

CORPORATE POLICY



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Department: Corporate Services
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Related Legislation: Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Municipal Act, Planning Act, Environmental Assessment Act and Ontario Heritage Act.
Related Documents: [Public Engagement Guidelines](#), [Accessibility Policy](#), [Respectful Behaviour Policy](#); [Honoraria Policy](#), Accessible Meeting Guidelines
Key Word(s): engagement, accessible, honoraria

POLICY STATEMENT:

The City of Waterloo is committed to open, inclusive and ongoing dialogue with the community. A variety of communication and outreach efforts will be used to ensure that residents are informed and have the opportunity to engage in the decision-making process that shapes the City. Effective public engagement is the result of an ongoing commitment to dialogue, transparency and the development of strong relationships that are grounded in trust and open communication. Authentic engagement seeks to reach people who might not otherwise get involved, and is accessible to people living with disabilities and diverse backgrounds. Encouraging public participation in decision-making through engagement enhances trust, helps build a sense of belonging, and contributes to the social, economic, and environmental well-being of Waterloo.

PURPOSE:

This policy provides guidance for public engagement by City employees and consultants retained on behalf of the City to do engagement work. It sets standards that emphasize the Guiding Principles of Equity and Inclusion, Integrity, and Operational Excellence. This policy supports effective decision-making by staff and Council by ensuring the City:

- Provides inclusive opportunities for the public to be informed about, and participate in, the decision-making process for City programs and services.

Mandatory Policy, *Municipal Act*: no

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- Provides accessible, easy to understand information and actively solicits feedback to allow interested and affected parties to be informed and participate in community dialogue if they choose.
- Provides effective input into Council's decision-making process.
- Respects access to information and privacy rights.
- Achieves a consistent and inclusive approach and shared ownership of community engagement activities across the City.
- Follow the public engagement requirements within applicable legislation, including but not limited to the Municipal Act, Planning Act, Environmental Assessment Act and Ontario Heritage Act.
- Communicates the outcome of the engagement process and decision-making to engagement participants and the public.

DEFINITIONS:

City Leaders: Supervisors, Managers, Directors and Commissioners at the City of Waterloo.

Consultant: Any person(s) or firm(s) that provides public engagement to the City under terms specified in a contract or other agreement and is not paid through the City's payroll.

Duty to Consult: A Crown (federal, provincial or territorial government) obligation to consult and, where appropriate, accommodate Indigenous groups when it considers conduct that might adversely impact potential or established Aboriginal or treaty rights.

Equity and Inclusion: (Guiding Principle, 2023-2026 Strategic Plan) The City builds relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and equity-denied groups and embrace Reconciliation, equity, accessibility, diversity and inclusion.

Equity-denied groups: Members of the community who have experienced barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources due to discrimination and subsequent disadvantage. This acknowledges and reflects that power is held by those with social status, both colonialism and patriarchy, have intentionally and willfully denied access and implemented barriers that impact affected community members. The choice to use this term reflects intention to acknowledge the harms done through systems and that the burden of ownership of responsibilities to change the power dynamics involved rests with the City.

Honorarium or Honoraria: Payment(s) made to an individual for a service that is intended to reflect the time and energy of their participation though may not reflect the value of the input provided. Honoraria are a formal acknowledgment of the time, contributions, and emotional labour involved, particularly when the knowledge being shared is rooted in experiences of marginalization, systemic inequity, or trauma. A form of recognition or thanks and a gesture of respect acknowledging the value of living or lived expertise.

Integrity: (Guiding Principle, 2023-2026 Strategic Plan) The City operates with integrity and transparency and we strive for well-considered comprehensive, responsive, diligent and thoughtful decision-making.

Interested and Affected Parties: Any individual, group of individuals, elected representative or organization with a specific stake or interest in the outcome of a decision, or who may be impacted (positively or negatively) by a decision. These terms are used in place of “stakeholder” to acknowledge the negative connotations of that word in other contexts to many Indigenous Peoples.

Living/Lived Expertise: Direct knowledge gained from someone's perspective, personal identities, and history outside of their professional or educational experience. This is sometimes referred to as living or lived experience.

Operational Excellence: (Guiding Principle, 2023-2026 Strategic Plan) The City provides fiscally responsible, exceptional service that meets the needs of residents, partners and equity-denied groups, employees and volunteers of the City.

Public: Individuals and special interest groups who live, work, play and/or learn in the City of Waterloo.

Public Engagement: Any two-way communication process that informs and involves the public. Public engagement uses input from the public to influence the decision-making process for better decisions. Centered around the decision-making process, public engagement does not include communications, public education, community relations or research.

SCOPE:

This policy applies to all City of Waterloo employees, including permanent full-time and part-time, temporary, casual, contract, and co-op students, contractors and consultants responsible for engaging with the public to support engagement. The Corporate Communications Division provides general guidance, support and oversight of community engagement activities, while there is shared responsibility across the City to support the decision-making processes for:

- Creating a new program or service.
- Evaluating an existing program or service.
- Fulfilling the requirements of applicable legislation (e.g. for development applications).
- Responding to a direction from Council.

POLICY COMMUNICATION:

The policy will be saved on the corporate intranet and posted on the corporate website. It will be shared as part of new employee and new council orientation sessions. The policy will also be shared with consultants when the city issues bids or requests for information are issued.

POLICY:**Guiding Principles**

To support the City's guiding principles of equity and inclusion, effective engagement, and service excellence, it is the policy of the City of Waterloo to:

1. **Provide transparent information about engagement opportunities and the decision-making process.** To maintain public confidence in the City's engagement process, provide clear, accessible information about activities, goals, and decision-making processes. Communications should be open and transparent, fostering trust and accountability when engaging the community, and when sharing results.
2. **Engage in ways that acknowledge diverse needs and remove barriers to participation.** The opportunity to be informed about and participate in the municipal decision-making process must be broadly communicated and the information made available to everyone. This includes engaging with a diverse range of community representatives and residents using a wide range of methods, ensuring that all perspectives are considered and valued, especially those from equity-denied groups. Effort shall be made to identify and actively engage individuals and communities who may not be represented or present in existing forums. All engagement activities shall reflect and promote inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility.
3. **Ensure all City departments work collaboratively to achieve coherent and effective engagement with the public.** As a core activity and shared responsibility across all aspects of municipal administration, the Corporate Communications team will work with all departments to ensure a consistent, streamlined approach to engagement across the organization. This includes consistent methods of engagement planning, practices and summary reporting, as well as awareness of the potential for engagement fatigue among participants.
4. **Apply related public engagement guidelines to all City programs and services.** Administrative guidelines and procedures will be established for various communication tools and formats supporting this policy. The City of Waterloo engagement practices are aligned with the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). The IAP2 is an international organization and the IAP2

Spectrum has been adopted globally as guidelines for governments striving to improve engagement.

5. **Respect the access to information and privacy rights of interested and affected parties.** Strive to be open and proactive in all engagement communication. This includes providing proactive disclosure of information when appropriate. Access to information, and the privacy of those participating and engaging with the City will be protected appropriately based on the requirements outlined in the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, City's Privacy Protection Framework Policy, Routine Disclosure Policy, and other applicable legislation and City policies and procedures.
6. **Ensure that engagement processes are respectful and appropriate.** Engage with interested and affected parties in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner, acknowledging and valuing the unique perspectives and contributions of all individuals and groups. For projects where honoraria is available, this will be acknowledged to participants in advance. All communication should be respectful and not diminish or unduly criticize differing points of view on matters or issues under consideration. The City will not accept nor consider input that is discriminatory, promotes hatred, harassment, violence or racism or that is abusive or derogatory. The City will enforce and uphold the Respectful Behaviour Policy for the benefit the public and staff participating in engagement processes.
7. **Engage the public only when their feedback and input can authentically inform the decision-making process.** Meaningful and effective public engagement includes trust in an authentic process. Public engagement activities seek input to inform the City's decision-making process. Authentic engagement includes acknowledging that there are exemptions to the process. Public participation will not occur for every decision at the City. Examples of exemptions to the public engagement process include but are not limited to operational decisions, decisions involving confidential or otherwise protected information, emergency or crisis-related decisions, or any instance where public feedback will either not influence a decision or where a decision has already been made. All matters related to public engagement efforts shall be presented and discussed in open Council meetings. These matters will not be considered in closed meetings, in accordance with the principles of transparency, accountability, and public participation. Where there are no opportunities for formal engagement to inform decision-making, the City will inform the public of the project and/or gather comments to ensure all perspectives are considered during the project.

Engagement Practices

Community engagement practices at the City generally have five components:

1. **Initiate** – project lead works with their team to define the project scope, the decision to be made, and the engagement objectives.

2. **Plan** – project lead (or designate) works with Corporate Communications to determine where the project falls on the IAP2 spectrum of engagement, interested and affected parties, and the associated techniques to connect, as well as any opportunities to collaborate and/or partner with other City engagement activities.
3. **Engage** – engagement activities are coordinated by the project team, assisted by Corporate Communications (e.g. Corporate Communications will be the lead for digital engagement via Engage Waterloo); feedback is received and analyzed by activity leads.
4. **Report and follow-up** – activity leads summarize results, sharing with participants and decision makers, and showing how the input received influenced the decision.
5. **Evaluate** – Corporate Communications works with other activity leads to invite participants to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the process and participant satisfaction.

More guidance and tools are provided in the Public Engagement Guidelines.

Indigenous Engagement

When Indigenous Peoples are included in the interested and affected parties of a project there are additional engagement considerations, including respecting the rights, knowledge, and leadership of Indigenous Peoples, and their history and ongoing relationship with the land. Respectful, meaningful engagement helps the City build and maintain reciprocal and accountable relationships with local Indigenous Peoples, and does not take the place of required Indigenous consultation (Duty to Consult), which is beyond the scope of this policy.

Honoraria and Recognition of Lived and Living Expertise

As part of the commitment to equitable and respectful engagement, the City recognizes the value of lived and living experiences, and community members' knowledge in informing decisions, programs, and services. The City will provide honoraria to individuals and communities who are invited to share their experiences and insights. Providing honoraria is one tool to help increase the diversity of input and participation in City engagement, as it helps to address some of the barriers typically faced by Indigenous communities and equity-denied groups. Honoraria are a formal acknowledgment of the time, contributions, and emotional labour involved, particularly when the knowledge being shared is rooted in experiences of marginalization, systemic inequity, or trauma. The City will recognize the value of lived and living expertise and community knowledge through honoraria, according to the Honoraria Policy.

Responsibilities

Employees involved in public engagement are responsible for:

- Looking for opportunities to engage the community early in the decision-making process.

- Developing engagement plans that align with the commitments in this policy and follow the processes outlined in the Public Engagement Guidelines and other related documents. This includes, where appropriate, seeking input from other City departments and staff to ensure this policy and legislative requirements are met when developing the engagement plan.
- Taking responsibility for ongoing learning to improve how engagement is planned, delivered, reported back, and evaluated.
- Ensuring engagement is inclusive, accessible, and responsive to community needs.

City Leaders are responsible for:

- Supporting staff by allocating enough time, funding, and people to plan, carry out, report results and evaluate engagement activities.
- Promoting a culture where meaningful engagement is valued and integrated into decision-making.
- Helping to identify opportunities for engagement early in the decision-making process, especially when outcomes may impact residents.
- Monitoring and supporting consistent use of the policy and Public Engagement Guidelines across departments.

COMPLIANCE:

In cases of policy violation, the City may investigate and determine appropriate corrective action.