



# Community Engagement

## VISION

**Bellevue’s actively engaged community shapes the city’s future.**

Bellevue has a strong social fabric, where community groups, businesses and city government work together to address our needs. The city makes engagement with the people who live, work and play in Bellevue today a high priority and carefully considers their needs when developing Comprehensive Plan policies. Community members know that their local government listens and responds to them.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SCOPE**

The Community Engagement element focuses on how the city interacts with the community to share information and solicit feedback on plans and activities.

## INTRODUCTION

The Bellevue community is engaged in a wide array of civic activities, such as volunteering at parks, serving on boards and commissions, participating in the city's flagship engagement class (Bellevue Essentials), hosting community gatherings and volunteering as mediators, among many other activities. City staff actively seek community input through a wide variety of inclusive, innovative and proven outreach methods to educate the public about issues and incorporate community ideas into plans, projects and budgets. When the needs and interest of all community members are considered, the city makes more sustainable, actionable, and community-informed decisions. This commitment to inclusive and effective community engagement promotes transparency, accessibility and greater trust between the city government and the Bellevue community.



## TODAY'S CONDITIONS AND TOMORROW'S PROJECTIONS

### Community Engagement Today and Tomorrow

Bellevue has a long tradition of engaging diverse communities in planning the future of their city. Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan has evolved with extensive and ongoing community involvement that represents a diverse range of viewpoints, areas of expertise and interests. The city also regularly incorporates community engagement into more specific planning efforts, such as community advisory committees, open houses, focus groups, surveys and other outreach methods. This tradition of active and inclusive engagement requires the city to constantly innovate and evolve its approach to how it engages a changing community. Bellevue continues to grow in size and diversity, prompting the city to adopt an expanded and more inclusive understanding of community. This includes residents, employees, business owners, and visitors, with a particular focus on those most directly impacted by plans and policies, especially when overlapped with historically marginalized or underserved communities. The city is also committed to the meaningful, regular and ongoing coordination with Tribes on all policies and actions with Tribal implications. Altogether, Bellevue is committed to engaging the entire community to ensure all voices are being heard now and in the future.

### Opportunities and Challenges

#### Inclusive Engagement in a Diverse Community

Promoting inclusive engagement in Bellevue's diverse community requires a variety of innovative outreach strategies to identify the most impacted communities, develop equity-driven public engagement goals and outcomes, establish meaningful relationships, implement culturally relevant engagement opportunities and remove barriers to participation. City staff seek

## DIVERSITY ADVANTAGE PLAN

The plan provides tools, strategies and resources to help the community and the city work hand-in-hand to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, leading to an improved quality of life for all residents.

to engage Bellevue's entire community in civic life and cannot assume that all people are equally comfortable or familiar with activities such as volunteering with city programs or participating in public meetings. Some communities may be cautious of public participation due to negative prior experiences with government, language barriers or cultural differences. The city can take numerous steps to better engage Bellevue's many diverse communities and ensure all voices are being heard. Strategies include meeting community members where they are, partnering with and mentoring community leaders to build long-term relationships and community capacity to participate in engagement processes, planning accessible meetings and events that reduce schedule, mobility and language barriers, translating outreach materials into multiple languages, providing multiple and varied ways to participate and reporting back to communities following engagement efforts to facilitate ongoing two-way communication.

### New Technologies and Innovative Methods

Web and social media-based platforms have become increasingly popular avenues for public outreach to reduce barriers to participation and reach additional segments of the Bellevue community. For younger generations, social media has become the default means for interacting with organizations and individuals. For busy professionals, especially those with families, traditional in-person public engagement methods such as public hearings or open houses scheduled during business hours can be inaccessible. By using web and social media-based tools, the city

can make participation easier, more accessible and consistent with community expectations.

Using the web and social media is also changing how cities inform community members—allowing instant dissemination of complex information to anyone with an internet connection. It has also transformed interactions with community members and how cities collect input. The city now has a mobile app for smart phones, communicates via a variety of social media platforms, and offers a “paperless” permit application option available entirely online. While these changes facilitate public engagement, they also raise potential problems, such as identity verification, maintaining civil discourse in online forums, navigating misunderstandings, respecting individual privacy concerns, staying current with ever-changing media platforms, and addressing accessibility issues for those who lack access to these technologies.

Beyond harnessing new technologies, there is also an opportunity for the city to implement additional innovative outreach methods to reduce barriers to public participation and promote inclusive engagement. Specific examples include: providing childcare and/or food during public meetings and events; providing stipends to compensate participants for their time when providing expertise or lived knowledge to the city; offering engagement opportunities at a variety of times and in multiple formats and collaborating with communities to develop culturally relevant engagement methods.

### More Complex Public Projects

Complex, challenging planning projects are on the horizon, such as: ongoing development of light rail; growth of the city's employment centers; work to address affordable housing and programs to enhance the distinct physical amenities of Bellevue's diverse neighborhoods as they continue to evolve. All of these changes require the city to engage community members, especially the most impacted, in new ways and in conversations that are very different from the conversations the city had 20 years ago. The city's community

engagement needs to be adept at presenting increasingly technical information, being responsive to public concerns, facilitating public conversations where a diversity of viewpoints can be expressed through thoughtful dialogue, welcoming people with little to no experience with civic engagement and integrating diverse viewpoints into planning solutions.

## Community Engagement Policy Summary

Bellevue’s policies establish clear guidance for the city’s community engagement efforts and are organized around the following themes:

### Building Community Capacity

Successful community engagement requires building the necessary pathways to include and uplift diverse community voices in planning and decision-making processes. To ensure all communities have the information and means to participate, Bellevue must support long-term relationships between the city, neighborhood groups and diverse community-based organizations, and provide educational opportunities to support engagement and thoughtful dialogue surrounding complex projects and technical information.

### Planning for Engagement

Bellevue acknowledges that planning and decision-making processes have excluded or deterred most impacted populations, which frequently overlaps with historically marginalized or underserved communities. To ensure all voices are heard, regardless of race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or any other characteristics that can lead to marginalization, Bellevue must identify where and who is most impacted by decision-making, prioritize equitable representation of viewpoints, collaborate with impacted communities to understand how the city can best meet community needs and encourage participation, and regularly seek any missing voices through ongoing research and analysis.

## Engaging the Community

Bellevue recognizes that a diverse toolkit of engagement methods is needed to ensure all voices are heard in planning and decision-making processes. Traditional outreach methods, such as open houses, public hearings, and online surveys, may only reach a subset of the community. To expand beyond this reach and ensure representative and inclusive outreach of the entire Bellevue community, the city must reduce barriers to participation, provide multiple and varied engagement opportunities, commit to investing additional time and resources in engaging historically marginalized or underserved communities, utilize a variety of innovative technologies and approaches, set measurable metrics to track engagement, and conduct regular community report-outs following engagement efforts to encourage open and ongoing communication.

## Supporting Good Relationships Between City and Community

Bellevue understands that successful community engagement does not and should not end with a single project or plan. Establishing meaningful, long-term relationships builds community trust and ensures that all voices can be heard within future planning and decision-making. To support good relationships between the city, its residents and the broader community, Bellevue must continue to provide equitable access and accommodations to city programs, services and events seek out periodic feedback on how the city can better reach its many diverse communities; and invest in culturally relevant training of city staff and representatives.



# GOAL & POLICIES

## Goal

To ensure that the public has on-going opportunities to participate in all planning efforts.

### Building Community Capacity

- CE-1.** Build relationships and coordinate engagement between the city and diverse cultural groups across the city and region through programs and partnerships such as a cultural liaison program or grants to community-based organizations to increase community engagement.
- CE-2.** Support identification and mentoring of potential community leaders, particularly those that support a diverse and representative leadership pool, to increase community capacity to participate in engagement processes.
- CE-3.** Provide issue and policy education opportunities related to projects as part of an overall community engagement plan to support informed and thoughtful dialogue.

### Planning for Engagement

- CE-4.** Conduct detailed and community-informed stakeholder analyses to identify what neighborhoods and segments of the community will be impacted by city projects, land use, and policy decisions, with particular attention given to historically underserved communities.
- CE-5.** Prepare a robust, transparent and user-friendly community involvement program that is tailored to effectively, efficiently and equitably involve the public at the appropriate level of engagement on city projects and policy-making. Utilize a combination of innovative and proven outreach methods to educate the public about the substance of issues and include viewpoints representative of the entire community.
- CE-6.** Identify opportunities for community influence and engagement on city projects and policy-making. Establish clear roles, responsibilities and expectations for community groups that may be informed, consulted, involved, collaborated with or empowered on particular issues as part of a public participation plan.
- CE-7.** Collaborate with communities affected by city projects and policies to identify planning approaches and engagement methods that are culturally relevant, meet community needs, and provide community members the opportunity to engage at appropriate levels throughout the process.
- CE-8.** Monitor and compare demographics of potentially impacted communities to those taking part in community engagement efforts to identify any missing voices and perspectives. Use additional, innovative engagement methods to target gaps in representative engagement. Conduct research and analysis to emphasize prioritized community interests and inform decision-making.

## Engaging the Community

- CE-9.** Encourage the use of plain language writing and design within public-facing engagement materials to ensure information is concise, inclusive and easy to understand. Periodically review materials to ensure content remains accessible.
- CE-10.** Encourage and support engagement with the entire community, including residents, employees, business owners and visitors to the city or area of the city under consideration.
- CE-11.** Cultivate constructive community dialogs for mutual understanding and sharing of diverse perspectives, ideas, experiences and expertise to support community engagement beyond the minimum required.
- CE-12.** Encourage and emphasize open and ongoing communication between developers and residents, businesses and other segments of the community impacted by development projects.
- CE-13.** Reduce barriers to community engagement by considering the needs of specific groups, especially marginalized populations.
- CE-14.** Provide equitable opportunities for engagement that invests additional resources and time in engaging historically marginalized or underserved populations.
- CE-15.** Use innovative technologies and approaches for community engagement to target unique needs and explore outreach opportunities, in addition to boards and commissions, that are effective, equitable and efficient at enhancing public understanding and participation. When successful, incorporate these approaches into other citywide engagement processes.
- CE-16.** Set metrics for equitable and comprehensive engagement and monitor progress toward meeting these metrics throughout a project.
- CE-17.** Following community engagement efforts, report back to the engaged community on the issues raised in the engagement process, how that engagement was utilized and the rationale used to make decisions. Leverage completed engagement efforts in an ongoing manner to inform future work.

## Supporting Good Relationships Between City and Community

- CE-18.** Establish meaningful, regular and ongoing coordination and exchange of information with Tribes to recognize mutual benefits and the potential for impacts on all policies, actions, and decisions of mutual concern.
- CE-19.** Provide equitable access to the city's programs, services, and events — including accommodation for youth, older adults, persons living with a disability, communities with limited English language ability, people of all genders, gender expressions and sexual orientations and people from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

See also Neighborhoods policies related to communication with the community, [NH-7](#) and [NH-8](#).

- CE-20.** Seek out periodic feedback from community members and city staff on the impact and success of city services to support effective two-way communication, identify areas of improvement and enhance future participation.
- CE-21.** Invest in training for city officials, boards, commissions and staff to ensure effective, appropriate and culturally relevant communication and engagement with diverse communities.