



ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

SECTION: 200 – General Administration	POLICY#: 210
TITLE: Equitable Community Engagement	R & O #: 22-85
	IMPLEMENTED BY PROCEDURE #:
SPONSORING DEPT/DIV: County Administrative Office/Office of Equity, Inclusion and Community Engagement	
ADOPTED: 09/20/2022	REVIEWED:

PURPOSE: The purpose of this policy is to serve as a foundation and guide for staff and contractors on best practices in equitable community engagement when working with the public, to assist them in participating in local decision-making. The policy can apply to all facets of County operations, specifically activities that are under the purview of the Board of County Commissioners and is not intended to change when community engagement is required, but rather to govern how that community engagement is conducted.

Washington County is dedicated to investing resources to break down the social, historical, and institutional barriers that exclude full participation from all community members in our programs, plans, and policies. It is the responsibility of the County to engage with the community to ensure transparency and accountability in government and promote the purposeful work of public service while also maintaining an organizational culture that is responsive to the values, needs, and concerns of the public. Washington County strives to center equity, diversity and inclusion in all its work, particularly in community engagement, and prioritizes a culture of operational excellence.

In addition to removing social, historical, and institutional barriers to participation, effective community engagement can benefit local government and the communities it serves by increasing trust and improving decision making processes and outcomes.

AUTHORITY:

Washington County Charter § 31.

DEFINITIONS:

Community Engagement: various methods of planned engagement conducted to provide the public with a means to gather their input to assist in local government decision-making.

Community Outreach: various methods of planned or unplanned outreach conducted to provide the public with information or raise awareness about an issue

Focus communities: groups that are a subset of the population, such as those residing in a geographic area or a countywide target population such as older adults.

Historically excluded and most at risk communities: any group of people that has been or continues to be excluded from full rights, privileges and opportunities in a society, organization, or governmental process.

GENERAL POLICY: It is the policy of Washington County that all departments, contractors, and consultants shall make documented efforts to include the community, as detailed in the policy and accompanying procedural guidelines, in all planned engagement processes. The practice of equitable community engagement will apply to decision making, including strategic planning, budget-setting, policymaking, and service delivery. When teams do not have the capacity or resources to implement an equitable engagement process, they shall utilize the expertise of staff in the Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement, or a consultant or contractor.

POLICY GUIDELINES:

1. Responsibilities:

- 1.1. The County shall engage residents and other stakeholders to inform them; gather information or feedback on an upcoming decision or revision of a prior decision; help identify community needs and aspirations; when appropriate or when required by law, policy or agreement.
- 1.2. County staff shall do the following:
 - conduct community engagement that is inclusive and accessible to all groups and residents including people of all ages, abilities, races/ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and cultural backgrounds.
 - provide information that is clear, easy to understand, and accessible to all.
 - appropriately consider and incorporate public input gathered into decision-making and planning.
 - report, as needed, to the Board on public engagement efforts.

- work to create an environment where all County departments are encouraged to continue developing their engagement capabilities and to make engagement an integral part of departmental planning and operations.
- build skills and knowledge across County departments to conduct community engagement activities and processes through ongoing training and support from the Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement.

2. Exceptions:

2.1. Exceptions may only be granted by the County Administrator or designee.

3. Implementation:

3.1. Elected officials and department directors are expected to be knowledgeable of, and shall be responsible for, implementing this policy within their respective departments.

4. Periodic Review:

4.1. This policy shall be reviewed by the County Administrative Office - Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement at least every three years, or more often if needed, and updated as necessary.

ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES:

The County shall do the following:

1. Utilize the Washington County Community Engagement Spectrum:

1.1. The Washington County Community Engagement Spectrum is a model developed to help determine the type of engagement effort being planned and clarify the degree to which the public will be engaged and level of influence they will have in planning and decision-making processes.

2. Involve Representatives from Focus Community(ies):

2.1. Representatives from focus communities shall be included in the design and plan for engagement. As a result, the engagement approach may take many different forms and may be a combination of more than one form.

3. Partner with Community Based Organizations:

3.1. Community based organizations (CBO) have expertise, a knowledge base, and networks of relationships that are extremely valuable to the community engagement process. CBO staff may be able to extend the County's reach in culturally specific communities in a variety of ways and provide co-creation of community engagement plans and processes

that are more relevant to community. Community based organizations should be compensated for their time and expertise through a contractual agreement. *See Section 9 Stipends and Honorariums for more information*

4. Develop a Community Engagement Plan (details of how to do this are in the procedure)

4.1. Staff shall develop an outline or more detailed community engagement plan that includes the following elements:

- 4.1.1. Goal, purpose, objectives, or preferred outcomes of community engagement
- 4.1.2. Level of engagement based on the Community Engagement Spectrum, see above
- 4.1.3. Methods of Engagement or how (format) staff plan to engage the community
- 4.1.4. Equity, diversity, and inclusion considerations to reduce barriers to participation.
- 4.1.5. Community follow-up to describe how community will be informed of how their information was used
- 4.1.6. Evaluation that describes what worked well and what could be changed for future engagement

5. Conduct Outreach and Communications

5.1. The County will make every effort to provide proper notice to the public for all community engagement opportunities. It is important to work with departmental communications staff, when available, to ensure that notices are provided in a timely manner, utilize various forms of media, are clearly understandable, use plain language, and are accessible to all. Working with community-based organizations to provide feedback about messaging and distribute finalized messaging is a helpful approach in reaching culturally specific and other communities. *Different types of outreach can be found in the procedure.*

6. Implement Culturally Specific Considerations

6.1. The County shall make every effort to consider and try to meet the needs of specific audiences in which engagement is focused. When intending to engage members of a specific community, understanding their cultural nuances is important for deciding what considerations to make in planning the event. If unsure, consider partnering with a community-based organization who works with the culturally specific community to help guide the planning and implementation.

7. Provide Language Accessibility

7.1. Materials translation, simultaneous interpretation, and consecutive interpretation shall be used, as needed or requested, in public events and activities to reduce language barriers and increase access for people who are hearing impaired or have difficulty processing language. This includes languages other than English as well as American Sign

Language or closed captioning. *This should be considered in accordance with the County's Limited English Accessibility Policy 207 and Procedure 207-A*

8. Utilize a Trauma Informed Approach

8.1. Trauma informed community engagement acknowledges and understands that the trauma community members have experienced may impact their ability to engage in traditional community engagement efforts fully and safely. *Specific considerations can be found in the procedure*

9. Stipends and Honorariums

9.1. The County shall attempt to off-set the financial barriers to participation by providing stipends, honorariums, and participation support, as appropriate, to community members for their participation in community engagement efforts. This action is also an acknowledgement of the ways in which Washington County benefits from the voices of historically excluded community members, the emotional toll sharing their experiences can take, and a recognition of the value of understanding their unique perspectives. Guidelines can be found in the procedure.