The **Research** Shop

Report for the City of Guelph: Community Engagement Policies in National and International Municipalities

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The Current Project

The Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship/Research Shop, University of Guelph, was engaged to complete a project on behalf of the City of Guelph. The aim of the project was to identify policies, frameworks and tools on community engagement from the City's list of comparator municipalities in Ontario, as well as some other provincial cities and international cities across the United Kingdom, Australia and the U.S.A. A total of 26 municipalities and four regions in Ontario were canvassed through online search and contacting municipal or regional staff. Of these, Halton Region and six municipalities, including Ajax, Kitchener, London, Oakville, Ottawa, and Waterloo have formal centralized policy on community engagement. Ottawa is currently reviewing their 2003 policy. Many Ontario municipalities plan to develop a policy or are in the process of developing the policy.

Nationally, municipalities and cities such as Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Victoria, and Halifax, as well as the District of West Vancouver, were found to have formal policies. Internationally, the cities in the U.S.A appear to lack centralized community engagement policies, but do have formal project specific strategies such as those concerning community engagement specific to the environmental sector. Here, we reported on five U.S. cities, including Burlington, VT, Philadelphia, PA, Portland, Oregon, Santa Rosa, CA, and Seattle, WA. For the metropolitan boroughs and districts in the United Kingdom, we focused our research on the metropolitan boroughs of Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, and Thurrock, and the non-metropolitan district, Teignbridge, which were found to have community engagement policies. For Australia, we focused our research on Melbourne, Onkaparigna, Mosman, and the frameworks and guidelines from the State of Queensland, the State of South Australia, and the State of Western Australia for local governments on community engagement. This report provides a summary on what community engagement is and how to plan for community engagement. Please refer to Appendix A for information on each local Ontario municipality and their current stage of development in regards to a policy on community engagement, Appendix B for information of other national cities, and Appendix C for the United Kingdom, Australia and the U.S.A.

What is Community Engagement?[1]

Definition

Community engagement is much discussed in the municipalities and regions that were searched, and is identified as a process that has been employed for the development, planning and implementation of various municipal or regional projects. Community engagement might have also occurred because of legislative mandate. For the municipalities and cities with formal policy or guidelines, each has defined community engagement with various emphases on the added value of the process in decision-making (See Appendices A, B, and C). Generally speaking, most municipalities have defined community engagement similarly as:

> The process of engaging the public in decisions that affect them, including
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> policies, plans, strategies, programs and services, for the purpose of making
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> decisions that are more informed and reflective of public concerns and values
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> (See the appendices for the specific definitions given by the municipalities).

An important oft-mentioned benefit of community engagement, if conducted effectively, is that it helps community leaders and decision makers, such as local councillors, understand the perspectives, opinions and concerns of the citizens and stakeholders they represent (e.g. Calgary, 2003; Edmonton, 2008; Kitchener, 2010; Leeds, 2006; Oakville, 2012; Thurrock, 2011; Waterloo, 2010; Victoria, 2010). It also helps strengthen networks and build cooperative and trusting relationships between public service sector organizations, community groups and organizations, and businesses. Positive action taken as a result of

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[1] In this report, we used the term community engagement. This term is also employed by other municipalities in their policy or related document such as Council report, including Ajax, Burlington, Chatham-Kent, Greater Sudbury, Kitchener, London, and Whitby. National and international cities also use this term including Halifax and Saskatoon in Canada, Philadelphia and Santa Rosa in the U.S.A., as well as the policies found in the United Kingdom and Australia. However, synonymous terms have also been found in other municipal or regional policy or related document, including public engagement (Oakville, Vaughan, Calgary, Burlington VT, Seattle), public involvement (Burlington, Waterloo, Edmonton, Portland), public participation (Ottawa), civic engagement (Greater Sudbury, Victoria), citizen participation (Halton region). Public consultation has also come up during our online search, email exchange or phone conversation with municipal or regional staff.

community engagement can lead to improved quality of life and promote the well being of the community (e.g. Ottawa, 2003; Newcastle, 2011; Teignbridge, 2011; Thurrock, 2011). Other benefits include overcoming polarization and reducing conflict, and establishing an environment where the public's opinions are valued and respected (Kitchener, 2010; Victoria, 2010; Waterloo, 2010). Additionally, community engagement can potentially promote civic capacity through greater public understanding of and participation in political practices and civic affairs, and build community capacity (e.g. Kitchener, 2010; Leeds, 2006; London, 2012; See also Sheedy, 2008).

Framework

Community engagement has been described as a continuum with different levels of engagement. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) developed the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum which identifies five levels of engaging the public based on increasing level of public impact. These include: 1) Inform; 2) Consult; 3) Involve; 4) Collaborate; and 5) Empower (See Figure 1 for definition and promise to the public for each level). This spectrum provides the basis for various Canadian municipal frameworks, as well as the Australian municipal and state frameworks, on community engagement:

❖ Oakville Public Engagement Guide (2012), Ottawa Public Participation policy (2003), Victoria Civic Engagement Strategy (2010), and Chatham-Kent Community Development Forum presentation (2011) identify five levels similar to those of the IAP2 spectrum. In Australia, the City of Melbourne's community engagement framework is committed to the IAP2 spectrum. The Local Government Association of South Australia and the State of Western Australia Department of Local Government also reference the IAP2 spectrum as an important tool for identifying the levels of community engagement when doing community strategic planning. It should be noted that, according to the State of South Australia Community Engagement Handbook (2008), Empower as defined by the IAP2 is not adopted in the handbook since "under the Local Government Act 1999, the only decision making power which is placed in the hands of the public is that of electing Council Members every 4 years" (p. 1). The handbook acknowledges that the term is often used by Councils and other government structures when referring to community development and capacity building initiatives, and provides an alternative definition of Empower as "providing

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P a g e | 5

opportunities and resources for communities to contribute to solutions by valuing local talents and skills and acknowledging their capacity to be decision makers in their own lives" (p. 2).

❖ Burlington City Council Report 1-12, Kitchener Community Engagement Toolkit (2010) and London Community Engagement Policy (2012) identify four levels in their framework. These include: 1) Inform; 2) Consult; 3) Collaborate; and 4) Empower (Burlington, London) or Entrust (Kitchener). Collaborate collapses the two categories of Involve and Collaborate in the IAP2 spectrum.

❖ Calgary Engage! Policy (2003) and Waterloo Public Involvement Guidelines (2010) identifies five levels: 1) Inform; 2) Listen & Learn; 3) Consult; 4) Collaborate; and 5) Empower. Inform, Consult and Empower are described as the three main levels, with Listen & Learn and Collaborate being necessary components of the overall strategy to engage the public.

❖ Saskatoon Community Engagement Process guide (2004) identifies with the first three levels of Inform, Consult and Involve. Similarly, the frameworks adopted by the Onkaparinga Council and the Mosman Council in Australia identify with these levels. It should be noted that the City of Onkaparinga's Engagement Handbook (2010) presents a Community Engagement Matrix that includes Collaboration as the fourth level as well (See Appendix C Onkapaparinga).

Despite being categorized as distinct levels, each is viewed as complementary and can be used independently or in combination within a given project (See the appendices for details on the frameworks of the municipalities). According to Waterloo's Public Involvement Guidelines, "informing is a minimum requirement of all public involvement" (p. 12). Thus, Informing is a basic step that must occur for all levels of community engagement in the continuum.

Nationally, Edmonton (2008) and Halifax (2008) present a continuum with three levels: 1) Information Sharing; 2) Consultation; and 3) Active participation (See Appendix B for graphic representations as presented by the two municipalities**). Information sharing** refers to building awareness of issues that may affect the public or specific communities. Similar to the statement in the 2010 Waterloo guidelines, information sharing is viewed as a key component of the continuum occurring at all levels (Edmonton, 2008). **Consultation** is typically part of a regulatory process where the public's input on matters affecting them is sought out with the goals to involve the stakeholders in developing collaborative solutions, build

Figure 1. The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum.

commitment, and improve the efficiency and transparency of projects, laws and policies. This level appears to correspond to a combination of the levels 'Consult', 'Involve' and 'Collaborate' in the IAP2 spectrum. **Active participation** involves sharing decision making to build a sense of ownership within the community or delegating decision making to build community capacity and responsibility. The local government takes on a supporting role to provide time and necessary resources to facilitate a dialogue between the City, the public, and other partners. This level corresponds to the levels of "Collaborate" and 'Empower' as identified in the IAP2 spectrum.

Many of the international cities that we researched also followed similar frameworks of using a continuum with increasing level of public impact in decision making. Of the cities in the U.S.A that were researched (Portland, Burlington, Santa Rosa, Seattle, Philadelphia), their community engagement strategies were based upon a common framework. This framework was developed in 2009 as a response to the Obama government's call for transparency and open government (U.S.A NCDD, 2009). The U.S.A National Collation for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) Core Principles for Public Engagement is a working document that was created in order to put some guidelines in place for those interested in the engagement processes, however those interested in implementing the core principles are encouraged to modify them to fit their specific needs (U.S.A NCDD, 2009).

In the United Kingdom, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have been established in most local authority areas as a result of the 2000 Local Government Act.[2] They are non-statutory partnerships designed to bring together local councils, public sector agencies, businesses, and voluntary and community organizations. The LSPs are part of local governance structures that drive forward community engagement development and improvement. For example, Leeds Initiative and Shaping Thurrock are examples of LSPs whose responsibilities include leading long-term strategic priorities and promoting the engagement of local representatives, businesses and organizations in decision making. Of the boroughs and district that were researched (Leeds, Manchester, Thurrock, Newcastle, Teignbridge), their community engagement policies follow a similar approach of having a continuum of engagement. Thurrock's Community Engagement Strategy 2011-2016 references David Wilcox (1994) Guide to Effective Participation, which proposes a 'ladder of participation model' with five levels of engagement:

1. Information giving
2. Consultation which involves providing information and listening to feedback
3. Deciding together which involves encouraging local communities to join deciding options and the best way forward, but it is the local council who will make the decisions
4. Acting together which involves forming partnership and working together, and decisions are made in partnership between local council and the communities

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[2] Visit the Local Government Improvement and Development website for more information on the LSPs in Britain.

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P a g e | 8

5. Supporting independent community initiatives which involves the local government supporting and empowering local communities on their initiatives and projects

Wilcox (1994) model echoes the IAP2 continuum as well as those found in the British policies. Newcastle's Community Engagement Strategy adopts the same continuum as that of Wilcox (1994). Leeds Community Engagement Policy (2006) adds a level called 'Researching' as the first level, making it a six-level continuum (Researching, Providing Information, Consulting, Involving, Acting Together, and Empowering). Thurrock's 2011-2016 strategy proposes five levels: 1) Information giving and gathering which involves providing information and collecting public opinions and attitudes; 3) Consultation which involves asking for public opinions and views: 4) Deliberation which involves actively involving people to discuss issues and priorities at various stages; 5) Collaboration which involves working together with the local communities; and 5) Partnership which involves maintaining equal working relationship with the local communities. Manchester Community Engagement Strategy 2011-2015 proposes seven levels of community engagement: 1) Communicating by providing information; 2) Researching to find out how to improve service delivery; 3) Involving people in decision making; 4) Consulting by seeking comments and feedback; 5) Devolving decisions by empowering communities to make final decisions; and 7) Supporting community action by supporting communities through services or grants. Teignbridge Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy (2011) has four levels: Information giving, Consultation, Involvement through joint up approach between local council and the community, and Empowerment.

It is notable that the conceptualization of community engagement, either in municipal policy or projects that have extensively engaged the public, tends to focus on the higher end of the continuum, particularly Consultation and Collaboration. In Ontario, the development of the Burlington Community Engagement Charter is currently being centered on Involve/Collaborate, while the London Community Engagement Task Force is researching on the Empower end of the IAP2 continuum. However, **Empower is a rarely used level for community engagement processes in many municipalities and cities.** The aforementioned definition of community engagement as a process that allows decision-making to be more informed and reflective of public concerns and values also emphasize the higher end of the continuum beyond the Inform level. As noted in the IAP2 framework and the Ontario municipal frameworks, Inform involves the

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P a g e | 9

provision of balanced and objective information to the public. However, there is no mechanism for the public to provide input. Thus, the **flow of information** is one-way from the City to the public at the Inform end. In contrast, the other levels involve two-way information flow as there is exchange of information from the City to the public and from the public to the City (Kitchener, 2010). **Two-way communication is often mentioned as imperative for community engagement by the municipalities and cities.** It should be noted that some researchers have considered public consultation to involve one-way communication only since the emphasis is on the flow of information from the public to the sponsor (Rowe & Frewer, 2005; Sheedy, 2008).

Guiding Principles

Several common guiding principles could be identified from the community engagement policies that are available from the municipalities and cities that were researched. These include the national cities such as Ajax, Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax, Kitchener, London, Oakville, Ottawa, Saskatoon, Victoria, Waterloo, and Halton Region, as well as the international cities such as Seattle in the U.S.A., and those in the United Kingdom and Australia. These common guiding principles are:

❖ **Open and Timely Communication:** The City will provide information that is timely, accurate, objective, easily understood, highly accessible, and balanced about the major perspectives.

❖ **Early Involvement:** The City will involve the community as early as possible so that the community have the time and opportunity to learn about the issue and form their opinions, and provide the opportunities for open and constructive dialogue. Halton Region's Principles for Public Consultation and Notification stipulates that the public shall be notified no less than two weeks in advance of a planned public event unless there are pre-existing policies, procedures or legislation which shall prevail over this general guideline.

❖ **Transparency:** The City will demonstrate openness and transparency of purpose when engaging the community so that participants will be clear about the reasons why they are being involved, the objectives and scope of the project, and what their roles and responsibilities are. Participants will be provided with feedback about the results and how their input has been used.

❖ **Accountability:** The City will demonstrate a commitment to being timely and cost-effective when engaging the public, and will ensure that results and outcomes are consistent with expectations and the promises it makes.

❖ **Inclusivity and Representativeness:** The City will encourage participation by those who will be affected and ensure that accurate representation of the community is reflected. The City will develop ways to effectively build relationships and engage members of the community who are often not engaged. Vulnerable populations who often face barriers that may impede their participation include seniors, youth, visible minorities, newcomers, Aboriginals, single mothers, people living in poverty, people with disabilities, people who are stigmatized for their gender and sexual identity, among others. Teignbridge Consultation and Community Engagement Toolkit (2011) and Thurrock Community Engagement Toolkit (2009) provide a Monitoring Form which participants fill out about personal information such as gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religion, and disabilities. Staff can use the filled forms to monitor the extent to which they are engaging marginalized groups.

❖ **Mutual Trust and Respect:** The City will ensure that the community will be engaged in a fair and respectful manner, and foster the respect for diverse values, interests and knowledge.

❖ **Resources:** The City will ensure the methods and resources for engaging the community are appropriate and reflect the magnitude and complexity of the issue or initiative. The process should be timely and fiscally sustainable. The City will ensure that stakeholders' time and resources are respected and used effectively. Staff facilitating the community engagement process will receive the training and support to assist them.

❖ **Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:** The City will continuously seek and learn better ways of engaging the community. Under this principle, the City of Kitchener is committed "to learn from the best practices of other organizations and communities, and share the same as requested" (p. 5). The City of Saskatoon stresses such evaluation and provides a list of questions in their engagement toolkit to facilitate thought processes surrounding successful engagement. Questions range from "What skills were lacking?" to "Did participants compliment us on our work? Why? Can we build on these strengths?" and "Did we need to engage specialists or can we be better trained to facilitate the process in the future?" (See Appendix B). The same kinds of questions are also indicated by the

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P a g e | 11

guidelines offered by other national and international cities for evaluation (See Evaluation below and Appendices B and C)

❖ **Feedback to and from the Public**: Participants are informed of the outcomes of community engagement and the public has the opportunity to provide feedback on the process. The district of Teignbridge in the United Kingdom has a "You said, We did" feedback form which staff fills out within six months of ending the engagement effort. Information on the form is then published on the corporate website to inform the public about the outcomes of the community engagement. Aside from providing feedback to the public on the outcomes and how their input has influenced the decisions reached, the public should also be provided with the opportunity to provide their feedback on the engagement process. Thurrock's 2011-2016 Strategy lists, the 'Right to challenge', as one of its principles for evaluation and feedback. This principle states that the "community will be given the opportunity to comment and/or complain about the engagement process and decisions made as a result of information received through the engagement process" (p. 21).

❖ **Co-ordinated Approach:** This principle for community engagement is particularly visible in the policies of the British boroughs, Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, and Thurrock, as well as the district of Teignbridge. All mention that a co-ordinated approach to community engagement can ensure that there is no duplication of efforts, help to avoid consultation fatigue and ensure a more effective use of resources. The City of Victoria in Canada also states that improving consistency and coordination of the City's engagement initiatives is key to maintaining trusting relationships and building a citizenry that is more engaged (2010). Use of a **central depository** can help store and co-ordinate the City's engagement activities. The City of Edmonton mandates that all City staff uses *Consultation Manager* as a central data repository to store all Public Involvement Plans, stakeholder input and relevant documents in its 2008 policy. The City is currently carrying out a review of the tool.

Thurrock's 2011-2016 Strategy suggests that "in order for community engagement to be meaningful and consistent across the Council and [community] partners, there must be clear ownership" (p. 13). The development of a **community engagement action plan** would be required to implement a community engagement strategy/policy, and should be monitored on an ongoing basis. Similarly, according to the

Halifax Community Engagement Strategy (2008), the implementation of the strategy would occur through a phased approach with **short term, medium term** and **long term** action goals. **Short term** goals would focus on the development and adoption of community engagement principles, including developing of a community engagement toolkit and promotion materials, introducing the strategy to city councillors and key business units, and establishing a steering committee. **Medium term** focus would be placed on the collaborative initiation of tailored community engagement improvement programs among staff and relevant business units. Emphasis at this stage is placed on capacity building through outreach and educational materials. **Long term** focus would be placed on monitoring and evaluation of improvement efforts (Halifax, 2008).

Planning for Community Engagement

The Kitchener Community Engagement Toolkit (2010), London Community Engagement Policy (2012), Oakville Public Engagement Guide (2012), Waterloo Public Involvement Guidelines (2010), Involving Edmonton: A Public Involvement Initiative (2008), and Saskatoon Guide to Public Process (2004) provide detailed guidelines on planning for the community engagement process. However, as noted in the Waterloo, Edmonton and Saskatoon policies, **flexibility may be necessary to meet the goals and objectives**. Edmonton (2008) advises that "in good design – form follows function" when planning for community engagement since there is no mandate that specific community engagement formats should be used at specific times (p. 9). Detailed step to planning for community engagement are also available from the international resources such as Thurrock's Community Engagement Toolkit (2009) and Onkaparinga's Engagement Handbook (2010). The following steps of planning for community engagement have been summarized from these policies and guidelines.

Step 1: Defining the Issues, Objectives, Goals and Stakeholders

Key issues to be considered before engaging the public in a project or initiative include:

1. **Issue and Goals**
    - ❖ What is the project or initiative?

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P a g e | 13

❖ What would be the values and benefits of engaging the public? What would be the costs of not engaging the public?

❖ What are the objectives and goals of engaging the community? The community engagement handbooks developed by the City of Onkaparinga and the Local Government Association of South Australia refer to the *SMART criteria* when setting community engagement objectives (**S**pecific and able to describe an action; **M**easurable; **A**chievable and accessible; **R**ealistic, recorded, and referred to during the process; **T**ime bound). The Queensland Government also asserts that using SMART criteria to set objectives is imperative to the development of an evaluation framework for community engagement (Queensland Government Department of Communications, 2004).

❖ If the decisions in the project or initiative cannot be influenced by the public, the goal would be to inform and educate the public.

❖ If the decisions can be influenced by the public, a community engagement plan would be necessary to determine the objectives, goals, timeline, measurable outcomes, outreach and communication strategies, constraints and other factors that can have an influence on the community engagement. Various municipalities and cities that we researched on provide template that staff can use to draft their community engagement plans (e.g. Edmonton, 2008; Teignbridge, 2011; Victoria, 2010).

2. **Stakeholders**

❖ Who are the relevant stakeholders?

❖ What roles will the stakeholders play?

❖ When should the stakeholders be engaged in the project or initiative?

❖ What are the appropriate strategies to outreach and encourage participation from the stakeholders?

❖ What are the barriers to participation and ways to engage vulnerable populations and those who often are not engaged (the seldom heard groups)?

❖ Potential Stakeholders may include:

   o General Public (those directly affected and those indirectly affected)

- o Groups and Organizations
  - Community associations and neighbourhood organizations
  - Business and business associations
  - Sport and recreation groups
  - Cultural groups and associations
  - Health organizations and associations.
  - Professional associations
  - Umbrella organizations
  - Environmental groups
  - Places of worship and religious organizations
  - Not-for-profit organizations
  - Charities and service clubs

- o Governmental Institutions
  - Local schools and educational institutions
  - City boards and commissions
  - Other municipalities
  - Other levels of government (provincial government, federal government)
  - Internal stakeholders

3. **Project Constraints**

   ❖ Budget, which may include travel costs, rentals, collateral, outsourced materials and

   consultants etc.

   ❖ Timeline

   ❖ Policy or statutory requirements

   ❖ Availability of in-house expertise

4. **History of the Issue**

   ❖ The public's level of involvement in the past

   ❖ Past and current public attitudes

Step 2: Choosing the Appropriate Level and Methods of Engagement

Factors that influence which level of community engagement and methods to be employed include:

   ❖ Nature and complexity of the project or initiative

   ❖ Project constraints, including budget, timeline, legal requirements, in-house expertise, etc

   ❖ The level of influence participants expect to have

   ❖ The level of support desired from the stakeholders and partners

❖ The level of support from organizational and political decision-makers

Table 1 below provides information on which level of community engagement to employ and some methods to consider. The table is based on four levels of engagement: Inform, Consult, Collaborate, and Empower (Entrust according to Kitchener's framework). Consult collapses the two levels, Consult and Involve, according to the IAP2 spectrum. It collapses the two levels, Listen & Learn and Consult, according to Waterloo framework. However, as noted above, the levels are complementary, and may be used independently or in combination. Furthermore, informing the public is necessary in order to prepare the public for higher level of engagement in a coming project or initiative, or to inform the public about the results of the engagement process.

Table 1: *Level of Community Engagement and Method. For more description, including advantages and disadvantages, of each method, see Kitchener Community Engagement Toolkit Appendix A, Oakville Public Engagement Guide pages 7 – 15, Waterloo Public Involvement Guidelines pages 29 – 33, Involving Edmonton section 2 pages 23 – 31, and Victoria Civic Engagement Strategy pages 73 - 79. Details on these methods and their advantages and disadvantages could also be found in the international resources (e.g. Leeds Community Engagement Toolkit (2006), p. 29 – 66). For a comprehensive guideline on the use of online social media, see Kitchener's Online Communications Strategy (summary available in Appendix A).*

	Inform	**Consult**	**Collaborate**	**Empower**
Appropriate when:	Decisions have already been made and public input is not required. Information needs to be shared with the public about a policy, program, initiative or service.	Policy/project parameter is still being shaped. Public input is required. Stakeholder ideas and concerns are needed, and will be considered in the final decisions.	The City shares decision making with other community partners. Decisions require public input and buy-in.	The public makes the decisions. The City may facilitate and support the implementation, but is not the project lead. Decisions require public input and buy-in.

Method	-Open houses -Posters -Newsletters -Brochures, flyers, or fact sheets -Direct mail -Email -Information kiosks -Public displays -Press releases -Television / Radio -Information hotline -Website information -Discussion papers -Tours and site visits -Social media (Facebook, Twitter, podcast etc)	-Open houses -Public hearings -Electronic forums -Workshops/events -Conferences -Information kiosks -Interviews -Focus groups -Surveys -Response forms -Town Hall and public meetings -Expert Panels -Delphi processes -Social media (Facebook, Twitter, podcast etc)	-Advisory committees -Task forces / working groups -Public hearings -Round table discussions -Workshops / events -Symposium	-Citizen juries -Advisory committees -Decision making boards -Task forces/ working groups -Development trusts

When choosing the methods of engagement, it is necessary to consider if the methods used **match the target groups**, e.g. appropriate methods to engage seniors would differ from those used to engage youth. Often, for large-scale complicated initiatives, a **mix of methods** is necessary and, **innovation and flexibility** may be needed. Additionally, different methods may be used at different phases of the initiative. For example, all comparator municipalities and cities have engaged the community extensively in developing the Strategic Plan through the use of multiple methods at different phases of the engagement process (See Appendix A for a variety of methods that have been employed by the Ontario municipalities for some of their major projects or initiatives).

Step 3: Implementing

Successful implementation of the community engagement plan requires **consistent and clear communications** in order to reach and encourage participation from the community. Consistent

communication will also ensure relevant stakeholders remain educated and connected to the project or initiative (Waterloo, 2010). Furthermore, community members likely have not spent the same amount of time thinking about the issues that City staff or experts have (Kitchener, 2010). It is imperative that the public is clear on why they are being involved, what their roles and responsibilities are, and what the expectations are. The public should not be misled into thinking they have more or less power in decision-making than they do (Kitchener, 2010). Their time and resources should be respected and used effectively. As noted by the comparator municipalities, **tokenism damages trust and buy-in.** Thus, stakeholders or stakeholder groups should not be involved simply to meet a quota or when their input will not be considered or used (See also Step 4: Evaluation below for a discussion on evaluating the effectiveness of community engagement).

As mentioned above, **communication is a key factor in the success of community engagement processes**. The City of Saskatoon suggests that communication objectives should be set within the overall project goals. It is important to think about the amount of lead-time that is needed to prepare certain communication strategies and materials as each project will require different strategies to communicate with the larger community. Specific communication plans should be drafted for projects that are more than a one- time events and involve a variety of stakeholders with different objectives and needs. These communication plans need to be used in conjunction with the community engagement plan (Saskatoon, 2004).

Moreover, there is increasing public demand for more effective use of new **online communication methods** to share information and provide platform for public input in addition to the **traditional communication methods.** For example, Shaping Burlington, an independent citizen advisory committee for the City of Burlington, recommended that the City overcame communication deficits to promote community engagement in its 2010 report. The City of Kitchener has developed a comprehensive guideline on the use of online social media to support the public's expectation for enhanced access to online information, and ensure that there is a more balanced approach between the use of online communications and traditional communications in order to reach as many stakeholders and diverse audiences as possible (Kitchener Online Communications Strategy, 2010; See Appendix A for a summary of

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P a g e | 18

the Strategy). In the United States, Burlington, VT, has developed a public input web tool to assist with public outreach and engagement while developing their community engagement policy. This web tool allows community members to provide comments and feedback to events online. The comments are viewable to all and comments from city meetings are included in order to keep the decision making process as transparent and open as possible. As noted in the Region of Waterloo's 2011 public input report for the Strategic Plan 2011-2014, traditional communication methods like newspapers, direct mail and e-mail topped the list overall for communication methods. However, high school and university students wanted information through social media, blogs, RSS feeds and online messaging. Children were also engaged in the process and their input was obtained by asking the children to draw pictures on what they liked best, what they would want to keep in the community for the future, and what they hoped to see when they grew up. Thus, methods of communication and engagement should match the target groups to be effective in encouraging participation. Halifax (2008) also acknowledges that successful engagement processes rely on strong communication techniques that go beyond traditional methods of newspaper notifications and mail outs, and use a combination of traditional and innovative communication vehicles (i.e. community-based networks such as notice boards and church bulletins, television spots, internet communication such as email and Facebook, door to door campaigns). When utilizing innovative communication techniques such as social media, Halifax stresses the importance of having clear language and translated materials, when necessary, and being aware of the timeline of notifications in advance of events.

Step 4: Evaluation (During and After Engagement)

> "To be effective, any evaluation should be integrated into the community engagement
> process itself; planning for the evaluation should begin early on and continue
> throughout, rather than being tacked on as an afterthought. Also, the evaluation should
> be done purposefully, guided by key questions of concern arising out of the goals and
> objectives of the community engagement process, with a focus on informing future
> planning and activities" (Kitchener Community Engagement Toolkit, 2010, p. 18)

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P a g e | 19

Evaluating the effectiveness of the community engagement process is important to understand what had gone well and what could be improved upon in the future, identify future needs within the same project, and gather information for future projects that are similar in scope and objectives. Halifax Regional Municipality Community Engagement Strategy (2008) and Queensland Government's Evaluating Community Engagement (2004) made the similar suggestion that both feedback and evaluation be incorporated as part of the planning process of community engagement and not prepared as an afterthought. The evaluation should not be onerous and should appropriately correspond to the length and complexity of the engagement process (Halifax, 2008). Barr and Hashagen (2000) stress that the process of evaluation must be an extension of community engagement, and thus staff should continue to involve the public in the process rather than adopting a top-down approach to evaluation. The Queensland Government Department of Communications (2004) also advises the inclusion of relevant stakeholders in evaluation to the largest extent possible. Stakeholders may be involved in various ways, including evaluation design, data collection and analysis, development of recommendations, and reporting.

Evaluation often involves an assessment of the extent to which the community engagement process has been effective in achieving its intended objectives and outcomes. Rowe and Frewer (2005) assert that there are two main concepts associated with the effectiveness of the engagement process and its activities. The first concept concerns the **fairness** of the engagement which is related to public acceptability, equity, democracy, representativeness, transparency and influence. It concerns the perceptions of those involved and whether they believe that the engagement "has been honestly conducted with serious intent to collect the views of an appropriate sample of the affected population and to act on those views" (p. 262). The second concept concerns the **competence/efficiency** of the engagement which is related to whether appropriate methods and tools have been used to elicit, transfer and incorporate diverse views and opinions efficiently. Similarly, Seattle (2009) deems a public involvement process successful if all stakeholders are satisfied that the process has been fair, accessible and has been effective in appropriately involving the public. Furthermore, process must have been

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P a g e | 20

inclusive and reflective of the community. If these requirements have been fulfilled, decision makers must then be able to make decisions based on the public involvement results as well as staff recommendations.

Kitchener Community Engagement Toolkit (2010) identifies two types of evaluation: Formative evaluation and summative evaluation. **Formative evaluation** occurs during the engagement process and examines the process in order to ensure standards are being met and allow staff to adapt the process if necessary **(process evaluation). Summative evaluation** occurs after the completion of the engagement process and examines the impact and outcomes of community engagement **(outcome evaluation).** It should be noted that process evaluation should also occur at the end of the engagement to reflect on the lessons learned, success factors, and areas of improvement when outreaching and engaging the community. The Queensland Government Department of Communications (2004) asserts that the purpose of summative evaluation is to monitor performance and reporting for public sector accountability, whereas the purpose of formative evaluation is to contribute to the management of the community engagement project and its development. A third purpose of evaluation is to contribute to research through a shared knowledge base and evidence of good practice (Queensland, 2004). Evaluation can include both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis as appropriate.

Key questions to ask include:
- ❖ Did the process reach the right people and ask the right questions?
- ❖ Was the methodology used appropriate?
- ❖ To what extent have the objectives of the community engagement been achieved?
- ❖ Did the people who got involved feel they were heard?
- ❖ To what extent did the target groups participate? How many stakeholders did not participate and why?
- ❖ Did the answers tell us what we needed to know?
- ❖ Did the process stay within the budget and use the available resources well?
- ❖ Did the community engagement lead to action?
- ❖ Did it help to build capacity in the community?
- ❖ How will the results of the evaluation be used?

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P a g e | 21

(From Waterloo, Oakville, Victoria, Saskatoon, Leeds guides)

Beierle (1999) proposes a similar evaluation framework for public involvement that measures outcomes based on "social goals", which were original developed within the environmental domain. The six social goals are identified as:

- ❖ Educating the public
- ❖ Incorporating public values
- ❖ Increasing the quality of decisions
- ❖ Fostering trust in institutions
- ❖ Reducing conflict
- ❖ Making decisions cost effectively

The Waterloo Public Involvement Guidelines includes follow-up worksheet to help staff evaluate whether they have met the guiding principles (p. 32), and an internal evaluation tool to help staff evaluate whether they have adhered to the policy and answer the key questions above (p. 33). The Saskatoon Guide to Public Process (2004) includes evaluation techniques and suggestions in their toolkit. Evaluation methods that involve relevant stakeholders they have found to be successful in the past include:

- ❖ Informal discussions
- ❖ Interviews (with key stakeholders, community members and city employees)
- ❖ Questionnaires
- ❖ Tear off forms with tick box answers
- ❖ Observations to assess the quality of participation
- ❖ Reviews of process documentation (e.g. records of events, issues raised, decisions made, submissions, feedback forms)
- ❖ Process evaluation forms filled in by key participants in the process

As evidenced by reviewing the community engagement policies of the Ontario comparator municipalities, as well as national and international cities, and contacting the relevant City Staff, there is little known about evaluating community engagement. Thus, a major barrier of the present community engagement strategies is the inability to clearly measure the process and outcomes. However, it should be noted that

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P a g e | 22

the Queensland Government Department of Communications provides an excellent resource to guide the development of an evaluation framework for community engagement (2004; See Appendix C for a summary of the guide).

Step 5: Reporting and Follow-Up

Reporting and giving feedback is considered to be a critical step in the engagement process. "It ensures that those involved see their input was received, understood and valued" (Oakville, 2012 p. 16; Waterloo, 2010, p. 19). Reporting is an important aspect of transparency, and reporting audiences should include not only funders and decision makers, but most importantly, participants (Sheedy, 2008). As noted by Saskatoon (2004), important questions that should be considered and answered at this time include:

- ❖ How will you let stakeholders know how their input was considered and used?
- ❖ How will you let decision-makers know how the information received was used?

At this step, the following should also occur:

- ❖ Acknowledge the participants for their time, energy and expertise
- ❖ Advise the participants when an outcome is expected
- ❖ Provide a record of the engagement process
- ❖ Provide a record of how the decisions were reached.

Reporting to participants require careful consideration of what the participants will want to know, including how their input have helped form decisions, and should be **communicated in plain language avoid of jargon and technical terms**. If the engagement process spans for a period of time with multiple events planned, communicating and reporting between events can help keep the momentum, link the events and encourage continued participation (Sheedy, 2008).

Methods of providing feedback may vary depending on the nature of the project. Saskatoon (2004) suggests the following or a combination of the following as successful methods for providing feedback:

- ❖ Community meetings
- ❖ Written reports (may be after each phase and at the end of the process)

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P a g e | 23

- ❖ Publication of a summary of community comments and final results in the local newspaper
- ❖ Newsletters
- ❖ School newsletters
- ❖ Final reports

Halifax (2008) has implemented a mandatory section on community engagement that all staff reports to help departments remain accountable in reporting and project follow-up. The section includes a mandatory description of community engagement processes including how **internal** and **external** stakeholders were engaged on a given initiative (i.e. how they were informed, consulted or actively engaged). Staff may also wish to append more detailed description of the process to staff reports (e.g. meeting minutes, key issues and how they were addressed). In the event that stakeholders or the wider community were not engaged, staff will need to provide a brief rationale for that decision (Halifax, 2008).

Engaging Diversity and Overcoming Barriers

For all municipalities and cities we researched, inclusivity and representativeness is considered to be one of the guiding principles of community engagement. Thus, outreaching and engaging diverse groups are important. In June 2007, the City of Mississauga launched *Our Future Mississauga* to engage the public in developing directions for the next Strategic Plan. The aim of the engagement process was to have a true dialogue. The key was identified to be casting the net as wide as possible. Thus, Mississauga recruited participants who represented:

- ❖ **A diversity of interests,** including residents, businesses, property owners, investors, community groups, advocacy groups, and representatives from regional and municipal bodies.
- ❖ **A diversity of age demographics**, including children, students, youth, young families, established residents and older adults.
- ❖ **A diversity of geographic areas,** including people from all neighbourhoods in the city.
- ❖ **A diversity of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds,** including representatives of different cultural associations and participants of varying income brackets.

(From Our Future Mississauga: Community Engagement & Directions Report, 2008)

Effective community engagement should address potential barriers that may impede the participation of vulnerable populations such as seniors, youth, visible minorities, newcomers, Aboriginals, single mothers, people living in poverty, people with disabilities, people who are stigmatized for their gender and sexual identity, among others. Table 2 below is a chart from the Kitchener Community Engagement Toolkit which describes the barriers to participation and potential ways to address them.

Barriers to Participation and Potential Solutions

Categories of Exclusion	Barriers to Participation	Potential Solutions
Economic: poverty is by far the most pervasive and cross-cutting issue that excludes people from society	• Time (working different jobs to support a family makes participating in an event difficult). • Social and cultural access (those with lower socio-economic status are less likely to have experienced civic participation). • Economic access	• Consult with the target population about event times that work for them. • Respect end times. • Provide food. • Provide childcare. • Where possible, hold event near work/ homes of target population. • Choose a space for the event that is inhabited by the target population. • Work with trusted community partners (e.g., non-profit organizations). • Hold the event on main public transit line OR provide assistance with transportation. • Provide remuneration for lost work time, childcare, transportation, etc. • Provide an honorarium.
Ethno-cultural	• Language (ESL) • Socio-cultural barriers (people of different cultural background inhabit their own unique space in the community) • Framing the issue (will likely have an impact on who attends as different groups may value and perceive things differently).	• Translate written material into appropriate language(s). • Explore options for event-based translation (whisper translation, group translation, or official translation). • Research the social space, places of worship, newspaper, and other places of gathering and communication; use these to outreach and/or host events. • Pre-test the material on the target population(s) • Present the issue in an objective and accessible way.
Stereotyping age	• Legitimacy (youth are stigmatized as too naïve and the elderly as being out of touch with contemporary times)	• Define concepts and frame the problem in ways the target population can understand and relate to. • Adapt the process so that people will not be intimidated to speak (e.g., small group discussion and reporting back).
Ability	• Physical access (the public space is not barrier-free) • Transportation (getting to and from events poses unique challenges for people with disabilities) • Communication (depending on a person's disability, they may need assistance with communicating)	• Ensure the event location and space is accessible and advertise as such. • Give sufficient notice of the event for people to plan transportation OR provide adapted transportation. • On registration forms, ask people to specify any special needs that they will need to participate. • Provide translation into Braille and sign language services (determine need before the event)
Gender and sexual identity	• Parenting (women still carry a disproportionate responsibility for childcare) • Legitimacy (people who do not fit the dominant model of "male" or "female" are stigmatized)	• Provide childcare money • Provide childcare at the event (ask people to register ahead of time). • Hire facilitators and staff who are sensitive and skilled at drawing people into the process.

Table 2: *Barriers to Participation and Potential Solutions (Adapted from the Kitchener Community Engagement Toolkit).*

Conclusion

Community engagement is acknowledged as imperative by all the comparator municipalities, and has been employed in the development, planning and implementation of many municipal or regional projects or initiatives. Aside from the Canadian cities such as Ajax, Kitchener, London, Oakville, Ottawa, Waterloo and Halton Region which have developed a formal approach to community engagement, many of the Ontario municipalities that we researched plan to develop a policy or are already in the process of developing one (See Appendix A). Municipalities and cities in the U.S.A appear to employ the process of community engagement on a project-basis, rather than having a centralized policy. On the other hand, a lot more policies and strategies on community engagement could be found from the United Kingdom and Australia. Of the municipalities and cities with a formal policy on community engagement, it appears that there are lots of similarities in their framework and approach to community engagement locally, nationally and internationally as have been summarized in this report.

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P a g e | 26

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P a g e | 28

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P a g e | 29

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Note: See Appendix A for resources from other Ontario municipalities, and Appendices B and C for resources from the other national and international areas.

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