



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY  
OF **WOOD BUFFALO**

# **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

MARCH 2021



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## WHAT IS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Municipality is committed to fostering public understanding of emerging opportunities, issues, and decisions, while creating a trusting and transparent environment for public dialogue to occur between residents and the Municipality.

Public Engagement is the process of connecting the Municipality and the public by having purposeful dialogue discussing and gaining an understanding of emerging issues and opportunities, involving the public by clarifying issues, and identifying alternatives or partnering in decision making.

The International Association for Public Engagement (IAP2) also defines it as: “A deliberate commitment that government makes to its public and stakeholder groups to listen and to be influenced within expressed limits.”

The Municipality is guided by the following principles in its commitment to public engagement:

- The Municipality will inform, educate, and engage the public about opportunities, issues and decisions that have significant impact on the public, through appropriate public engagement principles and activities.
- The Municipality will determine the level of public engagement proportionate to the impact of the issue or decision and will clearly communicate the level of public engagement required to the public.
- The Municipality will conduct public engagement in the most sustainable and inclusive way with available resources and reasonable costs.
- The Municipality will communicate decisions and results driven by public engagement to the public in a timely manner and in accordance with approved communications practices.

## ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

### Communications & Engagement

This department is responsible for implementation of the Public Engagement Policy and oversees implementation of the Public Engagement Framework, advising on engagement and supporting the organization in the implementation of a credible, transparent, and respectful process. Communications & Engagement (C&E) works with departments across the organization to identify topics or issues that require public engagement, align efforts within the Municipality to meet the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan, and providing results of public engagement to assist leadership in making informed, community-driven decisions about programming, services, projects, policies, and initiatives.

### Indigenous & Rural Relations

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is home to Treaty 8 and unceded Métis territory, the traditional lands of the Cree, Dene and Métis. The Municipality recognizes the importance of meaningfully engaging with Indigenous and rural communities on municipal programs, projects, and initiatives.

The Indigenous and Rural Relations (IRR) department is responsible for engagement and dialogue with Indigenous governments, communities and members, as well as rural communities in the region. This department works collaboratively with municipal departments across the organization to facilitate Indigenous and rural engagement and build positive relationships across the region. IRR may develop specific engagement processes or protocols with Indigenous communities that define the required engagement processes between the municipality and an Indigenous community.

Any requirements for Federal or Provincial Consultation with Indigenous communities are outside the scope of this Public Engagement Framework.

### Legislative Services

Legislative Services is guided by legislated requirements, such as advertising, for public hearings related to Council matters. While public hearings are a form of engagement, they are considered as part of the requirements of the Municipal Government Act and are not considered under this framework.

### Contracted Services

From time to time the Municipality will engage the services of subject matter experts to assist in the design and development of programs, facilities, and infrastructure. These contracted services may include providing support for public engagement; however communications and engagement strategies must be approved by and delivered with the support of the Department of Communications & Engagement and as required with Indigenous and Rural Relations.

## WHY WE ENGAGE

There are as many reasons to engage as there are people in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. From services to construction projects, the work we undertake as a municipality impacts current and future residents, businesses, and investors. Our residents - collectively our largest stakeholder group - are wholly invested in our region and are an excellent source of valuable feedback.

Public Engagement often provides the following benefits:

- Improves decision-making
- Facilitates understanding;
- Taps into local insight and knowledge
- Gets honest feedback on what works or doesn't work for services or projects
- Helps residents take a more active role in the community
- Provides a sense of community ownership and civic pride

It is also important to remember that our engagement activities are for both internal and external audiences. Our employees are - first and foremost - residents of the region and can be our best ambassadors. It is vital that information is shared across departments.

# Goals

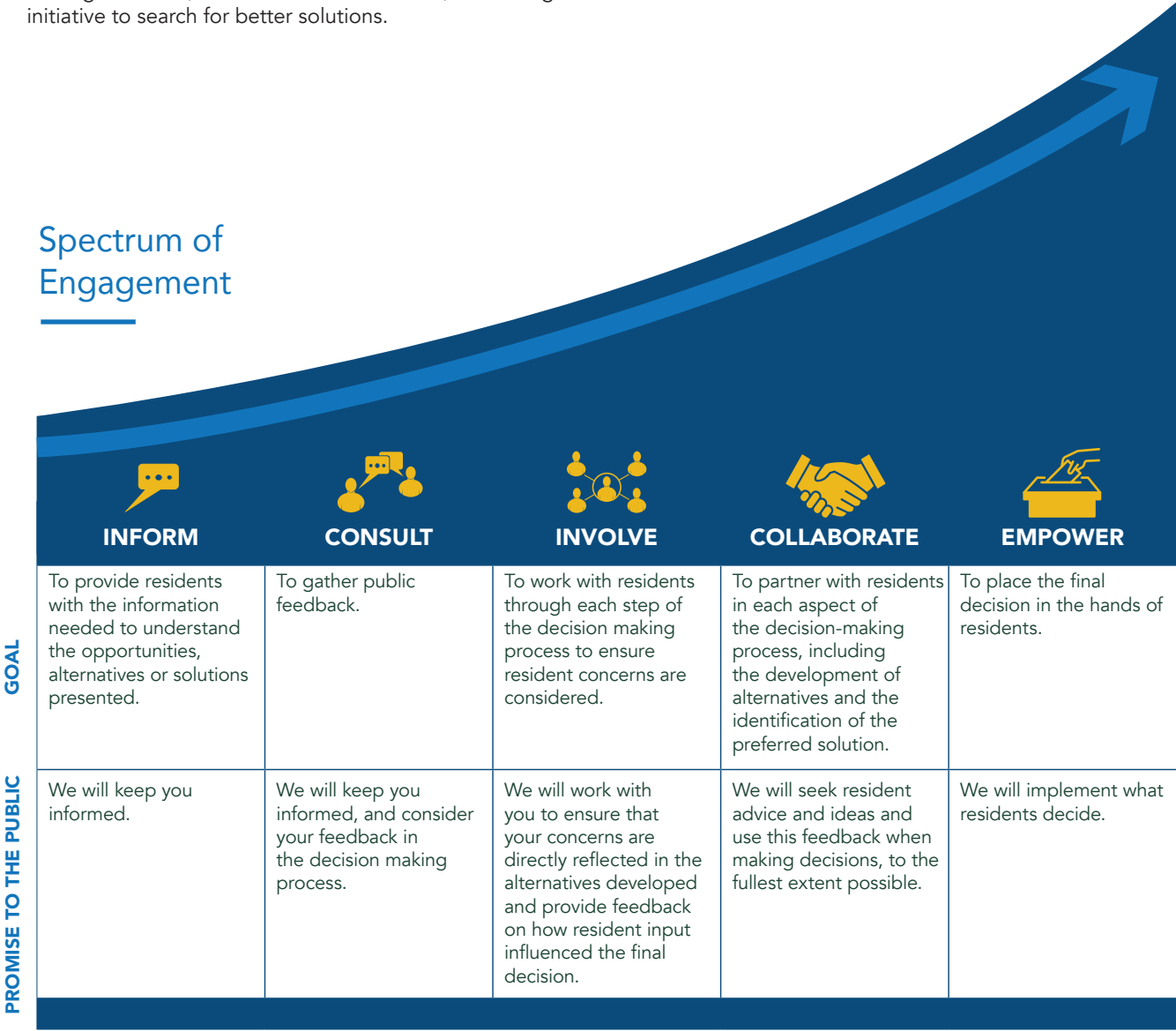
The following goals should be considered in undertaking meaningful public engagement:

1. Relationship management: Demonstrate to all stakeholders that their feedback is instrumental and required to make better decisions and to achieve our shared vision of a vibrant, sustainable region we are proud to call home.
2. Engagement management: Design opportunities to be as inclusive and accessible as possible, removing barriers to engagement and empowering all residents to have their voice heard.
3. Expectation management: Be transparent about what the outcomes are, and especially the degree of decision-making power residents will have. Commit to reporting back in a timely manner on how feedback influenced decisions.
4. Reputation management: Acknowledge that the Municipality doesn't always get it right, but we are committed to being accountable and transparent, making informed, evidence-based decisions, and taking initiative to search for better solutions.

With the above guiding principles in mind, every public engagement will have specific goals. For example, is the goal to inform the public about the project? Or is the goal to shape a particular part of a project/issue, such as the design of a building or the way a service is offered? Or perhaps it's more of an educational campaign as opposed to an information gathering campaign.

When considering goals specific to the project, it is helpful to assess what level of public engagement will occur. To do this, the Municipality takes guidance from the International Association of Public Engagement (IAP2). IAP2 is recognized around the world for its work to improve, promote, and advocate for public engagements across many sectors. IAP2 offers the resource of the Spectrum of Engagement, which identifies the level of engagement with the public over the course of five stages: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. The level of engagement will depend on the project goals.

## Spectrum of Engagement



## HOW WE ENGAGE

### Strategy Development

To facilitate appropriate and meaningful public engagement for various audiences and diverse situations, there are several steps that will be adopted to meet the needs and interests of residents and stakeholders.

IRR will lead the development, with support from C&E, of strategies for projects, programs, or initiatives where only Indigenous or rural communities are being engaged. C&E will lead, with the support from IRR, the development of strategies that include the public, other stakeholders, or Indigenous and Rural communities.

For each project or initiative requiring public engagement, a strategy will be developed comprised of the following elements:

- *Background:* Provide an overview of the issue to be addressed including any historical context, commitments, and obligations.
- *Decision-making:* What decisions have already been made, what decisions are still to be made, and what role will the public have in the decision-making process.
- *Objectives:* Set out SMART goals specific to the engagement, considering qualitative and quantitative intended outcomes.
- *Promise to the Public:* This statement will help to keep us accountable to the public and serve as a reminder of our public commitment throughout the engagement process.
- *Stakeholder Mapping:* Who will be impacted by the decision, and to what degree; who are the project ambassadors, decision makers and subject matter experts?
- *Potential Issues & Mitigation Measures:* Identify the potential problems and challenges and how these can be mitigated.
- *Tools & Tactics:* As a rule, a variety of ways and times to join the conversation should be provided.
- *Communications Plan:* What information needs to be given for participants to provide informed feedback, and how will this information be shared; how will we make people aware of the opportunities to engage?
- *Budget:* Detail the costs and source of funds.
- *Critical Path:* Outline the tasks and timelines for strategy implementation, and who is responsible for each activity.
- *Evaluation & Reporting:* An important part of the public engagement strategy (and earning public trust) is accountability; therefore each strategy must include a report back to the community and the organization for evaluation, to determine whether objectives were met and what could be improved going forward.

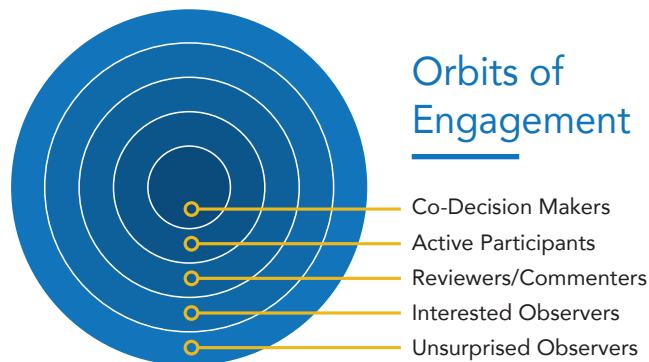
### Stakeholder Mapping

There are any number of stakeholders to engage. Stakeholders are individuals, groups or organizations who may affect, be affected by, or perceive themselves to be affected by a decision, activity, or outcome of a project.

Given the wide range of interests within the region, the stakeholders are many and varied. This may include residents,

industry, community organizations, local businesses, social profits, and other internal departments.

A critical step in the development of a strategy is to identify who should be engaged. To do this, a stakeholder mapping exercise will identify the orbit of engagement each group would fall into. Only once stakeholders have been identified can appropriate tactics for meaningful public engagement be determined.



## EVALUATION & REPORTING

Communications & Engagement and Indigenous and Rural Relations will work with municipal departments at the beginning of each calendar year to compile an overview of initiatives, programs and projects that will require public engagement. We will endeavour to share engagement opportunities to the public monthly, or an appropriately defined period, so that the public is aware of upcoming engagement opportunities. Recognizing that plans or approaches may change, the schedule of engagement will be reviewed and updated as necessary to ensure the required resources and support is available.

It is critical that results of engagements are shared with the public, and to report back on how the results have or have not influenced a decision or been incorporated into the topic being discussed. This is an important step to better understand how public engagement can be developed and improved, help build civic trust, and encourage future public engagement. Questions to consider include:

- Was the tactical approach appropriate? How can it be improved upon?
- Was the stakeholder mapping effective, or was someone/group missed?
- Were there concerns that were not identified on the outset? How can we avoid this in the future?
- Were there any unexpected outcomes, positive or negative?
- Were we able to adhere to project timelines?
- Were we able to achieve the stated objectives?
- Did the overall process meet the needs of the project?

Reporting back to the public is incorporated into the strategy development described above. It also provides an opportunity to thank the public for their engagement and share information about plans to improve the public engagement experience.



[rmwb.ca/participate](http://rmwb.ca/participate)