



Public Engagement Framework

A framework for public engagement in Strathcona County

Your County. Your Voice.



Strathcona County Public Engagement Framework: *Your County. Your Voice.*

The Public Engagement Framework presents an overview of the vision, guidelines, and a continuum of engagement for public engagement activities in Strathcona County. The goal is to deliver high quality relevant public engagement processes in the County.

This framework briefly summarizes the main components of the procedures and processes that one needs to take into account when planning public engagement processes. Links to important documents are provided for ease of the reader.

The County has had a public engagement policy since 2010 which was revised in 2016 but its application has been and remains uneven between departments. It is the hope of the Public Engagement Team that the renewed policy and framework, the new public engagement handbook and procedures will provide solid direction for any County employee who is responsible for public engagement processes.

1. Introduction

Recognizing the growing demand for public engagement and the value of public contribution to decision making, Strathcona County spear-headed an initiative that led to the creation of [Policy GOV-002-025 \(Appendix 1\)](#) and this framework to support the implementation of public engagement in all departments.

This framework provides guidance and support so that internal and external public engagement processes and practices are applied consistently throughout the organization.

The County supports public engagement processes that are honest, transparent and accessible, and that value the public's input into decision making. This is made clear in *Strathcona County 2030*, Strathcona County's strategic plan. One of the strategic goals is to increase public involvement and communicate with the community on issues affecting the County's future.

Appropriate and meaningful public engagement develops social capital, community capacity, and more responsive, active citizens by building

- Public understanding of issues and support for public engagement
- Trust and confidence between stakeholders
- Better relationships with citizens and the County

Effective public engagement enhances the legitimacy of decisions and

- Leads to better solutions
- Produces better, more informed policy informed by stakeholder input
- Builds strong communities

These benefits outweigh the skepticism around the value of engaging citizens and concerns about the outcomes and loss of control.

2. Vision

Strathcona County citizens are engaged in civic life. Their voices strengthen decisions and their involvement helps build Canada's most liveable community.

3. Guidelines

Consistently and effectively applying these [guidelines](#) will:

- Contribute to meaningful, responsive, transparent and accountable public engagement
- Create the conditions for authentic engagement around public issues and help avoid promoting partisan agendas

Public Engagement in Strathcona County will be planned, implemented, evaluated and reported using these nine interdependent guidelines that serve both as ideals to pursue and as criteria for judging quality.

4. Definitions

External Public Engagement - A formal, defined, interactive process between the County, the public and stakeholders, designed to increase mutual understanding, gather information, exchange ideas, and/or solve problems with the goal of making better, more informed decisions.

Internal Public Engagement - A formal, defined, interactive process between the County and its employees designed to increase mutual understanding, gather information, exchange ideas, and/or solve problems with the goal of making better, more informed decisions.

The Public - Anyone (including groups and individuals) who may have an interest in a specific topic or issue under discussion. The public may, or may not, be directly impacted by a decision on the issue.

Stakeholders - An individual, or group, who has a specific interest, or is impacted by, a topic or issue. Stakeholders may include residents, non-residents, groups, organizations, individuals, representatives and/or County staff, depending on the issue.

5. Continuum of Public Engagement

Public engagement occurs along a continuum with different desired outcomes at each degree.

The [Continuum of Public Engagement](#) identifies four different degrees of public involvement - Input, Listen & Learn, Collaborate, and Empower. Each represent increasing degrees to which the public can impact the decision or outcome.

The continuum is **not** a process map. A public engagement process may include one, two, or more levels of engagement on the continuum in any order, depending on the context, the length of the process, and desired outcomes.

Identifying the degree of public engagement for each aspect of a public engagement process allows practitioners to

- Clearly communicate the public's role in the decision-making process at the beginning of the public engagement.
- Identify some of the tools and strategies most effective for the desired degree of public involvement.

Informing stakeholders is an important part of public engagement in order to

- Build awareness of the opportunity to participate.
- Provide information to assist citizens and stakeholders in understanding issues, alternatives, solutions and/or decisions.
- Provide clear, relevant background and technical information as appropriate.
- Report relevant results of the public engagement.

Informing the public about an issue or program is **not** a public engagement activity. If public input is not required for a particular decision/direction then it is not a public engagement process. It is simply information out.

6. Public Engagement Handbook

[The Strathcona County Public Engagement Handbook](#) provides County staff a step-by-step approach to planning, implementing, evaluating and communicating the outcome of public engagement processes. The handbook includes a toolkit and guides public engagement planners to additional online resources they can use to ensure a successful public engagement process.

7. Public Engagement Procedures

Strathcona County has a set of procedures that outline the responsibilities of County staff in various roles with regard to public engagement as well as provide a quick overview of the public engagement process and public engagement continuum.

8. Public Engagement Team

Strathcona County has a [Public Engagement Team](#) that meets regularly. The team has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Act as ambassadors and liaisons for Public Engagement Policy and Framework in their respective departments, sharing new information and best practices with department

- colleagues.
- Share information with the Public Engagement Team and Senior Advisor, Public Engagement, on upcoming and current public engagement opportunities and activities within their respective departments.
- Foster a culture of public engagement in Strathcona County.

8. Roadmap for Public Engagement

The practice of public engagement in Strathcona County has grown and matured over the last several years. Some departments are totally on board while others still have a way to go in embracing the intent and the spirit of the policy and framework. The Public Engagement Team recommends these actions to improve public engagement processes.

1. Foster a County culture of public engagement for internal and external engagement processes championed by Senior Leadership Team.
2. Plan and implement a series of workshops for staff who are responsible for internal or external public engagement processes. These workshops will increase awareness and understanding of the public engagement policy, procedures, framework, handbook, best practices, evaluation, etc. expected by Strathcona County employees.
3. Develop and disseminate standard language to be used in all Requests for Proposals and Negotiated Requests for Proposals used across the organization when public engagement (both internal and external) is a requirement.
4. Develop and implement evaluation methods for public engagement processes.
5. Develop an annual public engagement summary report.