County of Yolo
Administrative Policies and Procedure Manual

TITLE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	DEPARTMENT: County Administrator's Office
TYPE: **POLICY**	DATE: January 29, 2019

A. VALUE STATEMENT

Through proactive and meaningful community engagement efforts, the County and public can work together to enhance the quality of life for all Yolo County residents.

B. PURPOSE

This policy is meant to serve as a guide and foundation for staff on best practices in community engagement when working with the public, in any form or capacity, to assist in local decision-making. The policy can apply to all facets of County operations including financial, asset management, environmental, community services, health and human services, public safety, strategic planning, and day to day operations.

It is the responsibility of the County to engage the community in order to ensure transparency and accountability in government and promote the purposeful work of public service while also establishing an organizational culture that is responsive to the values, needs, and concerns of the public. The County prioritizes a culture of operational excellence, supporting the principles of community engagement and empowerment. Through effective community engagement the County shall seek to consistently engage the public for the purposes of informing, consulting, involving, collaborating with, and empowering the community.

Effective community engagement can benefit local government in several ways, as detailed by the Institute for Local Government[1], including:

- Improved decision making and actions, with better outcomes for the public and local agencies
- Increased community buy-in and support
- Clearer identification of the public's values, ideas, and recommendations
- Well-informed residents
- Enhanced constructive discussion and decision-making
- Efficient project implementation with less need to revisit again
- Increased trust between members of the public and local government
- Higher rates of community participation and leadership development

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[1] Institute for Local Government. (2017). "Shaping the Future Together: TIERS Framework for Practical Public Engagement at the Local Level."

By investing in a comprehensive community engagement policy, the County seeks to attain these benefits.

C. DEFINITIONS AND KEY PRINCIPLES

I. Definition:
For the purposes of this policy, community engagement, also known as public engagement, is defined as various methods of outreach conducted to provide the public with information or gather their input to assist in local government decision-making.[2]

II. Key Principles:

    a. The County shall conduct community engagement that is inclusive and accessible to all groups and residents incorporating all ages, abilities, races/ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and cultural backgrounds.

    b. The County shall provide information that is clear, easy to understand, and accessible to all.

    c. The County shall appropriately consider and incorporate public input gathered.

    d. The County will regularly report to the Board on public engagement efforts.

    e. The County shall 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.

    f. The County shall build skills and knowledge across County departments to conduct community engagement activities and processes.

D. PROTOCOL

I. Planning

To ensure effective engagement, time should be taken to carefully plan out community engagement efforts.

    a. *Purpose:* Staff should determine the purpose or goal of conducting the community engagement and structure it accordingly. The purpose of community engagement can take several forms:

- Inform: To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
- Consult: To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or potential solutions.
- Involve: To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
- Collaborate: To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
- Empower: To provide the public with the information and resources necessary to assist them in making a final decision. This method of public engagement only applies to a project where the final decision legally rests in the hands of the public, such as an election issue.[3]

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[2] Institute for Local Government. (2016). "What is Public Engagement & Why Should I do it?"
[3] International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). (2014). "IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum."

b. *Community Landscape*: The population and geographic region that staff are seeking to engage should be carefully considered. Time should be taken to identify the key stakeholders in the community to ensure their notice and/or involvement (such as residents and ratepayers, community and cultural organizations, businesses, service clubs, public and non-profit partners). Ultimately, community engagement by the County shall be inclusive and accessible to all groups and residents incorporating all ages, abilities, races/ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and cultural backgrounds.

c. *Constraints and Resources:* Staff should consider and plan for potential constraints (i.e. project timeline, budget, and available staff) and resources (i.e. staff, digital needs, and meeting locations).

d. *Partners*: Looking for a local partner can be an asset in planning an outreach event as they already have contacts, knowledge, and buy-in with that community. Partners may also have a meeting space for you at a free or low cost charge or are already sponsoring or holding an event that you can easily join. Partners can also give you an idea of what kind of event works best for that community, including keying you in on factors to consider, such as time, resident demographics, etc.

e. *Develop Engagement Approach:* The approach to community engagement should be structured on the purpose of the outreach, community landscape, constraints, and resources.
   1) Staff should also consider and utilize an engagement approach that will most effectively reach the target population. For example, not all populations will be interested in a public meeting, so alternative methods, such as having a pop-up booth at an already occurring public event, may be more effective in reaching people.
   2) Based on these factors the engagement approach can take many different forms and can be a combination of more than one. For example:
      - Smaller engagement efforts could include focus groups, small group meetings, pop-up booths at fairs or farmers markets, or 'coffee shop' style meetings with key stakeholders.
      - Larger engagement efforts could include workshops, large public meetings, or facilitated group discussions.
      - Digital media, including social media, is another form of engagement. Staff can inform the community through websites and online newsletters as well as consult the public with surveys or polls. Digital media helps facilitate interactions and information sharing so residents are seeing services and information in multiple formats and locations.
   3) Staff should consult with the Board of Supervisor's District Offices for suggestions on how to best approach and communicate with constituents in their district.

II. Outreach

Once a purpose is defined and an engagement approach is in place, staff should conduct outreach in an effective and thoughtful manner.

a. *Public Outreach*: It is the job of staff to ensure the public receives proper notice for a community engagement effort. The notice should be provided in a timely manner, utilize various forms of media, be clearly understandable, and be accessible to all.

b. *County Policies*: Any outreach must be conducted in accordance with a department's public information process, the County's Social Media policy and applicable laws such as the limitations on mass mailings by elected officials.

c. *Public Noticing*: Staff must follow any required public noticing requirements applicable to their project. Public notices are often required of government agencies for certain rulemaking or lawmaking proceedings. A meeting of a governing board is a common example of required noticing but certain actions can also trigger the need to publish notice in a newspaper or to directly inform affected property owners and/or property residents. County Counsel is available to advise on any public noticing requirements.

d. *Staff Resource*: The County's Communications Coordinator and/or Community Engagement Work Group are available to staff as a resource to provide guidance and feedback on community engagement efforts.

e. *Variety of Methods*: Staff should consider using a variety of outreach efforts that best fit their community engagement approach. This can include print (press releases, flyers, direct mailings), electronic (emails, radio, social media, websites, videos), and personal contact (calling key community members, going door to door, hanging flyers at post offices).

f. *Translation*: For media outreach, efforts should be undertaken to provide materials translated into the languages of various ethnic groups in the County. The County's Public Information Officer can also assist with outreach to non-English language media.

g. *Easily Understandable Communication*: Written communication should utilize plain language that avoids the use of government jargon and acronyms, utilizes short descriptions, includes pertinent meeting details (time, location, etc.), and lists contact information. The reading-ease of written communication should match the target audience of a project, in accordance with Flesch-Kincaid readability. [4]

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[4] The Flesch-Kincaid readability test can be accessed in Microsoft Word.

h. *Relationship Development*: It is important to build and sustain relationships with each community. Purposeful and consistent efforts to build relationships in these communities, such as working with local agencies, keeping up to date on local issues, and attending local events, will help foster trust and build connections that lead to better outreach results.

III. Engagement

Once plans are in place and outreach has been conducted, the engagement approach should be implemented as previously planned with adjustments made as needed.

a. *Demeanor*: As staff are the ones engaging residents and entering their communities, being welcoming, friendly, present, and attentive, as well as taking the first step with a smile or 'hello,' will help show that your department or staff are warm, professional and customer-service focused. This also reinforces the County's mission and brand.

b. *Meeting Logistics*: If meetings are utilized as a tool of community engagement, proper logistical preparation must occur. Staff should consider several factors:
    - What meeting hours are best for the public?
    - Is the meeting location accessible via public transit?
    - Is the meeting where people are already present (easily accessible)?
    - Are bilingual materials available?
    - What accommodations may be made for families with young children (ex. time of the meeting, amenities, daycare, etc.)?
    - What audio visual equipment is needed?
    - Is an interpreter needed (either for a different language or ASL)?
      NOTE: The County has a list of staff available to serve as interpreters/translators with the cost for the employee's time paid for by the requesting department. This list may be accessed by contacting Human Resources.

c. *Meeting Facilitation*: When facilitating a public meeting, staff should use plain language (avoiding government jargon and acronyms) and clearly state the purpose for the community engagement, how feedback will be utilized, and the next steps in the process. Additionally, people receive and provide information in different ways based on their prominent learning style (such as visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic). Staff should facilitate meetings in a way that allows participation for individuals in a variety of formats. Examples include: a verbal presentation, visual pictures/charts, a summary handout, and/or ways for attendees to write their input.

d. *Alternative Input Methods*: When a community engagement effort occurs, alternative methods for input should be provided. This ensures that if an individual is unable to attend a public meeting or does not have access to a computer to take a survey that an email or phone number is provided as an alternative method for people to still provide input.

IV. Evaluation

After an engagement effort staff should review the information gathered and appropriately incorporate it into the decision-making process. This information should then be shared with the public and details of the engagement effort shared with the Board of Supervisors or other appropriate sponsoring authority.

    a. *Community Follow-Up*: It is the responsibility of staff to report back to the community to inform them of progress, how their input was utilized, and any final decisions. This is crucial in order to ensure that staff are engaging the public throughout the process. It also provides transparency and assurance to the community and shows that their participation is valued. The best method for reporting back to the community will vary by project, but would ideally utilize the preferred method of contact (i.e. email, newsletter, public meeting, etc.) identified by the community when staff conducted their initial outreach.

    b. *Engagement Assessment*: Gathering feedback on the successes and opportunities for improvement of a community engagement effort is greatly encouraged. This can be gathered directly from the target audience that participated in an engagement effort in several ways such as through follow-up surveys, anonymous comment cards, or plus/delta assessments at the close of a public meeting. Ultimately, the feedback received should be communicated with department staff to help improve future efforts.

    c. *Board of Supervisors*: Staff should inform the Board of Supervisors of community engagement efforts undertaken for a particular project or decision by providing a summary of the engagement efforts in the "Collaboration" section of the staff report. The County Administrator's Office will also inform the Board of Supervisors, on an annual basis, of the County's community engagement efforts.

E. <u>RESOURCES</u>

The County shall provide a "Community Engagement" webpage to supply staff with tools, templates, and other helpful information to assist in the implementation of effective community engagement efforts.