

Attachment 4

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Community Engagement Guide

To comply with federal regulations set forth by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Monterey County developed the Community Engagement Guide. This Guide provides approaches so that we comprehensively involve the community to ensure that all groups are represented and their needs are met.

Introduction

Monterey County government works best when community members and County staff work as partners. Though it sometimes feels as if it slows down a project, quality community engagement results in a smoother implementation in the long run and allows for more efficient government. It is also the law. This Community Engagement Guide supports departments to:

- Ensure better County decisions that more effectively respond to the needs and priorities of the community;
- Engage community members and community resources as part of the solution;
- Engage the broader diversity of the community—especially people who have not been engaged in the past;
- Increase public understanding of and support for public policies and programs; and
- Increase the legitimacy and accountability of government actions.

This guide and process is especially significant in Monterey County because of the wide mix of cultures, disparate incomes, and immigration statuses. In Monterey County, the poverty rate is 15.3%, wealth is concentrated into a few small areas, and 23% of the population are non-U.S. citizens.

Our quality of community engagement will increase as our staff’s knowledge, understanding, and humility regarding our community members (including culture, history, and current state) increases.

The Process

Community Engagement is a process, not a single event. It consists of a series of appropriate activities and actions over the full lifespan of a project to inform, obtain input from, and collaborate with the public. Not all public participation is the same because there is no single “public.” Rather, the public consists of a broad range of stakeholders holding an array of viewpoints on an issue. Conducting meaningful engagement involves seeking input at specific points in the decision process and on specific issues where such input has a real potential to help shape the decision or action.

Sometimes the opportunity for influence is quite small, while at other times the public can have a great deal of influence. The amount of this potential influence is the main consideration in designing a successful community engagement program.

STAKEHOLDERS ARE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE EITHER DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY IMPACTED BY THE COUNTY’S PLAN, PROJECT OR PROGRAM.

The Community Engagement Spectrum

There is no single “right” level of community engagement. For each project, the department must consider the specific circumstances, ability to share decision authority, and the nature of the public’s desire and need to participate. Community engagement can be viewed as a spectrum, ranging from low levels of engagement (e.g., informing the public) to high levels of engagement (e.g., collaborating with stakeholders on a decision).

INFORM

The Inform level of community engagement does not actually provide the opportunity for public participation at all, but rather provides the public with the information they need to understand the decision-making process.

This level is on the spectrum as a reminder that sometimes there is no opportunity for the public to influence decision-making and simply informing them is the appropriate activity. When you conduct the Inform level of public participation, it is important to recognize that you are not trying to persuade or influence the public in any way. As such, the Inform level is not the same as a public relations campaign. Rather, the Inform level of public participation requires you to serve as an honest broker of information, giving the public what they need to fully understand the project or decision, allowing them to reach their own conclusions as to the appropriateness and adequacy of the decision.

WHAT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS NOT:

- SELLING THE PUBLIC ON ...
- CONVINCING PEOPLE TO ...
- A MEETING TO COMPLAIN/ FIND FAULT WITH...

CONSULT

The Consult level of community engagement is the basic minimum opportunity for public input. Consult simply means to ask. There is no invitation to sit down together and work on things in any cooperative way. You merely ask the public for their opinions and consider the input you receive as you make the decision. At Consult, you generally ask for input at set points in the process, but do not provide an ongoing opportunity for input.

INVOLVE

The Involve level of community engagement is more than a consultation. To involve means to include. At the Involve level, the public is invited into the process, usually from the beginning, and is provided multiple if not ongoing opportunities for input as decision-making progresses. However, you are still the decision-maker and there is no expectation of building consensus or providing the public with any sort of high-level influence over the decision.

COLLABORATE

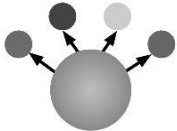
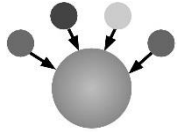
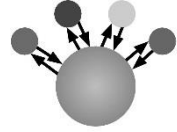
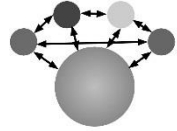
At the Collaborate level, the public is directly engaged in decision-making. The Collaborate level of community engagement includes all the elements of Involve but takes it a step further. Collaborate often includes the explicit attempt to find consensus solutions. However, like the Involve level of participation, you are still the decision-maker. The degree to which consensus will be sought and how much decision authority you are willing and able to share must be made explicit. In the end, you will take all the input received and make the decision.

Equitable Engagement

The Community Engagement Spectrum can effectively help us reach out to many people in our community, yet sometimes we need to make additional efforts to reach traditionally underrepresented groups. Some strategies to better engage and reach underrepresented populations include:

- Understand who lives here. Study the demographics for the affected area and cross reference that with the people who generally participate in your outreach process. Ask yourself: “Am I reaching a representative sample of people?”.
- Involve people in the issue. Provide specific roles for underrepresented community stakeholders.
- Listen well! Ask: “How will this policy, program, initiative, new building, new road, or budget issue burden or benefit your community?”
- Overcome language barriers. Utilize the County’s Language Access Plan and provide appropriate language translation and interpretation services at meetings and in your outreach.
- Bring your outreach to the community. Host public meetings, focus groups and events where people tend to gather like libraries and youth centers or better yet, ask to be included on the agenda of an already-existing meeting.
- Consider the space. Use round tables, never a head table to promote dialogue and to reduce artificial barriers. Staff and elected officials should sit WITH the community, not apart.
- Minimize opportunity costs by serving food and providing childcare at outreach events.
- Follow up by sending a thank you letter, phone call or email with a brief meeting summary. Let people know how their input shaped the result.
- Speak about issues in terms the general public can understand. Do your best to avoid acronyms and terms generally only familiar to governmental agencies. Provide materials with an awareness of the literacy and education levels of the community you want to reach.
- Understand that people come to your process with history and perhaps past frustration with the County and the services we have provided in the past.
- Foster inclusivity and demonstrate your commitment to working together. Take time to develop relationships. Listen. Be sincere. Be authentic.
- Provide system navigation when possible. People may have questions or need support to navigate a County process that is not specific to what you are working on. Help them connect with the appropriate help and learn how to navigate that particular process or system.
- Utilize “cultural brokers” and community leaders to make connections and build bridges between your office and the community you are trying to reach.

Monterey County Community Engagement Spectrum

Engagement Level	When to Use	Goal	Tools/ Opportunities
Ignore	Never	To deny access to the decision-making process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closed door meetings • Intentionally technical language
Inform 	We want the community to know what we are doing	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to understand the problem, opportunities and/or solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notifications • Billboards, brochures • Events or Meetings • Websites, Social Media, Videos • Community Education
Consult 	We intend to take public input into account as we make our decisions	To obtain and consider public input at set points in the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events or Meetings • Committees • Surveys • Focus Groups • Dialogue—not just telling • Govt. 2.0 web platforms
Involve 	We anticipate seeking input early and often from the community so help us design our work	To work directly with the public and consider their input throughout the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committees • Surveys • Community-driven Design Charrettes • Study Circles • Participatory Research
Collaborate 	We seek to work as a partner with the community and intend to work together to solve a problem	To partner with the public in key activities and decisions during the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study Circles • Advisory Boards • Task Forces • Consensus Workshops • Scenario Planning

Adapted from Nexus Community Partners Governing for Racial Equity Training September 13, 2017, The Davenport Institute Training to Monterey County October 30, 2013, City of Seattle Racial Equity Toolkit, Tompkins County Public Participation Plan, City of Portland 2013 Title VI Plan.