



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

A photograph of a sunset over a line of trees, with the sun low on the horizon and its light filtering through the branches. The sky is a warm orange and yellow. Below the image is a solid orange horizontal bar.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We respectfully acknowledge that Dufferin County resides within the traditional territory and ancestral lands of the Tionontati (Petun), Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee (Six Nations), and Anishinaabe peoples. We also acknowledge that various municipalities within the County of Dufferin reside within the treaty lands named under the Haldimand Deed of 1784 and two of the Williams Treaties of 1818: Treaty 18: the Nottawasaga Purchase, and Treaty 19: The Ajetance Treaty. These traditional territories upon which we live and learn, are steeped in rich Indigenous history and traditions. It is with this statement that we declare to honour and respect the past and present connection of Indigenous peoples with this land, its waterways, and resources.



INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

In June 2023, Dufferin County released its 2023 to 2026 Strategic Plan. The Plan presents a collective vision for the future of Dufferin County to be “A community that grows together”.

Central to this vision is an emphasis on the collective and collaborative effort required to deliver on the County’s goals – between the County, its local municipalities, the community and across every County department. That’s where community engagement comes in.

One of the key priorities of the Strategic Plan is Equity. As the County continues to grow and evolve, it is dedicated to ensuring programs, services and resources are responsive to the needs of the community and that barriers to access are reduced. The County strives to foster a workplace and community that embodies the values of inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility, and is working to align its programs, services and infrastructure with changing community needs.

The County is excited to engage and work with community members, partner organizations and agencies, businesses and others to build on the work it has already done and will continue to chart a path to a sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous future in Dufferin County.

What is community engagement

Community engagement is the practice of involving the public in decision-making processes related to matters that affect them and that they can meaningfully influence. It plays a key role in allowing every community member the right and tools to be involved in shaping decisions that impact them.

Community engagement allows municipalities to better understand the needs of their community and to actively consider perspectives from local citizens, business owners, associations and other relevant stakeholder groups. The goal of gathering these perspectives is to inform staff and Council, help guide the decision-making process, and to support clear, two-way, inclusive and equitable dialogue.

County commitment to community engagement

When engagement is legislated, minimum standards for when municipal governments are required to get input from the community are set out. This can be under legislation like the Municipal Act, for example. Dufferin County is committed to creating more opportunities for the community to engage than those required by law, and to make engagements meaningful, accessible and inclusive.

The County will clearly communicate opportunities to help shape the community, genuinely listen to what the community wants and needs, consider feedback and ideas to improve quality of life and report back to the community on how their input shapes the decision-making process.



The County is committed to:

- **Using clear and digestible language.** The County will articulate clear objectives regarding why it is engaging, the role the community will play in a decision-making process, the ways in which the community can make an impact, and how it will report back on the data received and the outcome of an engagement.
- **Ensuring engagements are accessible for the entire community.** The County will reach out to diverse audiences to ensure a broad range of experiences and perspectives are collected as part of its community engagement efforts. The County understands that not everyone can or likes to receive information in the same way(s), and will effectively communicate with its entire community by using all effective tools available. The County will provide a variety of ways to take part in engagement efforts so that its engagements are inclusive and easy for all.
- **Communicating engagement findings and results and informing the community how their opinions and input helped shape a decision.** The County strives to empower the community to take part in meaningful dialogue so that they are inspired to continue take part in engagement efforts.

When the County will engage

The County is dedicated to developing and nurturing relationships with the community and building capacity for civic participation to allow meaningful engagement. The County will engage the community to:

- Identify community opinions, needs, aspirations and sentiments
- Inform the creation of a new policy, program, project or service or revise an existing policy, program, project or service
- Fulfill a legislated requirement or Council resolution
- Provide opportunities to meaningfully influence matters that may impact them

When the County won't engage

The County may not engage the community if:

- There is not an opportunity for the community to meaningfully influence a decision
- A change or decision is legislated from other level(s) of government
- There is little or no community interest in a matter
- Something is a matter of public safety



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Different groups have different responsibilities to successfully deliver community engagement initiatives and achieve the vision of being a community that grows together:

County Staff

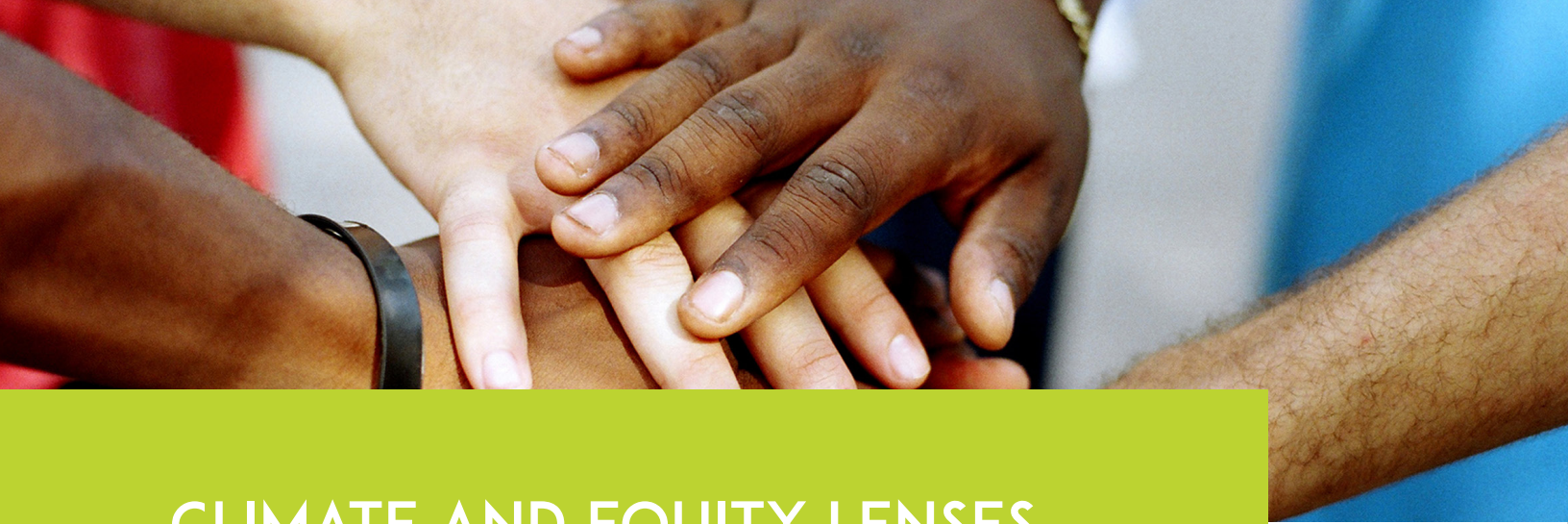
- Staff will determine, using the Community Engagement Framework, when engagement is appropriate and what level(s) of engagement should be used to effectively reach the community.
- Consider the scope of a project and enlist support from staff in other County departments that will be required to carry out engagement opportunities (for example, Communications, IT, Clerk's, etc.).
- Work with Communications to develop a communications plan to promote engagement opportunities and provide an understanding of why the engagement is taking place and how participants will help shape the community by taking part.
- Develop engagement plan, based on the Community Engagement Framework and with the Equity and Climate lenses top of mind, including project timelines and with consideration for budget/resources required.
- Manage and/or collaborate with consultants/partners who might be carrying out engagement on the County's behalf.
- Report on the success of engagement projects, including lessons learned and how engagement helped shape a decision.

County Council

- Be mindful of the importance of community engagement and consider engagement when providing direction to staff on County matters/reports and when proposing projects or timelines.
- Review and actively consider data and feedback collected from community engagement and use this information when making decisions/recommendations.
- Consider timelines and resources required for community engagement during the budget process and when making all decisions.
- Encourage the County to be equitable in providing engagement opportunities. Let staff know if there is an awareness of any barriers to engagement.
- Acknowledge the role biases can play in decision-making. Review data and feedback and consider it while taking the Equity and Climate lenses into consideration, along with other societal, financial, technical, intergovernmental, and other considerations when making decisions.

The Community

- **Ask questions!** Ensure you understand the goal of the community engagement you are participating in. What decision(s) need to be made? How can you help shape the community? How will this contribute to quality of life? What are your priorities for the community?
- Recognize that the County takes all voices, experiences and perspectives into consideration. Listen to the opinions of others with respect and curiosity.
- If comfortable doing so, let the County know if you or someone you know might experience barriers during the engagement process.
- Encourage others to participate in shaping the community by taking part in community engagement.
- Provide input and feedback within community engagement project timelines.
- Let the County know what you think about its community engagement processes. How could they be improved? What is working well? Are there ways to reach more of the community?
- Stay involved at every stage of the process, including understanding how your input helped shape decisions the County makes.



CLIMATE AND EQUITY LENSES

As part of the 2023 to 2026 Strategic Plan, the County introduced two lenses: Equity and Climate. These lenses are integrated into the County's day-to-day operations, policy design and decision-making processes. They are used to help the County understand and evaluate the impacts of new or changing County policies, programs and services to ensure the County is making decisions with social and environmental considerations in alignment with its long-term objectives.

The Equity Lens serves to help analyze or diagnose the impact of the design and implementation of policies and programs on under-served individuals and groups that experience marginalization, and to identify and potentially eliminate systemic barriers. The purpose of the Equity Lens is to be deliberately inclusive as an organization.

Some questions to consider when applying the Equity Lens to community engagement include:

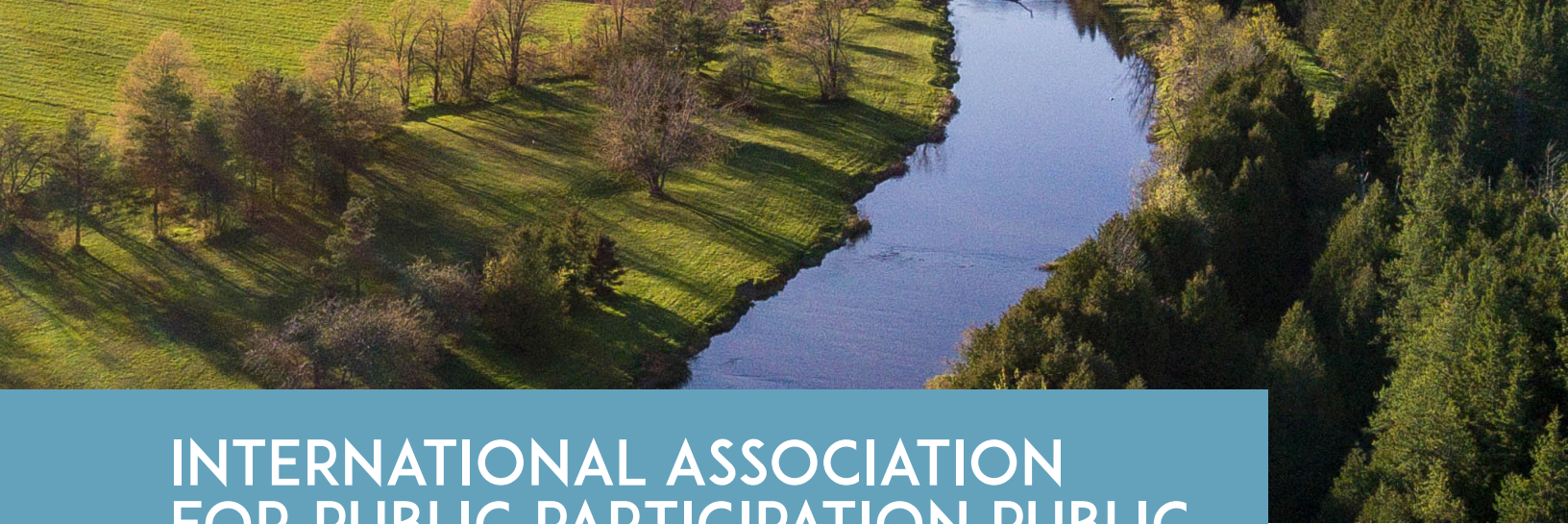
- What group(s) experience disparities related to this policy, program or decision? Are they at the table? (If not, why?)
- How might the policy, program or decision affect the group(s)? How might it be perceived by the group(s)?
- Does the policy, program, or decision produce any intentional benefits or unintended consequences for the affected group(s)?

The Climate Lens serves to help identify, analyze and evaluate potential climate and/or environmental impacts of policies, services and programs. Through use of the Lens, the County is better positioned to make informed recommendations and decisions that consider possible impacts to the climate (such as greenhouse gas production) or impacts resulting from the climate (such as increased flood risk). It also aligns with the County's ongoing actions to address climate change impacts through mitigation and adaptation initiatives.

A question to consider when applying the Climate Lens to community engagement includes:

- Can the engagement be modified to better address the risks posed by climate change?





INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SPECTRUM

The County follows the [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\) public engagement spectrum](#). IAP2 is the preeminent international organization advancing the practice of public participation. Its mission is to promote and advance public participation/community engagement globally through targeted initiatives that are guided by culturally adaptive standards of practice and core values.

INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	TECHNIQUE EXAMPLES
INFORM	"Here is something we would like you to know."	Media releases, social media, public notices, open houses, ads, posters, reports, presentations and live streaming of council meetings , mailouts/print materials, digital screens
CONSULT	"We have some options for you – what are your thoughts on them?"	Citizen advisory committees, workshops and targeted focus groups, large group meetings, participatory decision making, open chats and spaces
INVOLVE	"We want to know your thoughts on this. Here are some questions for you. What do you want or need from us?"	Surveys, polls, public comment (online, by mail, drop boxes), social media polls/online dialogue, community pop-ups , public meetings, tele town halls
COLLABORATE	"Let's work together to get this done! What solutions/options can we find? What do we want our community to look like following this engagement?"	Voting/ballots, delegated decision-making, community coalition, participatory budgeting
EMPOWER	"Let us help you make this decision/enact this change."	Design charrettes, mapping, visioning, community workshops, crowdsourcing, ideation

How the County will determine which level of engagement is appropriate

When determining which level of engagement is appropriate, the County will identify its goal(s):

- Raise awareness about a project, program, service or decision | Inform
- Require community comment to inform a County decision | Consult
- Require understanding about how the community will be impacted by a County decision| Involve
- Need to work with the community to find solutions/make a change locally | Collaborate
- Need to work with stakeholders for them to provide recommendations/ make a decision | Empower

Guiding questions for engagement

The County will keep the following questions in mind when engaging the community:

- Who in the community should be involved? Who will be directly or indirectly impacted by the decision? Whose quality of life stands to be influenced from the engagement?
- What feedback, ideas, perceptions and opinions are required from the community? How will the community influence/impact the decision to be made? What exactly is the community's role?
- When throughout the project will the community be engaged?
- How much influence will the community have? What can they influence, and what decisions can they not influence?
- Who will be responsible for making the final decision? Do other stakeholders need to be involved?
- Is the topic being engaged on a source of controversy/conflict? Will different communities have conflicting opinions on the topic? Are there any risks associated with the engagement?
- Are there any regulatory considerations?
- Are there any other engagements going on at the same time? The County will be mindful of engagement fatigue and other events that could negatively affect engagement efforts.
- What resources are required to conduct the engagement (budget, time, equipment, materials, administrative support)?
- Has a communications plan been completed for the engagement? Which audiences need to be connected with, and what are the best ways to reach them?

- Is the engagement inclusive and accessible?
- Have the Climate and Equity lenses been applied to the engagement plan?
- Will the engagement require a report back to the community or to Council?
- How will the success of the engagement be measured?
- How will the community be informed of the impact of their engagement on a project/decision?

Measuring engagement and communicating results

It is important, as the last step in the community engagement process, that the County clearly communicate insights and results and publicly demonstrate how gathered perspectives and opinions helped inform a recommendation or decision. It is also important to communicate why feedback might not inform a decision.

Being transparent and accountable encourages trust and positive relationships with all stakeholders and encourages further participation in community engagement projects. The County will clearly share insights and collected data as part of its commitment to engagement and will share successes and challenges from County community engagement initiatives.

Some ways the County will measure the success of its commitment to community engagement and community engagement projects will include:

- Number of projects that have a dedicated community engagement plan
- Number of projects that have a defined community engagement and communications section in County Council reports
- Overall community awareness of community engagement opportunities
- Number of online, in-person or social media interactions
- Number of visitors to Join In Dufferin community engagement project pages
- Number of engagement activities available to the community by engagement project
- Number of communications channels used to educate on and highlight community engagement opportunities
- Feedback on community engagement opportunities offered
- Resources dedicated to community engagement
- Number of engagement activities held
- Number of reports on community engagement results published

Appendix 1: Staff Checklist For Executing Community Engagement

Step 1: Identify engagement purpose and goals, issues, level of engagement required

- Assess the need for community engagement throughout each stage of a project**
 - Are there legislative/regulatory requirements to consider?
 - Are there contentious issues/political sensitivities to consider?

- Clearly identify goals for engagement – note * the goals could be different for each stage of a project – identify all goals**
 - What is the purpose of engaging the community?
 - How much can the community influence the decision to be made?
 - What information do the decision makers require?

- Determine which level(s) of community engagement are required for each stage of the project**
 - What are the required outcomes?
 - Do the determined levels of community engagement align with the County's Strategic Plan and commitment to be a community that grows together?

Step 2: Plan the community engagement process

- Identify which divisions need to be involved in the engagement project**
 - Clerk's Office – legislative and accessibility
 - Communications – communications plan and review of engagement plan
 - IT – any technological requirements to execute engagement
 - Finance – budgetary considerations
 - Other: _____

- Identify relevant stakeholders/ audiences to be involved in the project**
 - Community groups
 - Staff
 - Audience by postal code
 - Groups to be directly impacted by decision
 - Clients
 - Local businesses
 - Members of general public

- Select your community engagement activities
- Build engagement milestones into project plans and allocate appropriate time to execute strategic community engagement throughout the lifecycle of a project
- Prepare budget and seek budget approval and identify all resources required (human, financial, etc.)
- Provide engagement plan to Communications Manager for review.

Step 3: Engage the community

- Inform the community/target audiences of community engagement opportunities and how they will influence a decision (execute communications plan)
- Invite stakeholders who will be directly impacted to participate
Prepare engagement activities/materials. Ensure plain language is used so that it is digestible to all
- Ensure information is accessible and be prepared to accept requests for accommodation
- Ensure there are a variety of opportunities to engage – make engaging easy and inclusive for anyone who wants to be involved
- Accept comments/feedback/opinions in a variety of ways to encourage participation (in-person, online, at events)

Step 4: Track engagement response, analyze data/feedback and report back to participants and the community

- Compile and analyze all feedback/engagement results
- Provide information/feedback/data to decision makers so that they can make an informed decision
- Report back to stakeholders/participants and the community on the results of an engagement and how it helped shape a decision
- Evaluate the engagement process. Make note of what worked well and what could be improved. Document lessons learned/wins/future opportunities.

Appendix 2: Community Engagement Plan

Use the following template to draft a community engagement plan. This plan should be shared with all impacted County divisions for feedback, and then shared with the Communications Manager for review/signoff.

Project Name:
Project Lead:
Target audiences and stakeholders:
Level(s) of engagement to be used: <small>(inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower):</small>
Engagement tools to be used:
Top goal(s) of engagement: Goal 1: _____ Goal 2: _____ Goal 3: _____
Have the Equity and Climate lenses been considered? List any Equity or Climate considerations for this engagement project:
Communications plan completed and approved: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Appendix 3: Engagement Evaluation Tool

Evaluating community engagement projects is not about proving a community engagement effort was successful. The purpose is to make lessons learned available to the entire County so that it can deliver results for the community and improve community engagement efforts. The following evaluation should be completed following a community engagement project and submitted to the Communications Manager.

Project Name:
Project Timeline: (include all project milestones/stages of engagement)
Level(s) of engagement: (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower):
Engagement tools used: (for example, survey, town hall, focus group, mapping exercise):
Target audiences/stakeholders:
Dates of engagement:
What worked to inform the community about the engagement opportunity?
What engagement activities work well for your project?
What engagement activities did not work well?
What could be improved to ensure success for another project?
What are your key lessons learned/takeaways?
Were there any key learnings from the community that should be highlighted to influence future projects at the County?



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