilot Momentum

- Nation-leading Student Eviction Alert System first implemented at Tulsa Public Schools, will be operationalized in additional schools districts in the coming school year.
- Youth Voice & Leadership framework in development
- Birth-to-3 strategy and milestone development supported with technical assistance from Bloomberg Philanthropies
- Community-centered governance processes being developed
- FY26 pilots in development informed by Cabinet and Action Alliances

Leadership Transition and Continuity

Last week, ImpactTulsa announced the departure of its Executive Director Ashley Philippsen at the end of February. Her leadership has been instrumental in launching the Office and the Cabinet, convening partners and building the foundation that now exists. The City of Tulsa is committed to continuing the work of MOCYF in partnerships with Impact Tulsa, Tulsa's cradle to career backbone organization.

"Ashley has been an extraordinary partner to the City of Tulsa and a driving force behind our shared commitment to children, youth, and families," Tulsa Deputy Mayor Krystal Reyes said. "Her leadership was instrumental in launching the Mayor's Office of Children, Youth, and Families and building the strong foundation we are standing on today. We are grateful that Ashley will continue to remain engaged in an advisory role for the Office through May, ensuring continuity as this important work moves forward. Her impact on Tulsa will be felt for years to come."

Looking Ahead

In 2026 and beyond, MOCYF will shift from building the foundation for this work to accelerating impact by continuing to strengthen the work of the Tulsa Children's Cabinet, expanding Action Alliances, piloting interventions, expanding youth workforce pathways, and tracking progress transparently year over year. For more information on MOCYF, visit: **www.cityoftulsa.org/mocyf**

CITY OF CHARLOTTE

Meaningful public participation is achieved with intention.

Great engagement doesn't happen by accident.
It is intentionally designed before participation begins.

Charlotte's Standard Operating Procedure for Engagement (SOP-E) provides a consistent framework for designing public participation that is purposeful, transparent, and aligned with project decisions.

The result: meaningful participation that informs decisions, better-informed decisions, and demonstrated accountability.

BEFORE ENGAGEMENT BEGINS, WE ASK:

1. **WHAT DECISION IS BEING MADE?**
   Clarify the decision and what matters.
2. **WHO ARE THE IMPACTED STAKEHOLDERS?**
   Identify the people and communities affected.
3. **WHAT ROLE WILL THE PUBLIC HAVE IN DECISION-MAKING?**
   Define the level of influence and how input will be used.
4. **WHAT BARRIERS COULD PREVENT PARTICIPATION?**
   Identify potential barriers and plan to remove them.
5. **HOW WILL SUCCESS BE MEASURED?**
   Establish indicators for engagement and impact.
6. **HOW WILL WE DEMONSTRATE THAT PARTICIPATION MATTERED?**
   Plan how we will show what we heard and what changed.

MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION THAT INFORMS DECISIONS. BETTER-INFORMED DECISIONS. DEMONSTRATED ACCOUNTABILITY.

THE ENGAGEMENT PLANNING PROCESS

1. **DEFINE THE DECISION**
   Clarify the decision, objectives, and context.
2. **DESIGN PARTICIPATION**
   Determine participation needs and design stakeholder-centered participation.
3. **IMPLEMENT**
   Use the right tools and approaches to engage the right people.
4. **EVALUATE & ADAPT**
   Measure what matters, learn, and make course corrections.
5. **CLOSE THE LOOP**
   Share what we learned and how it influenced decisions.

ENGAGEMENT PLANNING IS RISK MANAGEMENT.
Plan intentionally. Engage purposefully. Reduce project risk and strengthen outcomes.

EVERY ENGAGEMENT PLAN INCLUDES

1. Engagement Objectives
2. Public Participation Role
3. Stakeholder Analysis
4. Success Measures
5. Aligned Tools & Techniques
6. Engagement Timeline
7. Evaluation & Adjustment
8. Public Feedback Loop

When applicable, every City project develops an Engagement Plan **before** engagement begins.

OUR ORGANIZATIONAL FOUNDATION

PUBLIC EXPERIENCE → **SOP-E** → **ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

PUBLIC EXPERIENCE
The desired experience people have when interacting with government.

SOP-E
The standard for designing meaningful public participation.

ENGAGEMENT PLAN
The tailored plan that guides implementation and delivers results.

Good design leads to meaningful participation.
Meaningful participation leads to better public decisions.

BLUEPRINT THINKING

Start with the decision, the public's role, and the people it affects— then choose the right tools and approaches.

Intentional design. Purposeful participation. Stronger outcomes.

Nicole Storey, AICP | nrstorey@charlottenc.gov | 704-231-3356 | charlottenc.gov

Standard Operating Procedure for Engagement

SOP-E



CITY OF CHARLOTTE

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.

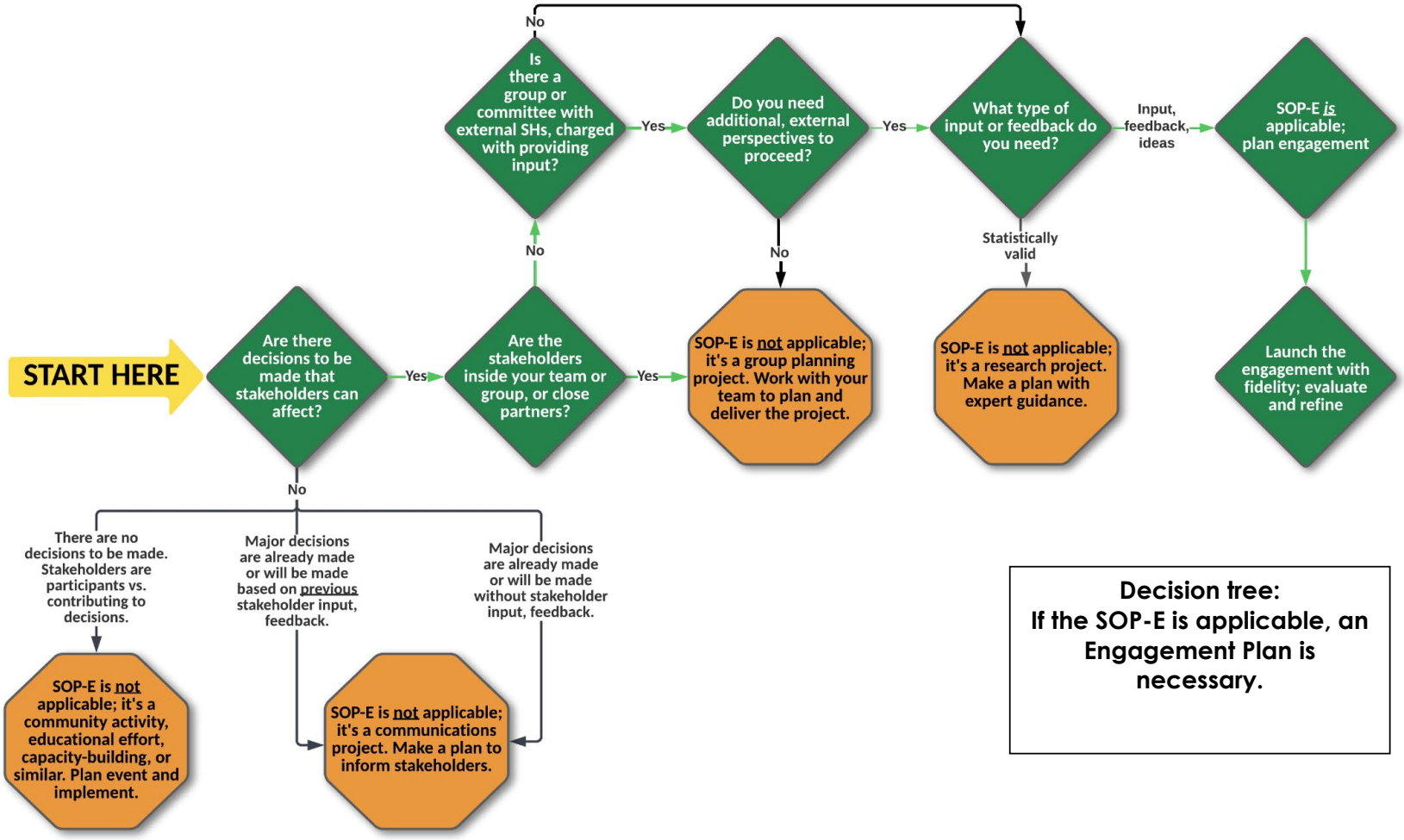
Complementary efforts ***outside*** the scope of the SOP-E scope may include community activities and events; education or capacity building; program participation; research projects; internal project planning, easements and rights of way negotiation; and communications initiatives where there are no 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.



© Adapted from Anne R. Carroll, www.carrollfranck.com, carrfran@gmail.com, may be used with proper credit

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

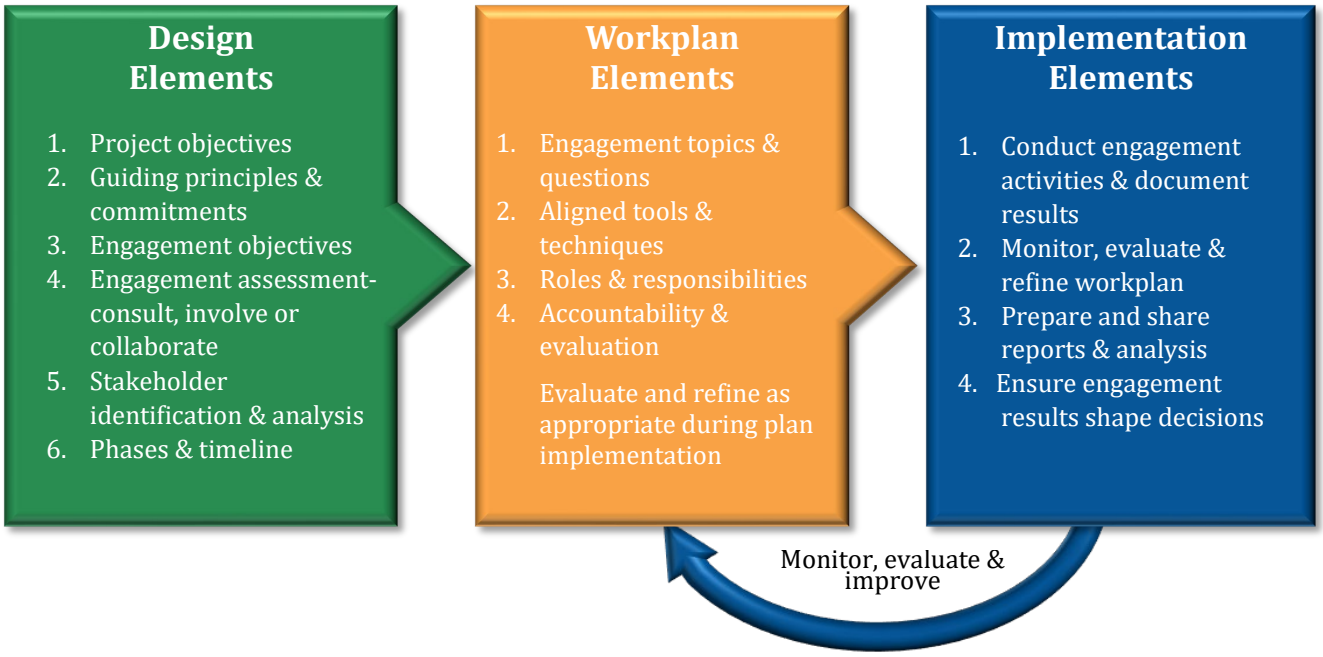
An Engagement Plan is a strategic process and accompanying documentation that outline how the project team will engage and involve stakeholders in decision-making. It's necessary for projects, programs, or initiatives for which this SOP-E is applicable. The framework below outlines the minimum Design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



© Adapted from Anne R. Carroll, www.carrollfranck.com, carrfran@gmail.com; may be used with proper credit

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.

City of Charlotte, Standard Operating Procedure for Engagement (SOP-E)

- **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.

City of Charlotte, Standard Operating Procedure for Engagement (SOP-E)

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

Table 2. Guiding Principles Sample Indicators, Measures and Outcomes

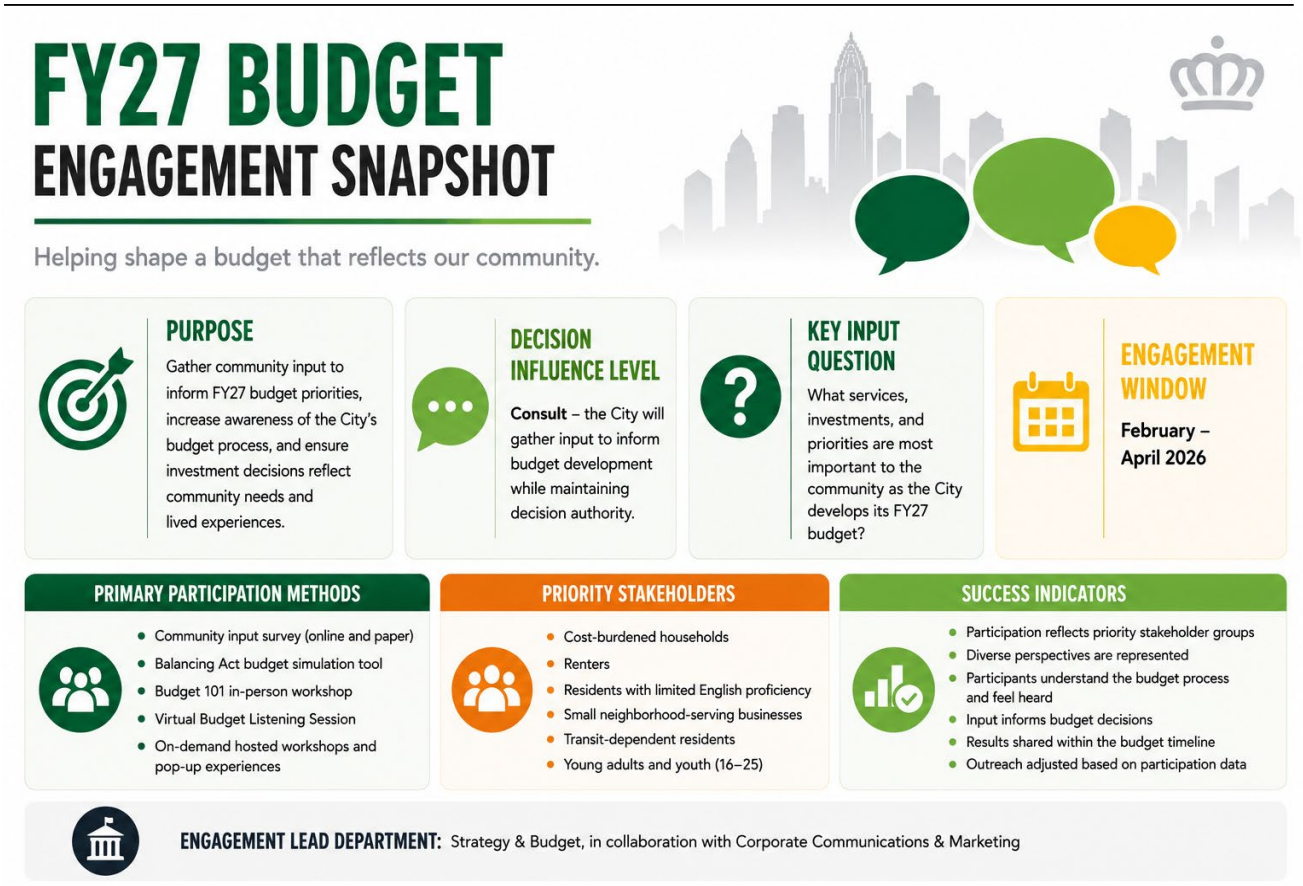
Guiding Principle *Charlotte has committed to these principles in our engagement efforts*	Sample Indicators of Success *Engagement processes that align with Charlotte's Guiding Principles are expected to exhibit characteristics such as these*	Sample Desired Outcomes *Adhering to Charlotte's Guiding Principles 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

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.

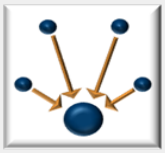
Engagement Objectives

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.

https://captimes.com/news/government/the-madison-city-workers-helping-spanish-chinese-hmong-speakers/article_f25cf78c-123c-464c-b852-d6ac6824b6c8.html

The Madison city workers helping Spanish, Chinese, Hmong speakers

By Enjoyiana Nururdin
Jul 9, 2026



The Department of Civil Rights' community connectors bridge gaps between city government and residents who speak over 40 languages.
ENJOYIANA NURURDIN

The Cap Times is an independent newsroom serving Madison and Wisconsin.

Sign up for the Morning Update to receive news in your inbox each morning.

Staff in the city's Department of Civil Rights are seeking to build trust between Madison's thousands of bilingual residents and local government amid concerns over a federal immigration crackdown.

Called community connectors, the staff in the department's Equity and Social Justice Division aim to bridge gaps for residents who speak languages other than English and request help accessing city services. While that looks different for each resident, the work starts with a proactive, intentional approach to address community concerns, the connectors said.

The department employs three staff to assist residents who speak Spanish, Chinese and Hmong with navigating services such as public health, transportation and voting. The Cap Times spoke with each of the community connectors and Kristy Kumar, manager for the Equity and Social Justice Division, about their roles and the impact in Madison.

The agency designed the community connector positions after the city's 2018 Language Access Plan, which identified the top languages spoken by Madison residents for translation purposes, Kumar said. English, Spanish, Chinese and Hmong were the main languages spoken based on census data, but city staff wanted to go beyond language interpretation needs and redesign government systems as well to better serve the diverse population.

"We designed (the role) to be a system that cuts through this one way of disseminating information to create a two-way channel with a feedback loop, so they shape how government works," Kumar said.

While not language translators, Kumar describes the community connectors as "experts in plain language." They often advise city staff on the language of official communications to make things simpler before distributing the information in another language.

Enoch Melgarejo said it's a huge responsibility and honor to serve as the city's Spanish community connector, especially while residents are on alert about federal immigration agents in the area.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents have arrested about 1,700 people in Wisconsin from the time President Donald Trump took office last year to spring this year. ICE has arrested around 100 people monthly statewide since last May, Wisconsin Watch reported in April.

"With all the things that are going on right now so close to our community in Madison, trust has not been the best," Melgarejo said. "People afraid of governments or parts of our government tend to have a hard time trusting even the local government that doesn't have anything to do with what's going on."

Ze Yang, the Hmong community connector, sees her role as helping people become more confident in navigating the city and its resources. Melgarejo and Yang emphasized that people of color, especially in Madison, aren't a monolithic group, but there are similar themes of isolation.

Yang said she previously interacted more often with older residents and now is helping more middle-aged adults or children, who might have difficulty communicating with their parents and who need assistance with city resources.

"In the Hmong community, I feel like the relationship (with the city) wasn't really there," Yang said. "We've lived here. We do our business, raise our family here, go to school here, but we don't know much about city government or know what's going on."

Holly Chen, the Chinese community connector, manages a YouTube channel and a WeChat account and platform for Chinese residents, reaching over 1,200 people. Chen said she's helped more seniors than other age groups.

For some community connectors, the work means showing up regularly at events, helping people navigate city agencies or hosting radio shows in their native languages. Being a community connector is about meeting people where they are and thinking creatively about promoting and educating city services to build trust, they said.

“We do tabling, like at a food pantry, or around Hmong New Year, when there's an event like that. We show up and table and introduce ourselves,” Yang said. “Showing our face, making our face known and that we exist and what our role is, I think that builds some trust.”

The community connectors recalled their work leading to a positive interaction with a family during an emergency. The case stemmed from Fire Department officials asking Melgarejo to join them in assisting a Spanish-speaking family.

Melgarejo hosts a show with La Movida Radio called “Conectando con tu Ciudad,” or connecting with your city, in Spanish. He interviews city staff on the show about programs and services, and a recent episode covered Agrace’s hospice care for patients with dementia.

After a radio interview with Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway last year, Melgarejo was asked to join public health and emergency officials to connect with a family that was living in a trailer park and in need of shelter from bad weather. Recognizing Melgarejo from the show, the residents felt more comfortable talking with him about city resources, he said.

“That whole interaction, the whole space, became super friendly and we were able to share ideas,” Melgarejo said, adding he recently learned the family was able to find shelter.

"We try to actually think outside of the box, so we work with community members at that level. We also attend community events when we get to interact with community members, and then collect the feedback that they have for the city, so we can bring that information and that feedback to spaces where we can actually share that with department heads and other people working at the city," Melgarejo said.

"It's part of our job and our positions to consult with every single city department, especially when they are actually working on new initiatives," he added. "We are not only reminding them to make sure that documents are translated in these three different languages, but also to take into consideration that there is a cultural aspect to make this more inclusive for all the communities that are coexisting within our own main community."

Kumar said the division hopes to one day add a community connector in American Sign Language, the language receiving the second most requests for interpretation.

Enjoyiana Nururdin is the local government reporter for the Cap Times. Enjoyiana writes about community, politics, public services and safety in the Madison region. Email story ideas and tips to enururdin@captimes.com or call (608) 252-6465.

Please consider supporting Enjoyiana's work by becoming a Cap Times member or sponsor. Sustaining local journalism in Madison depends on readers like you.

Enjoyiana Nururdin
Local Government Reporter

JOIN US!

Interested in connecting to additional resources from the Mayors Innovation Project? Learn more about the benefits of membership today.

Visit us at mayorsinnovation.org

mayors
innovation
project

7122 Sewell Social Sciences Building | 1180 Observatory Dr | Madison, WI 53706

608.890.0730 | **mayorsinnovation.org**