

LIVABLE CITY YEAR 2017-2018
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
CITY OF TACOMA

CITY OF TACOMA

A ROADMAP TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON TACOMA
URBAN STUDIES PROGRAM

TCMP 590/591: M.A. IN COMMUNITY
PLANNING STUDIO PRACTICUM PROJECT

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ABOUT LIVABLE CITY YEAR

The University of Washington's Livable City Year (LCY) initiative enables local governments to engage UW faculty and students for one academic year to work on city-defined projects that promote local sustainability and livability goals. The program engages hundreds of students each year in high-priority projects, creating momentum on real-world challenges while enabling the students to serve and learn from communities. Partner cities benefit directly from bold and applied ideas that propel fresh thinking, improve livability for residents and invigorate city staff. Focus areas include environmental sustainability; economic viability; population health; and social equity, inclusion, and access. The program's 2017–2018 partner is the City of Tacoma; this follows a partnership with the City of Auburn in 2016–2017.

The LCY program is led by faculty directors Branden Born (Department of Urban Design and Planning), Jennifer Otten (School of Public Health) and Anne Taufen (Urban Studies Program, UW Tacoma), with support from Program Manager Teri Thomson Randall. The program was launched in 2016 in collaboration with UW Sustainability and Urban@UW, with foundational support from the Association of Washington Cities, the College of Built Environments, the Department of Urban Design and Planning, and Undergraduate Academic Affairs.

LCY is modeled after the University of Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program, and is a member of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N), the collection of institutions that have successfully adopted this new model for community innovation and change.

For more information, contact the program at uwlcy@uw.edu.



ABOUT TACOMA

The third largest city in the state of Washington, Tacoma is a diverse, progressive, international gateway to the Pacific Rim. The port city of nearly 210,000 people has evolved considerably over the last two decades, propelled by significant development including the University of Washington Tacoma, the Tacoma Link light rail system, the restored urban waterfront of the Thea Foss Waterway, the expansions of both the MultiCare and CHI Franciscan health systems, and a significant influx of foreign direct investment in its downtown core.

Washington State's highest density of art and history museums are found in Tacoma, which is home to a flourishing creative community of writers, artists, musicians, photographers, filmmakers, chefs, entrepreneurs, and business owners who each add their unique flair to the city's vibrant commercial landscape. The iconic Tacoma Dome has endured as a high-demand venue for some of the largest names in the entertainment industry.

The city's natural beauty and proximity to the Puget Sound and Mount Rainier draws hikers, runners, bicyclists, and maritime enthusiasts to the area, while its lively social scene is infused with energy by thousands of students attending the University of Washington Tacoma and other academic institutions.

The City of Tacoma's strategic plan, *Tacoma 2025*, was adopted in January 2015 following unprecedented public participation and contribution. The plan articulates the City's core values of opportunity, equity, partnerships, and accountability, and expresses the City's deep commitment to apply these values in all of its decisions and programming. Each Livable City Year project ties into the principles and focus areas of this strategic plan. The City of Tacoma is proud of its 2017–2018 Livable City Year partnership with the University of Washington and of the opportunity this brings to its residents.



ABOUT UW TACOMA AND URBAN STUDIES

The vision of the University of Washington Tacoma (UW Tacoma) is to foster a thriving and equitable society by educating diverse learners and by expanding knowledge through partnership and collaboration with all our communities.

As an urban-serving university, UW Tacoma is dedicated to expanding access to higher education in an environment where every student has the opportunity to succeed; fostering scholarship, research, and creativity to address the challenging problems of our time and place; partnering and collaborating with our community partners for common good; and catalyzing the economic and social vitality of our region.

Founded in 2001, the Urban Studies Program exemplifies UW Tacoma's urban-serving mission: teach to engage; research to advance knowledge; act to promote social justice and equitable development.

The program currently offers undergraduate degrees in Urban Studies (BA), Sustainable Urban Development (BA), and Urban Design (BS); a Certificate in Geographic Information Systems (GIS); undergraduate minors in Urban Studies and Sustainable Urban Development; and graduate degrees in Community Planning (MA) and Geospatial Technologies (MS).

ABOUT THE M.A. IN COMMUNITY PLANNING

The Master of Arts in Community Planning at UW Tacoma is designed to develop civic leaders who are equipped to make change in networks of public and private actors, helping to create more just, sustainable, and livable urban futures.

The degree culminates in a two-term practicum project in collaboration with a community partner. Based on a studio model, the community planning practicum foregrounds the needs and interests of the partner organization, and enlists M.A. students in a sustained team project emphasizing group process, milestone definition and goal-setting, shared outcomes, and ongoing social learning among all involved.


In 2018 the City of Tacoma's *Roadmap to Civic Engagement* project presented an excellent opportunity for the first cohort of Community Planning graduates. Defined by city leaders to further the aims of the "Tacoma 2025" Vision and Strategic Plan, the project aligns closely with the M.A. curriculum, highlighting the need for equity and empowerment across all neighborhoods, communities, and publics. Furthermore, it embraces a multi-disciplinary approach to planning, where people and programs are the lifeblood of the built spaces they inhabit.


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TACOMA 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

The *A Roadmap to Civic Engagement* project supports the Civic Engagement and Equity and Accessibility goals of the *Tacoma 2025 Strategic Plan* and was sponsored by the City Manager’s Office.

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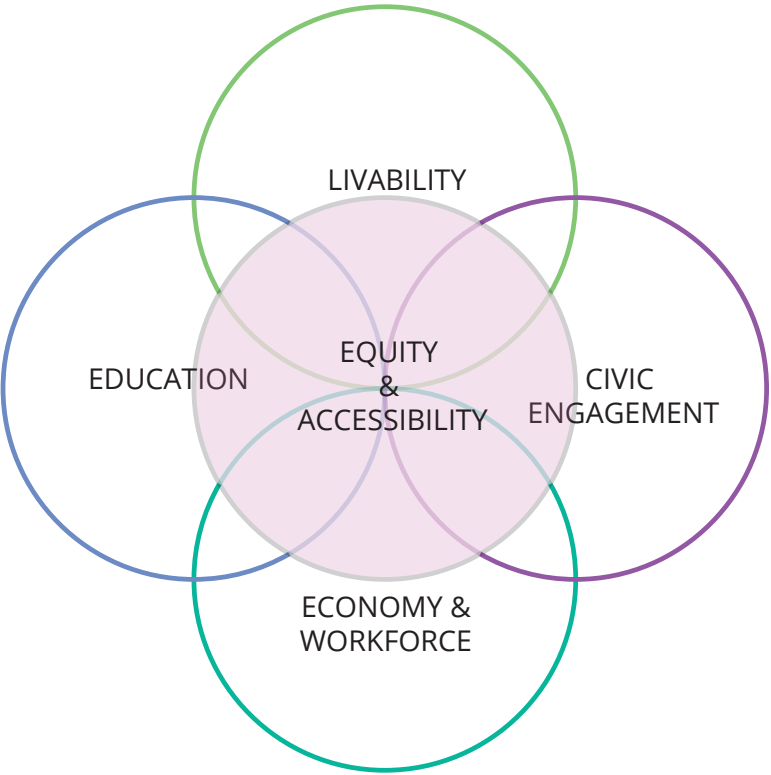
Goal #1 Livability
The City of Tacoma will be a city of choice in the region known for connected neighborhoods, accessible and efficient transportation transit options, and vibrant arts and culture. Residents will be healthy and have access to services and community amenities while maintaining affordability.
- 

Goal #2 Economy and Workforce
By 2025, Tacoma will be a growing economy where Tacoma residents can find livable wage jobs in key industry areas. Tacoma will be a place of choice for employers, professionals, and new graduates.
- 

Goal #3 Education
Tacoma will lead the region in educational attainment amongst youth and adults. In addition to producing more graduates from high school and college, more college graduates will find employment in the region. Lifelong learning and access to education will be prioritized and valued.
- 

Goal #4 Civic Engagement
Tacoma residents will be engaged participants in making Tacoma a well-run city. The leadership of the city, both elected and volunteer, will reflect the diversity of the city and residents and will fully participate in community decision-making.
- 

Goal #5 Equity and Accessibility
Tacoma will ensure that all residents are treated equitably and have access to services, facilities, and financial stability. Disaggregated data will be used to make decisions, direct funding, and develop strategies to address disparate outcomes.



RESOURCES

- Tacoma 2025 Strategic Plan:** https://www.cityoftacoma.org/tacoma_2025
- Livable City Year:** <https://www.washington.edu/livable-city-year/>
- UW Tacoma Urban Studies Program:**
<http://www.tacoma.uw.edu/urban-studies/about-urban-studies>
- Tacoma City Manager’s Office:**
<https://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/one.aspx?pagelId=11899>

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

The Roadmap to Civic Engagement project was created by the City Manager’s Office, with support from the Director of Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU), to better understand how the City of Tacoma approaches civic engagement, with a focus on the organization’s internal practices and values. It builds on community engagement efforts that were initiated as part of the Tacoma 2025 strategic planning process.

In this report, we present key findings and identify opportunities for further organizational investment to promote more inclusive and equitable civic engagement practices across the City of Tacoma.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: ADDRESSING EQUITY AND GROWTH

As the City works to promote equity and manage anticipated growth, effective civic engagement and representation of marginalized groups is crucial.

Tacoma is experiencing major growth, with a forecasted population increase of over 60% by 2040, according to the Puget Sound Regional Council. In 2014, significant community engagement efforts aided in the development of Tacoma 2025, the City’s strategic plan and vision for the future. That same year, the City Council passed the Equity and Empowerment Framework, which foregrounds the importance of civic engagement, identifying it as one the document’s five pillars.

However, the recent 2018 Community Survey indicates continued racial disparities in engagement and trust: 60% of White residents rated their confidence in government as “excellent or good” as compared to only 34% of Black residents. Additional disparities exist at the neighborhood level.

Addressing these systemic disparities and adapting for this magnitude of growth may require rapid policy change. Building an infrastructure for civic engagement is one strategy to ensure that policy solutions are effective and attentive to a wide array of resident needs.

METHODS

Using a qualitative, inductive approach, graduate students conducted, transcribed, and analyzed over 60 interviews with City staff in 18 departments across General Government and public utilities. From this, students developed initial findings and shared them with staff at two workshops.



Creating opportunities for government agencies, stakeholders, and community members to work together to co-produce outcomes is essential to promoting equity and inclusion. PMBBUN

In addition, students drew on academic literature and case examples to explore best practices in civic engagement. The following three concepts inform the analysis and recommendations of this report:

- A distinction between participation—resident input in the content of programs— and inclusion—continuous resident involvement in the creation of processes, programs, and policies
- Co-production, or actively engaging residents in the delivery of programs and policies, improving service delivery and outcomes
- Targeted universalism, which utilizes strategies to meet the needs of specific communities to achieve universal goals

FINDINGS

Developed from our analysis of qualitative data, these findings outline the core purposes of doing civic engagement within the City of Tacoma, and summarize some of the key challenges that we heard described by staff across departments.

I. Purposeful Civic Engagement

Values of Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is valued across departments as a path to building equity in Tacoma, and the City is taking steps to align practices with its commitments. Staff expressed the importance of relationships and becoming more inclusive as an institution through expanding access, connecting with community, and building trust, transparency, and accountability.



Staff from the City of Tacoma, many of whom were interviewed for the project, deliberate after being presented with initial student findings.
ANNE TAUFEN

Variation in Practice and Purpose

In practice, civic engagement varies widely across the City; accordingly, civic engagement performs different functions for each department. Recognizing this variability, uniform standardization of civic engagement across the city poses significant challenges. However, consistent support, allocation of resources, and the development of shared values can enable improved civic engagement practices.

II. Challenges in Practice

Access and Representation

Communities of color, immigrant communities, and low-income communities have been underrepresented in past City civic engagement efforts, which may skew the City's understandings of the needs of the public. The struggle to consistently have broad representation in decision-making processes may also be compounded by the City's complex structure.

Understanding Each Other

Many staff perceive a lack of public understanding of the processes and functions of City government. In efforts to be transparent and informative, resources are spent producing and distributing information, or on learning more about public preferences through surveys and other input opportunities. However, this often happens in lieu of opportunities for two-way dialogue and conversation, which can lead to misunderstandings on both sides.

Flashpoints and Catalysts

Flashpoints, or high levels of participation that are passionate or urgent in nature, can emerge around controversial issues. This can cause the City to invest considerable energy on specific decisions and can sometimes come at the expense of more sustained, relationship-building work. However, these moments can also be catalysts for more meaningful engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our interview data demonstrated that City staff view civic engagement as an important opportunity to build continuous improvement into their work and to strengthen relationships with residents. Across departments, staff voiced interest in increasing the impact of their programs, supporting and coordinating with one another, and operationalizing the Tacoma 2025 values of Opportunity, Equity, Partnerships, and Accountability. However, many departments noted that they require additional support and resources to accomplish these goals.

Our research suggests that the following investments can further strengthen a culture of universal responsibility for civic engagement within the City of Tacoma:

Tools

- A **Civic Engagement Statement of Values** can provide clarity and direction for all City of Tacoma departments. This report offers a preliminary statement, based on our interviews; however a statement of civic engagement values will be most effective if it is revised and adopted by City staff.
- A **Civic Engagement Design Tool** that helps staff and managers in departments across City government reflect and plan for more equitable civic engagement practices.
- A **Typology of Civic Engagement Approaches** that illustrates, describes, and categorizes the different engagement methods we heard described in interviews, aligned along a spectrum from participation to inclusion.

Steering Group

- A Citywide civic engagement team would serve as both an internal learning community and as an institutional group to provide leadership for organization-wide civic engagement work and investments.

Resources

Organizational Support: The use of existing institutional mechanisms to prioritize continuous improvement in civic engagement.

- Increased training opportunities to improve staff confidence around civic engagement practices, including conflict resolution, cultural competency, and facilitation.
- Staff or consultant capacity for qualitative data analysis, to interpret large amounts of public input in ways that illuminate a breadth of community perspectives, including specific feedback on limitations of current or planned civic engagement investments.
- Creation of participatory budgeting with a percentage of the City budget, empowering residents to engage fully and directly in the decision-making around resource allocation.

Funding: Increased resourcing at the organizational level to fund civic engagement work within departments.

- A dedicated budget line item for civic engagement, accessible to all departments through a budget justification process.
- A system of justification and prioritization for civic engagement investments in the budget allocation process, potentially managed by the Steering Group and enlisting one or more of the Tools described above.
- A catalyst fund to support innovative proposals in civic engagement that address an existing challenge, build new relationships with residents, encourage risk-taking or experimentation, and/or create cross-departmental collaboration.
- The creation of a city-wide civic engagement position/centralized department within the City itself.

FUTURE ENGAGEMENT WORK

As the City of Tacoma embarks on future civic engagement capacity-building work, we recommend that the City's request for proposal (RFP) process include the following as part of a continued scope of work to be carried out by staff and/or consultants:

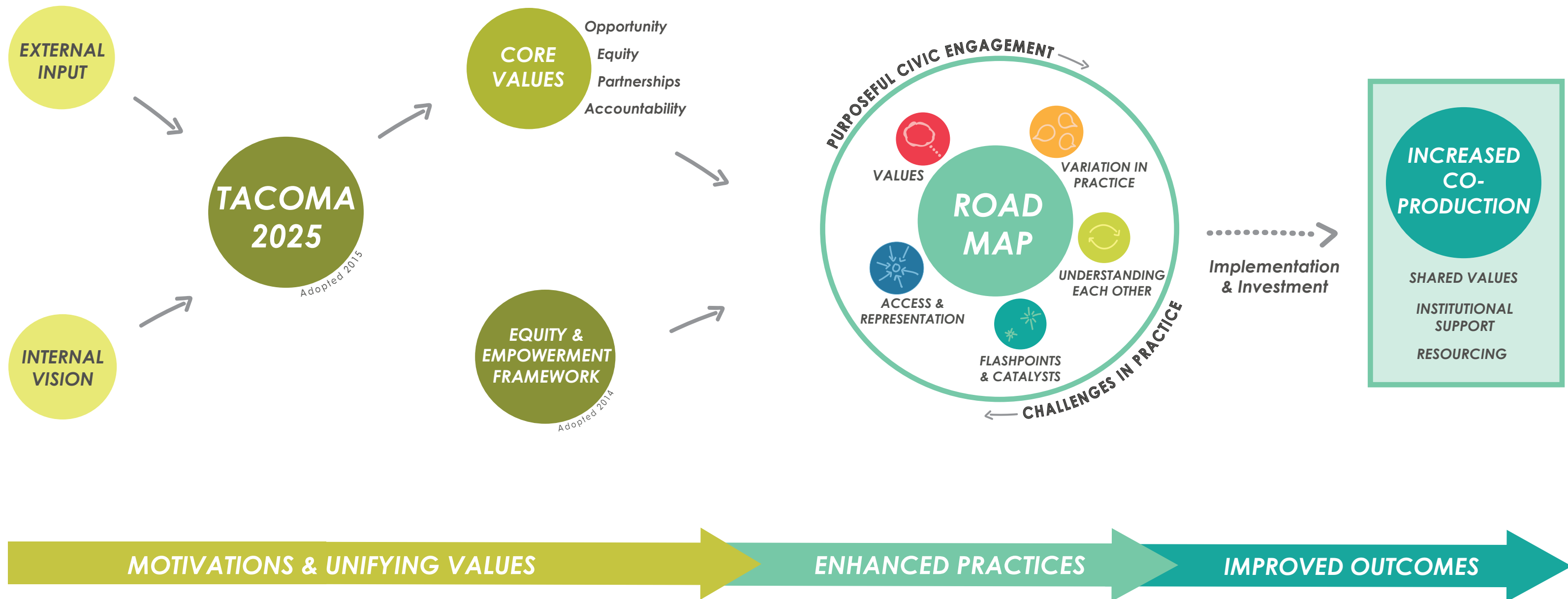
- Ensure broad public participation and input in this process.
This was outside of the scope of this project, but a deeper understanding of the public's experience as they engage with the City will be essential in crafting future strategies for engagement. In particular, if this work is carried out by community liaisons or consultants, City staff working alongside to gather this input will result in increased public trust in the process.
- Include the Steering Group and external stakeholders as part of forthcoming civic engagement capacity building work. Recognizing the wide array of practices happening across the City, the organization will benefit from input from staff in different departments and at different levels of organizational leadership, as well as the input of community members serving in a leadership capacity. This could be the first task of the Civic Engagement Steering Group proposed above.

Ongoing investments to develop the capacity, practices, and continuous improvement in civic engagement practices will support Tacoma 2025 implementation and enable the City of Tacoma to create shared prosperity, enhance equitable service delivery, and improve representation of marginalized communities as the city grows.



TO CIVIC

ENGAGEMENT



The Roadmap to Civic Engagement builds upon existing commitments established by the City of Tacoma to engender equity and empowerment throughout City government, and reflects an investment in civic engagement to further the four core values of the Tacoma 2025 Strategic Plan.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND TACOMA 2025

In 2014, the City of Tacoma began planning and implementing what became *Tacoma 2025*, a living document that guides the City in its planning and growth strategies over the next 10 years. Adopted in 2015, the Tacoma 2025 Strategic Plan reflects the input of more than 2,000 Tacoma residents. The effort was an ambitious process that went beyond traditional strategies of public involvement. Through one-on-one interviews, outreach at fairs and festivals, an involved steering group of community members, surveys, online forums, and community workshops, the process engaged residents in creating a shared vision of Tacoma's future.

To maintain and expand the work that took place through the Tacoma 2025 planning process, the City Manager's Office identified a need for increased support for civic engagement across City of Tacoma government. Created by the City Manager's Office with the support of Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU), this project documents existing civic engagement practices and identifies opportunities to expand the organization's capacity for public involvement across departments, moving the City towards the goals outlined in Tacoma 2025 and the Equity and Empowerment Framework. In addition, this project is designed to inform future civic engagement work, including an upcoming Request for Proposals (RFP), within which further identification of community perspectives, needs, and desires around communications and engagement will occur.

This project documents existing civic engagement practices and identifies opportunities to expand the City's capacity for public involvement across departments, moving it towards the goals outlined in Tacoma 2025 and in the Equity and Empowerment Framework.



This report focuses on the internal civic engagement practices at the City of Tacoma, cataloguing current conditions and identifying opportunities for increased connection with the public. CITY OF TACOMA

EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

Equity has been established as a consistent guiding principle across the City of Tacoma and as a catalyst for changing the way the City conducts business, pushing the organization to move from ‘business as usual’ to a more innovative and transformational approach. The Equity and Empowerment Framework , adopted by the City Council in 2014, highlights “Purposeful Community Outreach and Engagement” as one of its five pillars. Tacoma 2025 also highlights equity as one of its four core values, and the document states that “all Tacoma residents must have equitable opportunities to reach their full potential and share in the benefits of community progress.”

The City’s commitment to equity underscores the fact that different communities may require different investments and resources in order to address the historical and ongoing effects of discrimination, inequality, and institutionalized racism.



T-Town: City Services Expo is one of the City of Tacoma’s organization-wide efforts to connect with residents. The event, held bi-annually at the Tacoma Dome, introduces residents to the City services and programs of different departments. ANNEKA OLSON

In addition, the City’s commitment to equity underscores the fact that different communities may require different investments and resources in order to address the historical and ongoing effects of discrimination, inequality, and institutionalized racism. Equity is thus a more ambitious goal than achieving equality. In a civic engagement context, an equitable approach ensures the contributions of all residents are valued and developed in the creation of a just and sustainable city. It also requires that some communities receive more attention than others; this is part of guaranteeing meaningful involvement of community members historically excluded from civic processes.

ADAPTING TO GROWTH

The Puget Sound Regional Council has estimated that over 80,000 people have moved to the Puget Sound region each year during the last two years. Tacoma’s population was estimated at 211,277 in 2017, up from 198,397 in 2010, a growth of 6.5%, or almost 13,000 people, in just seven years. This growth is expected to increase in coming years in the South Sound, as the metropolitan region continues to add residents, and as affordability worsens and the cost of living escalates in surrounding areas.

The Puget Sound Regional Council forecasts a population increase greater than 60% by 2040 in Tacoma, indicating that local policies related to land use, transportation infrastructure, and other City services will need to adapt accordingly. Therefore, robust civic engagement methods are needed to ensure that City of Tacoma policy reflects the needs of current residents as the city grows. Such methods may also help the City achieve its sustainability, equity, and growth targets.

Robust civic engagement methods are needed to ensure that City of Tacoma policy reflects the needs of current residents as the city grows.

INCREASING DIVERSITY

As Tacoma’s population expands, it also diversifies. In 2017, 60% of residents identified as White, down from 65% in 2010; 11% identified as Latino, 10% as African-American, 9% as Asian, and 10% as a combination of these categories and/or others. This is consistent with trends

Only 34% of Black residents indicate that their experience with City government has been “excellent or good,” compared to 60% of White residents and 68% of Latino residents.

throughout the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan region, where people of color represent 81% of population growth between 2000-2016. Nineteen percent of Tacoma residents speak a primary language other than English, and 13% are immigrants. While Tacoma’s economy is growing, in the first quarter of 2018, the unemployment rate (6.1%) and the poverty rate (17.9%) remained higher than the larger metropolitan area (4.7% and 10.9%, respectively).

These demographic factors indicate that increased capacity for equity, and the building of civic trust and political will, continue to be critical as Tacoma’s population grows and becomes even more diverse.

COMMUNITY SURVEY – HIGHLIGHTS (2018)

In January 2018, the City of Tacoma conducted its biennial Community Survey to assess citywide satisfaction with City services. The survey was offered in English, as well the next five most commonly spoken languages in Tacoma--Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Khmer. This enabled the City to understand where language access might also contribute to disparities. The results indicate ongoing disparities in resident satisfaction with City government and civic engagement practices:

- There is significant variation by neighborhood in overall satisfaction with City services, ranging from a high of 80% in North and West Tacoma to a low of 62% in parts of Downtown, Northeast, and South Tacoma.
- There is major variation in confidence in government by race, with only 34% of Black residents indicating that their experience with City government has been “excellent or good,” compared to 60% of White residents and 68% of Latino residents.
- Overall, more than two thirds of respondents attended a City event of some kind during the previous year (69%), but only 28% of respondents attended a City meeting or made a complaint or inquiry (33%) over the previous year.
- Households making more than \$50,000 per year were more likely to attend a City event, meeting, or to make a complaint or inquiry than households earning less than \$50,000.

These results highlight the different experiences that diverse neighborhoods, racial communities, and income groups have with City services—likely compounded by historical patterns of institutionalized racism, residential segregation, and income disparity.

KEY CONCEPTS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Here, we outline three key concepts that have been important for our analysis: co-production; the distinction between participation and inclusion in civic engagement process; and targeted universalism.

Co-Production

Co-production is a broad term that acknowledges the essential importance of a variety of stakeholders in influencing, carrying out, or helping to shape future iterations of a program, project, or event. For example, a fully developed process of co-production between community members and government is likely to entail local government agencies and local community groups jointly organizing, funding, and leading a local initiative. Decision-making opportunities for stakeholders or community members, such as membership on advisory boards or commissions, are opportunities for residents to co-produce outcomes. More informal co-production might include people who adopt or modify behavior in accordance with initiatives, who help to promote programs and events, or who generate community support. Importantly, effective co-production can help governments achieve their own goals, while also leading to improved trust, with fewer conflicts with stakeholders, better policy outcomes, and a shared responsibility for the equitable distribution of resources.

Increased capacity for equity, and the building of civic trust and political will, continue to be critical as Tacoma’s population grows and becomes even more diverse.

Effective co-production helps governments achieve their own goals, while also leading to improved trust, fewer conflicts with stakeholders, and better policy outcomes.

DISTINGUISHING PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

Civic engagement best practices emphasize that the amount, type, and role of public participation usually needs to vary depending on the context or project. For example, the continuum used by the International Association of Public Participation (www.iap2.org) outlines the ways in which degrees of participation vary depending on what the city intends to do with the input it receives, and how realistic and feasible it is for the public to be deeply involved in a given project or decision-making process. They term this “the promise to the public” (see figure to the right).

Another distinction is between the concepts of participation and inclusion, put forth by Quick and Feldman. They note that participation emphasizes input from the public within a more limited scope, focusing on the content of programs and policies. Inclusion, on the other hand, is “continuously creating a community involved in coproducing processes, policies, and programs for defining and addressing public issues.” The distinction also can have important differences in scale: often, participation practices are more achievable at a broader scale, while inclusion requires the involvement of smaller, more dedicated groups.

TARGETED UNIVERSALISM

Adopted as part of Tacoma’s Equity and Empowerment Framework, targeted universalism is a strategy that seeks to achieve universal goals through targeted approaches. According to scholar John A. Powell, a targeted universal approach in civic engagement should be inclusive of the needs of all, but with special attention to the situation of and impact on the most marginalized and underrepresented communities and groups.” The goal is for more than improved diversity, which alone may not address the underlying structures that perpetuate systemic racism and other inequities. Recognizing that neither universal nor targeted

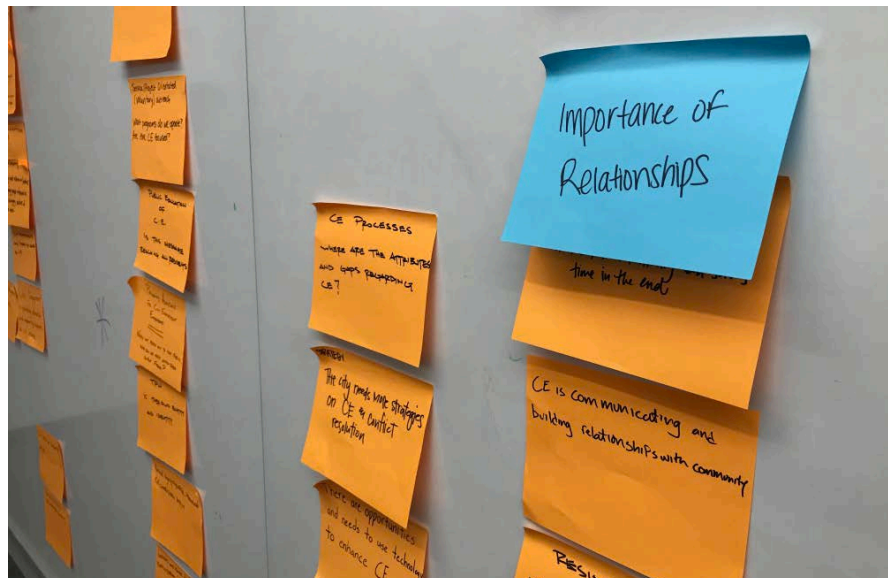
The Spectrum of Public Participation

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fact sheets• Websites• Open houses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public comment• Focus groups• Surveys• Public meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workshops• Deliberate polling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citizen Advisory committees• Consensus building• Participatory Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citizen juries• Ballots• Delegated Decisions

The Spectrum of Public Participation, generated by the International Association of Public Participation, illustrates the different degrees of participation that can occur depending on project or context. INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

methods have been effective in achieving lasting transformative change, this shift in thinking reworks the standard approach of universal strategies and employs, in its place, targeted strategies to reach universal goals. Beyond recognizing disparities, targeted universalism also includes the alteration of institutions and structures—in a civic engagement context, this would include the design of a process rather than merely establishing a device for gathering input on the content of that process.

In November of 2017, the students of UWT's MA in Community Planning program met with City Manager Elizabeth Pauli to start a dialogue around the production of this Roadmap to Civic Engagement. Over the course of two quarters, students conducted and transcribed interviews with 60 City of Tacoma staff members. Students analyzed this data and reviewed policy and practice documents, presenting their preliminary findings on two occasions to City and TPU employees to share preliminary findings and encourage reflection and feedback. In recognition of the importance of staff alignment and agreement with their findings, the project was an iterative, ongoing dialogue between staff and students, and took a social constructionist Grounded Theory approach to data analysis.

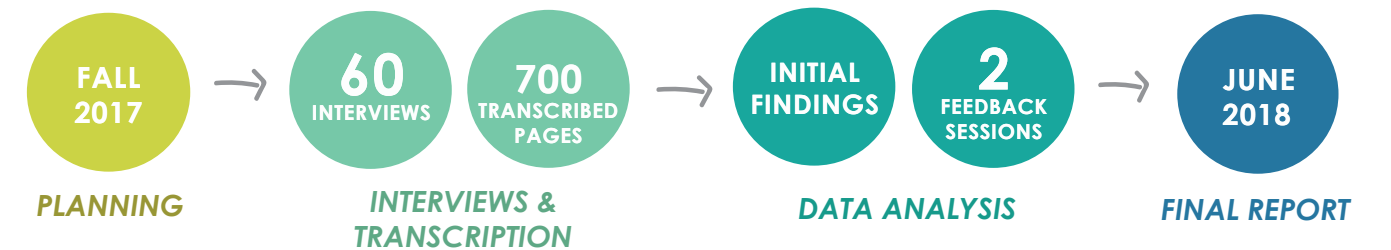


Students collaborated to identify, merge, and sort themes to generate the findings and recommendations outlined in this report. ANNEKA OLSON

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Student research questions focused on the attitudes and practices of City employees regarding civic engagement. This allowed students to tailor their findings and recommendations to the internal experiences, culture, and practices of civic engagement at the City of Tacoma.

- How does the City of Tacoma approach civic engagement?
 - How do employees speak about civic engagement?
 - How do they describe their connections with the public?
 - What are their practices to encourage civic engagement?
- What are opportunities to increase connection with the public and build civic trust to advance equity and prepare for growth?



PROCESS

Phase I: Planning

In late 2017, students and faculty developed a project scope and statement of values in conjunction with David Nash-Mendez, Senior Management Fellow, in coordination with City Manager Elizabeth Pauli.

Phase II: Interviews and Transcription

Over the course of a four-week period throughout February and March 2018, researchers conducted more than 60 interviews with City of Tacoma staff. Interviewees participated from 18 different City departments and TPU. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, yielding more than 700 transcribed pages. For a complete list of interviewed staff, see Appendix A. For Survey Tool, see Appendix B.

Phase III: Data Analysis

This project used a Grounded Theory approach, which is an inductive approach to analysis wherein a theory is developed from the data. There are no pre-existing frameworks or categories. This approach allowed students to be highly context-specific for the City of Tacoma rather than relying on existing frameworks. From the interview data, students wove together emerging themes to systematically tell the larger story of how the City of Tacoma currently practices civic engagement. Specifically, students identified “chunks of meaning” that emerged from the data before organizing these into themes to address their research questions.

Feedback sessions

As part of the analysis process, students prepared two mid-project presentations to a total of 40 employees from both General Government and TPU. Presentation attendees included individuals students had interviewed and additional interested staff. During these feedback sessions, students presented their preliminary findings and asked

staff whether these findings fit with their experiences; students also sought ideas for next steps for civic engagement opportunities. In keeping with their social constructionist approach, students used the feedback from both sessions to adjust their findings and guide their final recommendations. Students also provided two reports to City of Tacoma directors on project status during the course of the project.

A note on interpreting findings across TPU and the City

Although TPU operates independently from General Government—for example, the Tacoma 2025 plan does not yet include TPU goals—the findings in the report address both organizations’ approaches and sentiments towards civic engagement.

Phase IV: Findings and Recommendations

The findings presented in this report emerged from close analysis of civic engagement practices at the City of Tacoma. The recommendations are closely aligned with student findings, and are tailored specifically to the City’s context.

POSITIONALITY OF RESEARCHERS

“A researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions.”

The Community Planning program at UWT focuses on the social and institutional dynamics that create and sustain systemic power disparities, seeking to build analytic and practical intervention skills that help communities and leaders create equitable and just realities for themselves. We recognize that our findings reflect our shared positionality as university-based researchers and community planning professionals, with varying years of experience and forms of expertise. Review short, biographical statements of faculty and students in Appendix C.

However, some of the shared characteristics that define us are as follows: We are ten graduate students and two Ph.D. instructors, all of whom identify as White. Half of the students identify as female, half as male, and both instructors are female; ten of us work at least part-time outside of our affiliation with this graduate program; four of us are parents, and all of us have lived or worked in Tacoma for at least the last two years.

PROJECT LIMITATIONS

Addressing Race and Racism

We did not ask directly about race or racism in our interviews. Instead, we asked more generally about forms of residential privilege. In hindsight, especially as a group of all White Community Planning students, this may have further reproduced a tendency of White mainstream culture to rely on coded language to talk about disparities that are deeply influenced by dominant patterns of racial and ethnic bias. Nevertheless, these issues were clearly evidenced in our interview data, which indicates the importance of ongoing training, awareness, and interventions to proactively address deeply embedded concepts of race and ethnicity in civic engagement practices.

Connecting with Residents

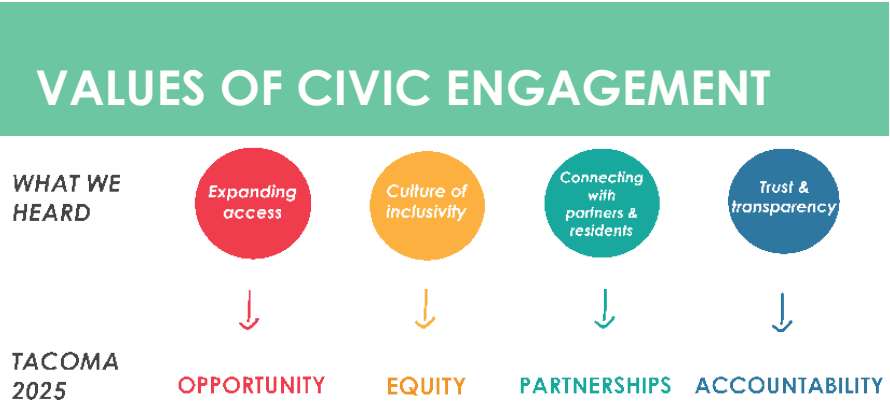
Any effort to improve civic engagement practices requires authentic, ongoing feedback from the people most affected by the City’s practices: local residents and community groups. Our research did not engage residents and community group members over the course of the project. As graduate student researchers, we are limited in our ability to represent, speak for, or create expectations on behalf of the City. We view this community outreach as an essential next step so that the City can better understand how and where to improve inclusion in civic engagement.



Students sought staff feedback at two events, recognizing that their input would be key to understanding and implementing the report’s findings. ANNE TAUFEN

VALUES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement is valued across departments as a path to building equity in the City of Tacoma, and the organization is taking steps to align practices with its commitments. The four Tacoma 2015 values of Opportunity, Equity, Partnerships, and Accountability emerged in our interviews with staff as they talked about departmental values of expanding access; building a culture of inclusion; connecting with partners and residents, and creating trust and transparency. However, while many departments are committed to these values, they are uncertain of how to coordinate and operationalize a shift in practices under the current organizational structure.



In interviews, students heard from City of Tacoma staff about the values they hold regarding the importance of civic engagement.

Expanding Access

Staff talked about the potential for effective civic engagement to empower resident involvement and expand access to resources. Employees recognize that their practices can help to create opportunity by sharing ways to access City services, listening to residents, and making adjustments in department policy.

"If it is really about historically marginalized [communities], you have to go about things completely differently."

— Christopher Wright,
Neighborhood and Community Services

While interviews with staff revealed the City's commitment to expanding opportunities for community engagement and involvement, this does not

"If you come with a plan and all the answers, then I know you're not ready to listen."

— Tanisha Jumper,
Interim Director of Media and Communications Office

mean that there is always sufficient institutional support to build trust with residents. For example, when engagement is conducted without acknowledgement of historical barriers to opportunity, departments may limit their ability to discover and act on the wealth of knowledge that comes from Tacoma's diversity. Acknowledgement of past inequities can allow the City and TPU to build new ways to approach residents that truly open the process up for opportunities in initial engagement, ongoing involvement, and lasting improvements. A commitment to improve access to City decision-making builds Opportunity for Tacoma residents, the first core value of Tacoma 2025.

Building a Culture of Inclusion

"If we're not connected with some folks, I believe it's our responsibility to figure out how to fix that."

— Amy McBride, Community and Economic Development

Commitment to inclusion and equity means that staff strive to take into consideration who is not fully participating in civic life—and seek to understand why. Building an inclusive culture means empowering and resourcing groups and individuals with historical, economic, and operational disadvantages, and many staff described this commitment as a motivation for their work. An inclusive culture also emphasizes an internal readiness to hear more diverse voices and act on their ideas and suggestions. This value aligns directly with the core value of Equity in Tacoma 2025.

Connecting with Partners and Residents

City staff value relationships with residents and organizational partners, recognizing that ongoing community connections are critical to effective civic engagement. Many staff feel a sense of duty to, "meet people where they are," as some staff describe it, even though many staff admit they do not always have the tools or training to know how to achieve this ideal.

“In working with neighborhood groups, we just try give them every opportunity to advocate for themselves and work with them to achieve their goals.”

— Allyson Griffith, Neighborhood and Community Services

“[Our goal is] to empower the community and to foster leadership.”

— Kristin Lynett, Environmental Services:
Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability

Across the board, City staff recognize partnership- and relationship-building as a meaningful and strategic way to address the needs of Tacoma residents and communities. Community members and organizations who play an active part in service delivery and decision-making often possess more ownership and investment over the outcomes—increasing the likelihood they will continue to show up and participate in decision-making processes. Formalizing these community relationships through organizational partnerships can offer the potential for expanded community empowerment and leadership. In addition, partnerships can improve City policy-making by ensuring that departments hear from those most directly impacted by these decisions. This commitment to building connections is consistent with Tacoma 2025’s core value of Partnerships.

Trust, Transparency, and Accountability

“Now people want to know more. They want to know why. Transparency—you need to be able to provide that.”

— Mike Slevin, Director of Environmental Services

Many staff see civic engagement as an important opportunity for government and residents to understand one another. However, shifting institutional practices and priorities can make building trust difficult—



On the steps of the Philadelphia Art Museum looking towards City Hall. The LCY student researchers examined the Serve Philadelphia initiative as a case study. LEE CANNON

Case Study: Serve Philadelphia’s Civic Engagement Academy

Serve Philadelphia is an initiative of the City of Philadelphia’s Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service (OCEVS), which was founded in 2010 as a result of a Cities of Service leadership grant.

In a targeted effort to increase civic understanding and empower more people in the City of Philadelphia, OCEVS launched its Civic Engagement Academy (CEA) in 2010. It brings representatives from different City departments to underserved neighborhoods in a two-month course. The series is designed to introduce residents to City departments, provide information about how to effectively access services, encourage residents to pass along the information to their communities, and prepare residents to take the step toward becoming community leaders, organizers, and activists.

The Civic Engagement Academy works with community organizers and leaders upon request and strives to tailor sessions to the interests and needs of the community. Generally, the CEA Learning Series introduces Philadelphians to the principles of community organizing and focuses on topics such as goal setting; asset mapping; timeliness and benchmarking; targeting and recruitment; data evaluation; volunteer management; community meeting management; building coalition; and media and marketing. During each session, residents hear lectures from City officials and community leaders, and learn how to apply what they have learned through a hands-on activity and discussion. The City’s goal is for people to feel empowered and to “have the tools they need to be part of the change they want to see in their neighborhood.”

especially when there are historic tensions between communities and government. There may also be competing priorities, as departments strive to balance timing, budgets, and efficiency with more open-ended opportunities for community participation.

“I think government has a great role to create those opportunities, but sometimes we don’t always see that we have that role. We just have to get a job done and be efficient.”

— Ellen Walkowiak, Community and Economic Development

In shifting organizational values to put equity at the forefront, some departments are taking intentional steps to transform their work into a platform that invites community collaboration and greater transparency. This work is ongoing. Building trust, transparency and accountability is key to the core value of Accountability laid out in Tacoma 2025.

Challenge: Making Values Visible

In the context of the City’s goal of strong fiscal management, it can be challenging to justify investing staff time and resources into more proactive, innovative approaches to civic engagement. However, these values are not necessarily at odds, as more robust civic engagement often helps departments design better policies and achieve stronger community support. In addition, a clear statement of values that elevates the importance of civic engagement could promote consistent support across departments.

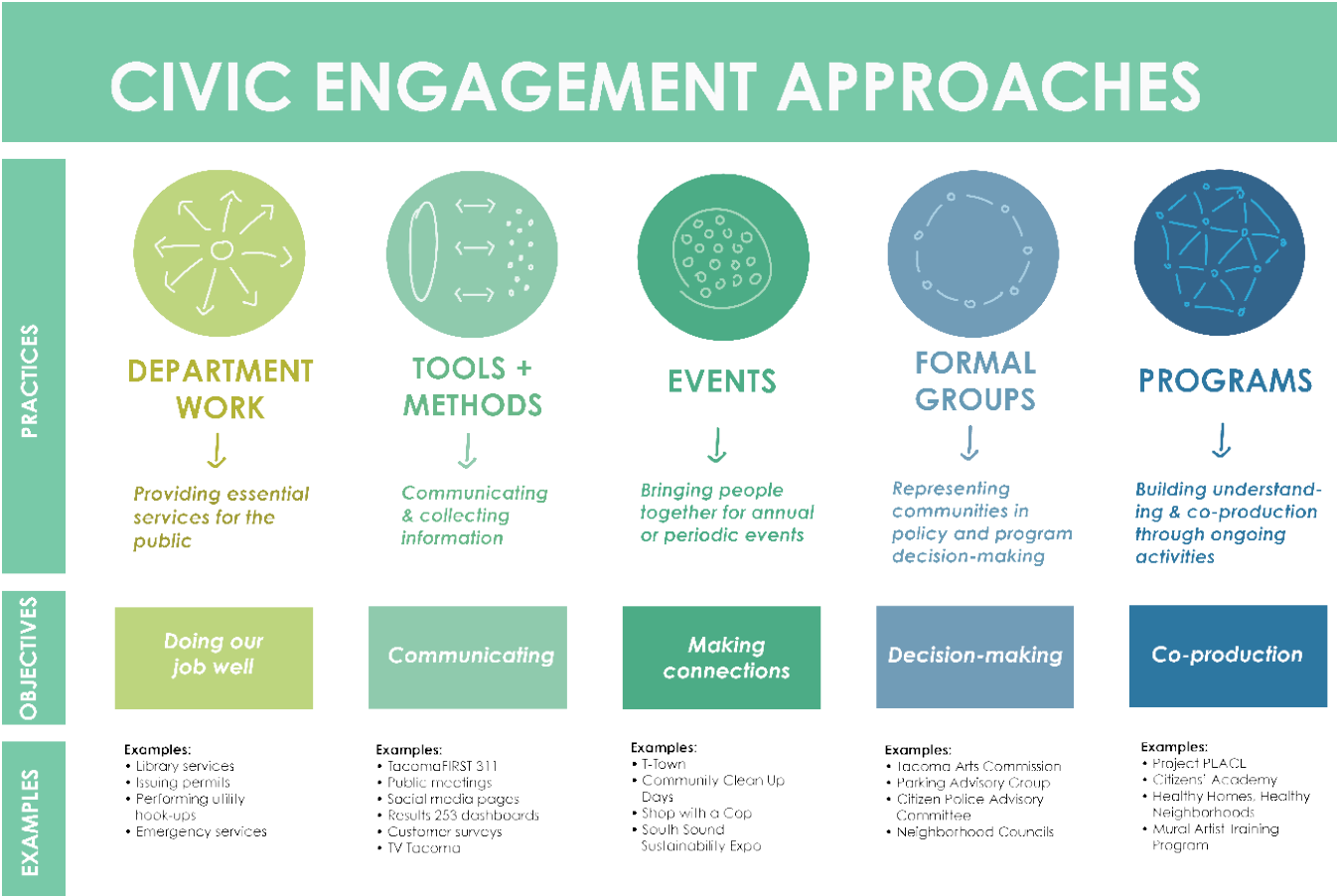
“At some level, to be truly effective, this needs to be the community’s plan, the community’s goal. What are the community standards that you need to meet in order to fit in and meet the citizens’ expectations?”

— Brian Boudet, Planning and Development Services

VARIATION IN PRACTICES

Civic engagement is valued across departments as a path to building equity in the City of Tacoma, and the organization is taking steps to align practices with its commitments. The four Tacoma 2025 values of Opportunity, Equity, Partnerships, and Accountability emerged in our interviews with staff as they talked about departmental values of expanding access; building a culture of inclusion; connecting with partners and residents, and creating trust and transparency. However, while many departments are committed to these values, they are uncertain of how to coordinate and operationalize a shift in practices under the current organizational structure.

Based on our interviews, we identify five different categories of civic engagement practiced by the City, which are described in the following



Developed from interviews with City of Tacoma staff, this graphic outlines the different approaches to civic engagement taking place across departments. It forms the basis of the Civic Engagement Approaches tool, presented in Appendix F.

sections. Each of these categories outlines both a description (practices) as well as the rationale (objectives) that different departments employ in this array of engagement approaches.

Department Work: Doing Our Job Well

Civic engagement is often part of the core functions and direct services that City departments provide: utility hookups, customer service, permitting, emergency response, and management of third parties providing public services. Effective delivery of these services is often a prerequisite for other kinds of engagement, as it forms the basis of the public’s expectations for city government. Resources for this type of civic engagement are generally allocated based on the roles and responsibilities of each department.

“A significant amount of the [civic engagement] decision-making is dictated by the project.”

— Patrick Babbitt, Environment Services:
Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability

Tools and Methods: Communicating and Collecting Information

Many staff emphasized the importance of effective communications with the public. These ‘tools and methods’ include ways to communicate information to the public, such as public meetings, posting public records online, newsletters, direct mail, videos, tip sheets, data dashboards, social media platforms, and utility bill inserts. They can also include ways to gather information from the public, such as the 311 app, the City’s community survey, public polling, and market research.

Many of the tools to communicate information to the public seek to inform residents of City programs, policies, and events. “Pushing out information,” as one department manager described it, can be a particular focus of this work, as staff seek to ensure public understanding of their department, tailoring communications to make them more legible for the public (for more on this, see Understanding Each Other).

Sometimes, this work is mandated by statute; in other cases, this work is not legally required, but departments have found it directly relevant to meeting their goals. In other cases, while not required in daily interactions with the public, effective communications support the overall success of projects.

“The core function of my group is getting more market feedback and providing data to help inform decision-making at the executive level—and to understand what customer preferences are.”

— Dan Drennan,
Tacoma Public Utilities: Public Affairs and Communication

“We have significant state mandated requirements for public engagement associated with growth management planning. The City code includes requirements also.”

— Brian Boudet, Planning and Development Services

Market research and surveys are frequently used tools to aid in understanding public needs. Though many staff acknowledged that marginalized populations tend to be underrepresented in surveys, others highlighted public polling as a way to improve understandings of the needs of communities who may not be participating in other forms of public engagement.

Social media has been a particularly important change in the way that communications happen between City departments and the public. Despite the potential limitations of these platforms, new media sometimes allow for improved communications between City staff and the public.

“The growth of social media has really changed how we do our work. There are conversations that happen at a different level, and that changes the dynamics of engagement.”

— Chris Gleason, Tacoma Public Utilities:
Public Affairs and Communication

Events: Making Connections and Bringing People Together

City-hosted events are often designed to bring communities together and help constituents learn about the services each department provides. Events can also be a way to inspire action and promote community pride.

These events are viewed as a critical way for creating connections with community members. Though events do not always constitute meaningful public involvement in City policy and decision-making functions, they often serve as an important way to begin to build relationships with members of the public.

“Outreach is a lot of what we do. It could be job fairs, community events, or just being that face of the City.”

— Shelby Fritz, Human Resources

“I would say that civic engagement is part of everything we do, because we can't have events if we're not engaging the public.”

— Tammi Bryant, Tacoma Venues and Events

Formal Groups: Engaging Community Representatives in Decision-Making

The City provides opportunities for residents to engage through in a variety of formal settings, including twenty-seven different official Committees, Boards, and Commissions. In these groups, community members advise and make recommendations to the City Council and/or City staff, and in some cases even serve as a formal decision-making body for policy affairs.

Neighborhood Councils are another structured way in which the community is involved in local governance. Created in 1992, the eight Neighborhood Councils “advise City Council on issues of local importance and [in seeking] consensus among residents on specific plans of action.”

Programs: Ongoing Activities of Engagement and Co-Production

City-developed and hosted programs offer opportunities for staff to engage with community members in deeper, more meaningful ways. Programs can enable long-term relationship building, as well as create

“The Transportation Commission is helping drive and establish policy, and that guides the work that we do.”

— Kurtis Kingsolver, Director of Public Works

Case Study: Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Equity Metrics Data Initiative

In 2017, the nation’s largest municipal utility released the Equity Metrics Data Initiative (EMDI) plan, “to track, measure, and report on how its programs are provided to all customers and residents of Los Angeles.” Approved with the 2016 LADWP Water and Electric Rate Action, the EMDI launches a data-driven framework that considers how well programs, services, and resources are allocated throughout the utility to see where disparities exist. This information and analysis provides important information about services and operations, aligning with the City’s goal to reach all customers fairly and equitably. The EMDI has now established a framework to guide the LADWP in reaching fair and reasonable services to all ratepayers.

Stakeholder outreach and participation played—and continue to play—important parts of this initiative. This remains essential to ensuring equity. The initiative also offers an example of institution-wide goal setting that takes into account the various needs of different departments.



Downtown Los Angeles night photography at the Los Angeles Water and Power building. The LCY student researchers examined the City’s Equity Metrics Data Initiative as a case study. ANDREW SCOTT BAUER

the conditions for co-production, where residents, community members, and City staff build trust through shared activities (see more information on co-production in the introduction). In their ideal form, well-developed programs allow for community ideas, perceptions, and experiences to drive decision-making. This yields a more transformational model of community inclusion in the formation of City policy.

By enabling ongoing interactions, the implementation of programs is often an important step that allows people to work towards shared responsibility for the content and delivery of services. Programs also offer an opportunity to enact targeted universalism, as they allow staff to tailor approaches to reaching particular communities with the purpose of achieving universal goals.

“The police have a Citizens Academy where they bring residents in [to learn about how the Police Department works]. Anybody that’s ever been through it has had a night and day experience. I think there are tons of opportunities for us to do things like that, to educate people about how government works.”

— Andy Cherullo, Director of Finance Department

“We practice adaptive project management. The community is constantly changing both culturally and socioeconomically. As a result, we’re always looking at adjusting the strategy to reflect the needs of the community.”

— Linda Stewart,
Director of Neighborhood and Community Services

Challenge: Standards and Department Flexibility

As the City develops standards and shared expectations for community engagement, care must be taken so that increased coordination does not come at the expense of flexibility within departments and opportunities for innovation.



Downtown Tacoma with Mount Rainier and foothills in view. CITY OF TACOMA

ACCESS AND REPRESENTATION

Communities of color, immigrant communities, and low-income communities have been underrepresented in past City civic engagement efforts, which can skew the City’s understanding of the needs of the public. City staff most often describe the challenges of access and representation by referring to neighborhood disparities correlated with historic patterns of institutionalized racism and reinforced by socioeconomic status.

The struggle to consistently have broad representation in decision-making processes and to provide broad access to a variety of services and opportunities may also be compounded by the City’s complex structure.

“The goal is to foster dialogue and collaboration among many different constituents within the city. However, the same types of people in the same groups continue to be most boisterous. And so we miss out on a lot of voices that could or should be heard.”

— Chris Bell, Office of Management and Budget

“[For recruitment efforts] we like to get to areas of underrepresented communities and talk to people and get as many people of color and women aware of the fire service as possible. We spend great effort in that.”

— Deputy Chief Tory Green, Tacoma Fire Department

“We miss out on a lot of voices that could or should be heard.”

— Chris Bell, Office of Management and Budget

Neighborhood Disparities

Staff frequently observed that some neighborhoods are characterized by far more active, demanding, vocal, well connected, and “engaged” residents than others. Specifically, staff refer to the North End, characterized by a high proportion of White, affluent residents known for being vocal and engaged. This is in contrast with other neighborhoods that are perceived to be less engaged, such as the historically Black Hilltop neighborhood and South and East Tacoma. The residents of these

neighborhoods typically have lower household incomes and a higher proportion of immigrant communities than other parts of Tacoma.

“The Hilltop area, they’re not necessarily clamoring. So we’ll go to their neighborhoods, we go to the neighborhood meetings, we try, and it’s a little bit more of a push. We don’t really have to do anything with the North End, so it’s much easier.”

— Jim Parvey, Environmental Services:
Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability

This is consistent with the data gathered through the 2018 Community Survey, where respondents from Council District 1 (North End, West End) were markedly more satisfied with City services than respondents in Council District 2 (including parts of Old Town, Downtown, and Northeast Tacoma) or Council District 5 (South End). These patterns demonstrate that residents who may already have low trust and satisfaction with the City are less likely to make requests or provide input.

“We have the same practice no matter where we are. I don’t know how to address it differently. I would love to have that answer, but we really don’t do much different from one area to the other.”

— Kurtis Kingsolver, Director of Public Works

“A goal that we have been working on [is] looking at our underserved populations and how often they’re contacting the City. We saw disparity from Council District 5, compared to the rest of the Council districts, and between the White and non-White populations.”

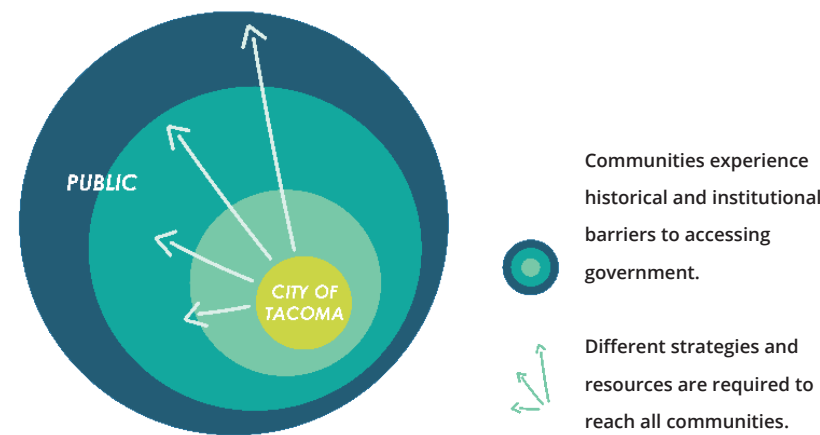
— Allyson Griffith, Neighborhood and Community Services

This suggests that the needs of residents in well-served neighborhoods are generally heard and addressed. The problem, however, is that residents of other neighborhoods do not seek out, and have come to not expect, the same level of responsiveness from the City. It also means that the City’s understanding of the needs of these communities can be skewed by this uneven pattern in engagement.

Institutionalized Racism

Neighborhood disparities can be coded ways of referring to racial and ethnic difference, and the residential segregation that continues to define the city. While Tacoma is not alone in US cities in its history of segregation

ACCESS & REPRESENTATION



The historic and institutional barriers faced by low-income and immigrant communities and communities of color can make it more challenging for the City of Tacoma to connect using typical civic engagement methods. Often, connecting with historically marginalized communities requires a more targeted approach to ensure that all voices and experiences are reflected in civic engagement processes.

and institutionalized racism, the history here is well-documented—for instance, as the Office of Equity and Human Rights outlines, “redlining that occurred in the late 1930s, [resulted in] more than two-thirds of the City having limited or no access to funds for buying or building a home in areas populated by people of color.” In particular, the historically Black Hilltop neighborhood was categorized as the highest risk for investment; this prevented Black residents from acquiring loans to purchase homes and build community wealth.

With increasing growth and rising real estate values, residents with lower incomes, especially Black residents, are being displaced through gentrification. Already from 2010-2015, 35% of African American residents have left the Hilltop, and that displacement is expected to continue with the Tacoma Hilltop Link light rail expansion project. The historical marginalization of Black residents in Tacoma has created an environment of distrust; for instance, only 34% of Black residents voice confidence in City government, as opposed to 60% and 68% of White and Hispanic residents, respectively.

“[The Black Collective is] a very well-organized group of people who...looked at our data and said, ‘Why is it that in one of the most diverse cities in Washington State, 80% of the workforce is White?’”

— Diane Powers,
Director of Office of Equity and Human Rights

This may also be perpetuated by a lack of diversity among City staff: while the White population in Tacoma is roughly 61%, 80% of all City employees are White. Recently, the Office of Equity and Human Rights has acknowledged that the disproportionately White workforce creates barriers for broader representation. The office now works to make changes in hiring practices to incrementally diversify the workforce over time. However, despite ongoing efforts to increase equity and access at the City, our interviews suggest that institutionalized racism persists as an ongoing barrier to participation, informed by long-standing experiences of marginalization.

Given that institutionalized racism is often discussed in the coded language of neighborhood disparities as opposed to overt discussions about racial biases and discriminatory practices, addressing the systemic inequities tied up in race requires targeted and intentional efforts. Some departments already seek to address these disparities through programmatic interventions and deep, relationship-building work.

“This was a situation where we had an opportunity for public art at the People’s Center. [The steering committee] was concerned about not having any African American artists on the roster, as was I. So we did a workshop for everybody, but really targeted artists of color...now one of the artists is off and running, doing tons of work in the community, and the community felt heard, and [we realized], wow, this actually can happen.”

— Amy McBride, Community and Economic Development

Socioeconomic Status

In Tacoma, almost 18% of residents are below the federal poverty level. The city’s median annual household income is just over \$51,000—more than \$15,000 less per year than Washington State’s average. As in many cities, opportunities for civic engagement are often most accessible to those with the economic resources and social networks that extend to people in positions of power, such as City staff, leaders, and decision-makers.

“The people that come to government are the people that have the luxury—they are economically stable, they have the time. Those are the people that we hear and engage. And the people that don’t have that ability are the people whose voices are not being heard.”

— Mike Slevin, Director of Environmental Services

Departments are working to improve their understandings of and approach to connecting with people who do not have the freedom that comes with discretionary income. The City recognizes that time and energy are two of the most precious resources that people have. This is especially the case for low-income residents who may be working multiple jobs, raising families, and/or caring for elders or disabled family members. These are the people least likely to attend meetings at City Hall. Therefore, it is important that the City extend itself to these residents, who lack the capacity to participate in meetings at City Hall, and innovate new methods to connect with marginalized residents about issues of importance to them.

Economic resources, including stipends and other measures to support participation, would not just be helpful for residents who want to engage with policy matters and other civic topics; they are essential for the City to develop programs and practices that reach more residents, and for the City to communicate with residents more effectively.

A Complex Bureaucracy

Representative government can be difficult to understand and access, and Tacoma’s City Manager governance structure can make this particularly confusing. Meeting times, formats, and procedures for public participation can also be challenging to navigate, even if members of the public are able and willing to attend meetings.

“Our effectiveness and legitimacy is dependent on us getting broad participation and diverse voices to speak up about how they feel and what they want.”

— Lauren Flemister, Planning and Development Services



About 400 residents attended this meeting hosted by the Korean Women's Association to learn about the City's budget process. Cambodian, Vietnamese, Korean, and English translation services were provided to create an atmosphere of inclusion. CITY OF TACOMA

“You can’t have someone who is making \$300,000 a year being the voice of someone who’s making \$40,000 a year.”

— Chris Gleason,
Tacoma Public Utilities: Public Affairs and Communication

"I think average citizens, I think there's a lot of confusion, when you drill down to what any particular department does. For most people, they pretty much just care that when they turn a light switch, their power comes on."

— Andy Cherullo, Director of Finance Department

For both TPU and the General Government, many staff described service delivery and essential department functions as the primary purpose of their work. With this perspective, many spoke of performing their functions consistently and of trying to present information more clearly rather than working to change the way that the government interacts with residents. (This challenge is outlined more clearly in the following section, Understanding Each Other.)

Challenge: A Readiness to Work with Under-Represented Communities

Without equal access and representation, the City will not be able to ensure the effectiveness of civic engagement efforts. The City aims to gain or lose the most in the eyes of underrepresented communities depending on how they address issues that matter most to these communities. Furthermore, if there is a sense that public engagement is not reflective of a broad and inclusive public, this can jeopardize the legitimacy of the process.

Equitable civic engagement requires that there is organization-wide support for staff to investigate, learn about, and respond to historic and institutional barriers, and engage with culturally sensitive and trauma-informed approaches. Key to success in this arena is identifying priority issues for proactive engagement and creating a readiness within the City to act on input from under-represented communities, even if that input may not seem straightforward or easy to interpret. In this way, the City and staff can attempt to undo those barriers and create new opportunities for trust, dialogue, and co-production.

"Civic engagement is vast, it is critical and reactionary, and each department has their own way. We're getting better at the proactive piece instead of just reactive. Project PEACE allowed us to gain opportunities from a shared vision, bring the community to us, allowing those communications to develop, and actually meet specific needs, because it's not one-size-fits-all."

— Captain CP Taylor, Police Department

Case Study: Strengthening Libraries as an Example of a Learning Community

In May of 2018, 137 urban libraries across the United States, including the Pierce County Library System, signed a statement aimed at achieving racial and social equity. As noted by the Urban Libraries Council (ULC), "Libraries are trusted, venerable and enduring institutions, central to their communities and an essential participant in the movement for racial and social equity."

Several libraries currently work with ULC to explore ways to reach and engage local entrepreneurs—particularly people of color, women, immigrants, and veterans. For example, St. Louis County Library will, "explore new ways to grow its monthly educational series that engages local entrepreneurs with outreach events, instructional sessions, and a small business and nonprofit expo," while Kansas City Public Library will, "work to bring multilingual small business and entrepreneurship programs to immigrants and refugees in Kansas City." More locally, the King County Library System plans to, "develop and implement a holistic and equitable approach to addressing the needs of immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs through research into local economic development plans, sector strategies, and demographics."

Libraries can be powerful partners in efforts toward racial equity and social change, helping to shift from an 'informed citizen' model of service to an 'engaged, strong-democracy' model. The latter supports meaningful civic engagement and understanding. This shift also addresses issues like information-overload and misinformation.



Currently, Tacoma Public Libraries is hosting an event series called Libraries Transform Tacoma. Each conversation invites the public to come and express their concerns and wishes for their communities. Tacoma Public Libraries plans to take this information and use it to improve the efficacy of its programs and operations. TACOMA PUBLIC LIBRARIES

UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER

Many staff perceive a lack of public understanding of the processes and functions of City government. In efforts to be transparent and informative, resources are spent producing and distributing information, or on learning more about public preferences through surveys and other input opportunities.

However, these are both forms of communication that result, primarily, in a one-way flow of dialogue. This often happens in lieu of opportunities for two-way dialogue and conversation, which leads frequently to misunderstandings on both sides.

“That’s one of our big challenges for the next five years: trying to figure out how we can get people to understand what it is that we do.”

— Dan Thompson, Environmental Services: Wastewater

“I think we are getting the information out that we want or need, but I would think that, if we had great civic engagement, the citizens in this community would have a very good understanding of what we do.”

— Deputy Chief Tory Green, Tacoma Fire Department

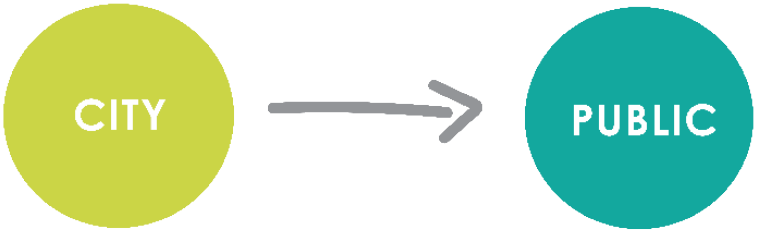
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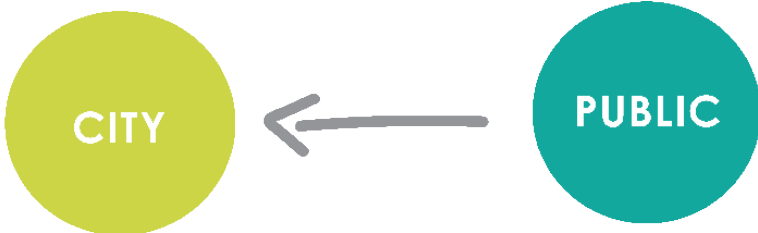
One-Way Communication

As outlined in the section Variation in Practices, tools and methods for communicating with the public are an essential prerequisite for effective civic engagement. Almost all City of Tacoma departments focus on communicating with the public, employing methods such as press releases, social media, educational videos, and promotions. These are all good examples of messaging aimed at increasing understanding on the

ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION



The City pushes out information to promote public understanding of departmental work.



The public provides information to inform City services, policies, and practices.

part of the public. However, while public understanding of City programs and services is important, sole reliance on these one-way methods of communication limits opportunity for responses and dialogue.

Resources are also invested in surveys, polling, and comment periods in an effort to understand resident perspectives, but this is also primarily a one-way flow of communication. Even though the type of information gathered from residents can be incredibly valuable, it is often not enough, especially since underrepresented groups tend to also be underrepresented in survey design and access to comment periods. As a result, staff and residents are more likely to talk past each other, especially in the context of underrepresented communities, causing an incomplete feedback loop.

“We’ve gone to a permitting system that has a lot more transparency, and through that system, we’ve been able to push out a lot of information.”

— Jana Magoon, Planning and Development Services

“[Market research methods] can bring that voice of the customer into the organization, with data, to help inform operational decision-making surrounding capital projects or changes in policies and procedures.”

— Dan Drennan,
Tacoma Public Utilities: Public Affairs and Communication

Two-Way Communication

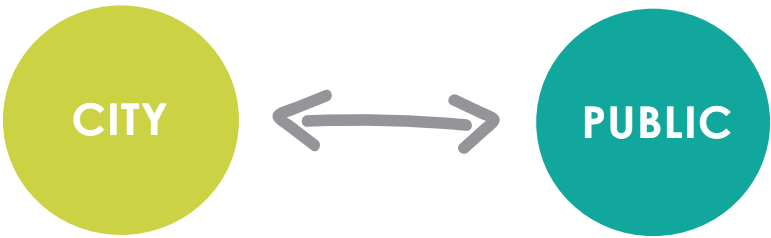
Staff highlighted the need to better understand the experiences and desires of diverse community members, specifically through programs and effective two-way communication. While brief exchanges of two-way communication can provide key points of clarity, ongoing exchanges over time—such as the creation of sustained programs—have the potential to build mutual understanding, productive relationships, and can also inspire the co-production of programs and policies (Appendix F: Civic Engagement Approaches outlines this in more detail).

As the City furthers its work to align hiring practices with the diversity of Tacoma’s population (discussed in Access & Representation), it will bring new members of the public into dialogue with representatives from the City of Tacoma (see figure to the right, Two-Way Communication).

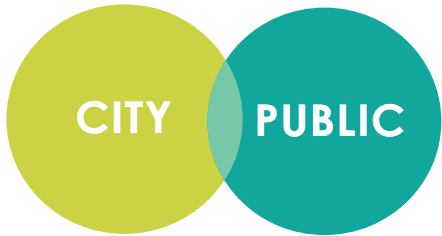
“Let [residents] provide you with feedback. And not just feedback, but an avenue to engage in a conversation.”

— Danielle Larson, Finance Department

TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION



The public and the City have opportunities to learn from each other, and the public knows how their input is used in decision-making.



Opportunities for open dialogue and improvements in hiring practices bring the City and the public into more frequent and sustained contact.

Language Access

Language access is a critical factor in promoting mutual understanding between the City and residents—especially because 19% of residents speak a language other than English at home (Census ACS 2016). In our interviews, it became clear that the strategies for engaging populations with limited English varies significantly across departments. Some departments have implemented proactive approaches in their hiring of multilingual staff, while others rely on translation services and technology to increase access and understanding.

However, overall this is an area that would benefit from increased attention as part of an organization-wide initiative for civic engagement. In particular, departments would benefit from a better understanding

of best practices and of available resources for things like translation services or governance models, such as the Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs.

“We will still have some business owners for whom English is a second language. We have interpreter services, and we actually have quite a few people on our staff right now who can speak a second language, so that’s helpful.”

— Danielle Larson, Finance Department

“As we started to plan the town halls, [we heard from the Spanish speaking community] they were tired of always having to have the headphones on and listen to translation—they wanted to do the town halls in Spanish, with all the non-Spanish speakers having the earphones for translation, so that’s what happened.”

— Diane Powers,
Director of Office of Equity and Human Rights

Challenge: Creating Opportunities for Two-Way Communication

One-way communication leads to misunderstandings between the City and the public, which often results in low or uneven participation from residents and frustration among staff. In some cases, it leads to high levels of concern among residents, creating flashpoints (discussed in more detail in the following section).

The City has succeeded in creating occasions for two-way communication in specific programs and contexts, and an opportunity looms to make this more widespread across departments. However, programmatic opportunities for two-way dialogue can be time and cost intensive, and managing and utilizing the qualitative data received from two-way communication can be challenging. However, the iterative process of summarizing and sharing this information back to the community—and ensuring that they understand how their input was or will be used—is an essential part of building trust as part of two-way communication.

“Ultimately, it’s up to people to define what they want their community to be, and if we don’t have a great mechanism to understand how people feel, then I don’t think we’re as successful as we could and should be.”

— Lauren Flemister, Planning and Development Services

Case Study: Lincoln District Revitalization Project

Tacoma City Council initiated the Lincoln District Revitalization Project in 2014 and structured it around the seven Tacoma 2025 priority areas: Health and Safety, Human and Social Needs, Economic Vibrancy and Employment, Education and Learning, Arts and Cultural Vitality, Natural and Built Environment, and Government Performance.

In an innovative effort to practice the values of accountability and partnership, this project involved the Community and Economic Development Department, in partnership with other departments, establishing a satellite office in the Lincoln District. The City positioned this office strategically, to be accessible to the community throughout the revitalization process; and staffed it with local language needs in mind, allowing residents easier access to the City for input, questions, and concerns. An intentional effort was made to include members of the community in the planning process for the neighborhood’s revitalization. The City continues this commitment to the residents through the satellite office. The inclusive project enabled staff to build relationships, engage in dialogue, and meet residents where they live, work, play, and gather.



Students examined the Lincoln District Revitalization Project as a case study. (The Lincoln District is shown above in a manipulated digital image.) DON CAMP

FLASHPOINTS AND CATALYSTS

Flashpoints, or high levels of participation that are passionate or urgent in nature, often emerge surrounding controversial issues. This may cause the City to invest considerable energy on specific decisions and actions, and sometimes comes at the expense of more sustained relationship-building work or policy change.

While responding to public frustration can be time-consuming, for staff, flashpoints are important indicators of community needs. In addition, these moments serve as important catalysts for the development of programmatic interventions to solve underlying communications or policy challenges. Flashpoints also spur dialogue, which provides opportunities for more meaningful engagement.

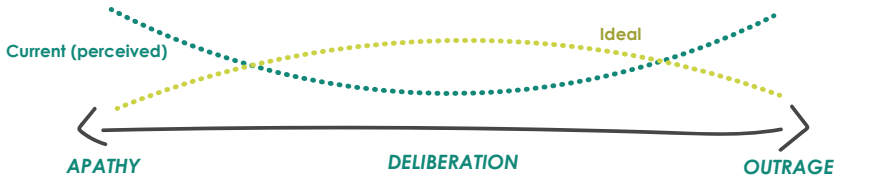
Flashpoints

“Activists may or may not totally represent the whole community. Twenty people will come every week and they’re the same people. Is that really what the community is saying?”

— Tad Wille, Assistant City Manager

When high levels of public attention and participation emerge around policy changes, staff must often combine civic engagement with crisis management techniques. As issues become more controversial, additional

FLASHPOINTS & CATALYSTS



This schematic illustrates what we heard from many staff: that, on a spectrum from “apathy” to “outrage,” public responses to City policies tend to be clustered on either end of the spectrum (turquoise line). However, the goal of a deliberative approach would be to create more opportunities for public input, increase responsiveness, and minimize levels of outrage (green line).

resources are often committed to these efforts. Furthermore, while flashpoints may elevate new and important topics on the public agenda, they do not always indicate broad public opinion. For this reason, it is challenging to interpret and use this input to direct policy and social change.

Many staff lamented the general challenge of getting people to show up to participate. This is particularly true about the daily, on-going work of the City. Often, the perception is that the public doesn’t care, or that the issue’s impact on the public is low. Yet, on the other end of the spectrum, certain decisions catch public attention and ignite broad dissatisfaction, leaving staff to continually respond to complaints or crisis. One interviewee called this, “the range from apathy to outrage.” This captures a sentiment that we heard across several departments: it can often be challenging to find a place along this spectrum where residents can participate meaningfully in the policy-making process. Instead, it often appears to City staff that the public either does not see the benefit of showing up, or they are too opposed to a project or outraged about a policy to believe that engaging in the process is worthwhile.

While the spectrum is a helpful way to understand generalized patterns of the public’s sentiment toward the City, flashpoints also serve as indications of miscommunication, lack of transparency, and legitimate community frustration around a policy issue. They also emerge out of the mistrust that stems from community experiences of historical disinvestment, trauma, and institutionalized racism. Therefore, when the public does not show up, it may not be due to a lack of interest but instead due to a lack of understanding of the process, knowledge of how to participate, low level of trust in City government, or belief that one’s input will not make a difference. In addition, while it can be tempting to think of flashpoints as merely a lack of understanding, creating solutions to these problems often goes beyond increased, one-way communication, and requires more robust dialogue (as discussed in the previous section, Understanding Each Other).

“It can be tricky when you get into emotionally charged topics, and typically as a City employee you have to try and be as professional as possible and make fact-based decisions rather than emotional ones.”

— Dan Drennan, Tacoma Public Utilities:
Public Affairs and Communication

Response to Flashpoints

Either in anticipation or in response to public pushback that emerges around these issues, General Government and TPU staff often invest considerable energy in sharing information (as discussed in the previous finding) to educate the public, sometimes also working to create new forums for discussion. Though these are important moments to engage with the public, they also require significant organizational resources. In controversial cases, staff time and budgets can be stretched in order to accommodate public input.

Risk of Being Responsive to Flashpoints

These flashpoints can be particularly challenging for staff when the process is legally mandated or required by policy, with minimal leeway. Without the public fully understanding the process, as described in the previous finding, it can also be particularly challenging to carry out these discussions. Several interviewees noted that this increased participation takes place when members of the public perceive that their interests are under attack. The concern that individual interests drive the process is compounded over fears that it is often a very small slice of the public who shows up and participates. As discussed in detail in Access & Representation, unevenness of access to the City has implications for the organization’s broader engagement, and the sense that flashpoint issues dominate civic engagement makes it more challenging to use input gathered in these settings.

“Just because we may outline that we’re going to have three or four public meetings doesn’t mean we don’t end up having more. It might be controversial, so we just have to find ways to absorb that into the budget.

— Kurtis Kingsolver, Director of Public Works

“We don’t have huge crowds the majority of the time, but every now and then we will have hearings where the room gets a lot fuller. It just depends on how many people are being affected, and how controversial the issues are.”

— Jeff Capell, Hearing Examiner

Flashpoints Catalyze: Opportunities for More Meaningful Engagement

While high levels of participation surrounding these controversial issues or policy changes can be resource-intensive and draining for staff, in some cases they prove their merit, as catalysts for new or changed opportunities for more in-depth and productive engagement with the public. For example, in one interview, staff described the budget shortfall that Tacoma faced during the last recession, which lead to significant decreases in funding across City departments and services. In anticipation of this issue, former City Manager T.C. Broadnax held budget meetings throughout the City to explain the situation and prioritize funding. According to City staff, these meetings “had huge participation” even though they were not required; several staff credited the meetings for improving public understanding through several years of financially dire straits.

In addition, much of the literature on civic engagement and collaborative governance highlights the inevitability of conflict and disagreement in these kinds of “shared-power settings.” Instead of indicating systemic dysfunction, some scholars note that it is these controversial policy issues that cause a political community to form, which can itself become an important part of the policy-making process.

Challenge: Respond Proactively and Avoid Reliance on Flashpoints

Conflicts arise commonly at the municipal level and can be important gauges for understanding where to focus increased attention or resourcing. However, given the often unequal access to the City, flashpoint issues do not always reflect the broad opinions and needs of the entire community. For this reason, using these as the sole catalysts to guide decision-making skews the City’s understanding of the issues most important to the public.

“Instead of backing away from crises, we want to be more aggressive about seeing how we can address those needs without tying up unnecessary or inappropriate resources.”

— Chief Jim Duggan, Tacoma Fire Department

Case Study: Project PEACE

The Tacoma Police Department (TPD) and the Office of Equity and Human Rights launched Project PEACE (Partnering for Equity And Community Engagement) in 2015. Against the backdrop of widespread protests over the police shooting of Michael Brown and other unarmed Black men around the country, the project hosted a series of community conversations among communities of color and TPD.

By acknowledging a potential flashpoint, the project took a deep dive toward trying to understand the root causes of community concerns. In a series of listening sessions that lasted between three and four hours each, small group facilitators encouraged police officers to engage in dialogue with community members about institutionalized racism, their own personal perceptions and experiences with TPD, and opportunities for the department to be more responsive to resident needs.

In addition to fostering relationships between TPD and historically marginalized communities, TPD intentionally integrated the outcome of the series of conversations into its development of a strategic plan. The process produced six key pillars for work going forward: building trust and legitimacy, improving policy and oversight, social media, community policing and crime reduction, enhance training and education, and officer wellness and safety.



Tacoma Police Headquarters. The City of Tacoma started Project PEACE in 2015. The project has created space for the Tacoma Police Department and community members to come together to identify and address public safety concerns. DIAMOND BROOKE

AN ORGANIZATION-WIDE INITIATIVE

Civic engagement is one of the highest priorities for an equitable and inclusive City government, and yet it is beyond the scope of one project, initiative, or department. Despite the high value placed on civic engagement and Tacoma 2025 goals across departments, efforts are uneven across the City. Many employees remain unfamiliar with how their department’s civic engagement approach fits in with broader strategic plan goals.

Strengthening organizational support for civic engagement aids the implementation of Tacoma 2025, reinforces cross-departmental work, and improves citywide, equity initiatives. In this section, we outline our recommendations for accomplishing improved civic engagement at the organizational level.

Strengthening organizational support for civic engagement aids the implementation of Tacoma 2025, reinforces cross-departmental work, and improves citywide, equity initiatives.

Creating a Shared Culture of Civic Engagement

The goals outlined in Tacoma 2025 provide an outline of the City’s existing support for inclusive civic engagement efforts (from the Government Performance Focus Area):

“Opportunity: In 2025, Tacoma residents trust in their City government and civic institutions. Elected leaders and civil servants hold transparency and accountability as primary civic responsibilities. The community believes that local government is tackling the tough issues and actively engaging residents and community partners in those endeavors. Residents engage in civic affairs, participate in government activities, and vote.”

“Equity: In 2025, the City of Tacoma government will be inclusive, reflective of the community it serves, and ensure that City resources are distributed equitably to residents and visitors.”

As discussed in our first finding, Values of Civic Engagement, we found efforts to strive toward these goals in different departments. Efforts are ongoing at the departmental level to prioritize working alongside constituents to accomplish projects that reflect their needs, concerns, and desires.

Tools for Civic Engagement: In the first recommendation that follows, we outline the need for expanded, organization-wide support of civic engagement, allowing each department to create specific goals, policies, and procedures, with the understanding that their work is part of a greater collective commitment as well as an undertaking to improve connections with the public.

“I’m not aware of any specific requirements that say that we have to interact. I know we try to have as many touch points with citizens as possible.”

— Chris Bell, Office of Management and Budget

Departmental Unevenness Persists

As outlined in our finding, Variation in Practice, civic engagement occurs differently across the City. While this reflects differences in the roles and responsibilities of various departments, it also means that many departments practice civic engagement in an ad hoc manner. As a result of this, some departments are more intentional about planning, resourcing, and implementing civic engagement opportunities than others.

Expanded, organization-wide support of civic engagement would allow each department to create specific goals, policies, and procedures, with the understanding that their work is part of a greater collective commitment, as well as an undertaking to improve connections with the public.

Civic Engagement Steering Group: A coordinating mechanism across the City can ensure common understanding of civic engagement. This would help structure the implementation of civic engagement while allowing each department the flexibility to incorporate policies and procedures in a way that is relevant for their work.

“Equity is a different kind of thing. How do you know you reach that underserved group? In our Neighborhood and Community Services Office, we can probably do counts and say ‘yeah, we’ve served 50 more clients with this program for homeless youth,’ but in other places, it’s a trickier thing.”

— Andy Cherullo, Director of Finance Department

Organizational Resources and Support

Resourcing: While departmental goals and responsibilities vary, the City government, as a whole, shares in its commitment to successful civic engagement. In addition to creating a common understanding and definition of civic engagement and organizational mechanisms to implement best practices, additional organizational resourcing and funding will ensure that new initiatives around civic engagement are feasible and successful.



City of Tacoma staff formed cross-departmental groups and provided input on the initial findings for this report. ANNE TAUFEN

A coordinating mechanism across the City can ensure common understanding of civic engagement.

Organizational mechanisms to implement best practices, additional organizational resourcing, and funding will ensure that new initiatives around civic engagement are feasible and successful.



City of Tacoma municipal building. The City of Tacoma is the eighth largest employer in Tacoma, with more than 2,000 staff spread across 21 departments and offices. WIKIMEDIA

1. TOOLS FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Students created a series of tools to support City of Tacoma staff as they implement civic engagement initiatives at both the organizational and departmental level, and as the City continues to work to put the Tacoma 2025 Values of Opportunity, Equity, Partnerships, and Accountability into action.

Civic Engagement Statement of Values

A **Civic Engagement Statement Of Values** provides clarity and direction for all City of Tacoma departments. This report offers a preliminary statement, based on our interviews; however, a statement of civic engagement values will be most effective if it is revised and adopted by City staff members.

Explicitly stated values hold people accountable to each other, and remind members of a shared public realm of their existing and aspirational commitments to one another. See Appendix E for a graphic representation of values.

These value statements were developed based upon our experiences studying the City of Tacoma’s civic engagement practices:

- 1.Expanding access:** Civic engagement is an opportunity to provide resources and venues for residents to develop skills, take part in decisions, build relationships, access and take advantage of City services, and improve mutual understanding between City staff and community members.
- 2.Culture of inclusivity:** Engaging with residents is an opportunity to embrace the asset of diversity in all of the City’s work. We seek to bring to the fore equitable practices by addressing uneven access and representation among all communities and by recruiting, building relationships with, and supporting diverse residents, including youth, in our partnerships, decision-making, and service delivery.
- 3.Connecting with partners and residents:** The City of Tacoma values partnership with all members of the public. Due to inequities, in terms of access to government resources, which characterize many neighborhoods, the City works to develop partnering strategies that ensure all residents gain access to government services and decision-making processes.

- 4.Trust and transparency:** We recognize civic engagement as an ongoing accountability to residents in all our work, and strive to make clear commitments and to set realistic expectations around public participation, resident representation, community partnerships, and service delivery.

Typology of Civic Engagement Approaches

A **Typology Of Civic Engagement Approaches** illustrates, describes, and categorizes the different communication and engagement methods elicited in the interviews and research. Each approach pivots around a central objective that falls along a spectrum, from participation to inclusion. Each can be utilized by City staff to identify potential areas for equity investment and improvements.

The practices and approaches provisionally identified through this project are detailed in the Findings section, entitled, Variation in Practices. In particular, the distinction between participation and inclusion highlights the fact that opportunities for resident-City co-production are more likely within sustained, programmatic interventions that allow for targeted approaches to specific groups or communities. See Appendix F for the Typology of Civic Engagement Approaches tool.

Designing Purposeful Civic Engagement

The **Designing Purposeful Civic Engagement** tool helps staff and managers with different programmatic and service responsibilities identify how and where to put the City’s shared civic engagement values of equitable policies and practices into action. A series of questions encourages reflection and suggests targeted steps among the various approaches.

The draft design tool poses questions intended to help departmental staff first clarify why they are undertaking civic engagement – its purpose, both in terms of organizational values and its function for the department’s work – followed by questions that orient decision-makers toward how civic engagement should be pursued. The tool highlights where civic engagement typically requires more resourcing, as well as the functional constraints that frame different departmental responsibilities and service areas. See Appendix G for the Designing Purposeful Civic Engagement tool.

Case Study: Equity Rationale in Budgeting Allocations

In 2014, Tacoma’s City Council and City Manager both identified equity and empowerment as key policy priorities. Simultaneously, the Tacoma 2025 visioning process foregrounded equity as one of the four key goals held by the public. Moreover, 71% of residents stated that it was “essential” or “very important” to expand access to City services and infrastructure to people of different races and ethnicities, abilities, and income levels (OEHR Annual Report). This increased attention to equity within and outside of City government led to the Council’s adoption of the Equity and Empowerment Framework in October of 2014. The framework highlights five goals, focusing on the City’s workforce, successful community engagement and service-delivery, inclusive decision-making, and support for human rights. In order to connect this policy document to regular departmental work, the Office of Equity and Human Rights worked with the Department of Finance to integrate questions about equity in the budget development process.

Initially, the process consisted of direct training around racial equity budgeting for City Council and employees in the Office of Management and Budget. As the process continued, staff integrated specific questions. For example, if a director hoped to gain a budget enhancement or reduction, that person included the question, “How will this impact equity?” According to the Department of Finance’s Director, Andy Cherullo, “You need to really need to think about [why and how your budget justification impacts equity], and if your answer is no, you have a slim chance of getting additional resources for things.”

The “department work” of budgeting is something that cuts across City departments; it also requires the thought and input of many staff and departments. This approach allows the City to systematically evaluate how equity is implemented in different departments while also acknowledging that it will, by definition, look different for each department.



Participants of a Tacoma 2025 visioning event. TACOMA 2025 VISION AND STRATEGIC PLAN

2. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STEERING GROUP

A civic engagement steering group serves as a learning community within the City and as a recognized leadership body to push ahead civic engagement initiatives. In addition, the inclusion of diverse community members ensures that engagement strategies are all-embracing and effective.

Proposed Structure

While there are a variety of formal citizen commissions that provide leadership to different City departments, we recommend that this group perform a more informal governance and knowledge-sharing role. However, the group could provide advisory support to the Human Rights Commission, or to another formal body, for increased influence on policy-making.

Participation

We recommend that the group be equally comprised of City of Tacoma staff, from a cross-section of departments, and diverse community representatives. These members should reflect the city’s racial, language, and cultural diversity, and should particularly seek to reflect the needs of marginalized communities. Ideally, this group would be comprised of 10 – 15 City staff and 10 – 15 community representatives. The group will be most effective and welcoming if the participation of both internal and external stakeholders is roughly equal.

Group Responsibilities

The authority of this group may be to provide policy recommendations, programmatic feedback, project proposal feedback, and to summarize City efforts that promote an equitable environment for the residents of Tacoma. This group will be tasked with overseeing organizational engagement strategy and policy, and with achieving objectives toward equitable civic engagement, including:

- Encourage growth as a learning community with the primary function to promote the exchange of information and to train across departments and integrate community feedback. The group could also serve in an advisory capacity to another formal body, such as to the Human Rights Commission, to generate and consult on best practices related to civic engagement.
- The adoption of the community engagement Statement of Values, and management and training around the Designing Purposeful Civic Engagement Design tool, described in the previous finding.

Case Study: Learning Communities

Pioneered at MIT’s Society for Organizational Learning, learning communities have been successfully implemented in a multitude of public and private-sector organizations. Defined by Senge and Scharmer (2006) as, “a group of people working together to nurture and sustain a knowledge-creating system,” learning communities focus on three domains of activity:

- 1. Research: a disciplinary approach to discovery and understanding, with a commitment to sharing what is learned.
- 2. Capacity building: enhancing awareness and capabilities, individually and collectively, to produce meaningful results.
- 3. Practice: working together to achieve practical outcomes.

Importantly, learning communities are often comprised of a variety of different internal and external actors:

- Executive leaders: provide support for line leaders and develop learning infrastructures; they also lead by example in the gradual process of evolving the norms and behaviors of a learning culture.
- Local line leaders: undertake meaningful organizational experiments to test whether new learning capabilities lead to improved business results.
- Internal networkers: serve as the “seed carriers” of the new culture; also called community builders, they can move freely about the organization to find those predisposed to bringing about change. They also help out in organizational experiments, and aid in the diffusion of new understandings.

The group might include executives from different departments, mid-level managers, and staff members that regularly interact with community members in their work. Community representation might include a designee from each council district, as well as community members that represent historically marginalized communities.

A learning community centered around inclusive, innovative approaches to civic engagement could enable the City of Tacoma to create internal infrastructure and capacities. It could also support the development of cross-functional, cross-departmental teams in sharing the existing internal knowledge of the organization and in researching, developing, and disseminating best practices.



Photo of Massachusetts Institute of Technology campus: site of the Society for Organizational Learning, one of this project’s case studies. WIKIPEDIA

- Input or management for the distribution of funding specific to civic engagement initiatives (see following recommendations.)
- Provide leadership and guidance for the drafting and implementation of the forthcoming civic engagement request for proposals process, which will conduct public-facing data gathering and community input.

3. RESOURCING

Resourcing is an integral piece of our proposal: every initiative requires organizational support and funding in order to be sustained. We understand that the City works under significant budget constraints and we wish to reinforce that this is part of the larger movement toward implementing Tacoma 2025 and achieving equitable community development across the City. The following options are offered as potential areas of resource support, both in terms of increased organizational support and increases in direct funding for civic engagement activities.

Organizational Support

- Training and professional development opportunities to improve overall confidence and competencies of staff and to increase effectiveness of civic engagement practices, including but not limited to topics such as conflict resolution, crisis de-escalation, cultural humility, trauma-informed care, anti-racism, facilitation and hosting, collaborative project management, crucial conversations, and communications.

- Staff or consultant capacity for qualitative data analysis to interpret large amounts of public input in ways that illuminate a breadth of community perspectives, including specific feedback on limitations of current or planned civic engagement investments.
- Creation of participatory budgeting with a percentage of the City budget, empowering residents to engage fully and directly in the deliberation and decision-making of urban governance and resource allocation.
- Use of existing institutional mechanisms to prioritize continuous improvement in civic engagement, such as the inclusion of civic engagement skills and practices in job descriptions, or through the dedication of time to sustain meaningful civic engagement commitments. There are ways for resource allocation to happen without finding new sources of revenue, such as restructuring job descriptions to allow for civic engagement budget allocation, participatory budgeting to recruit others to participate, and wrapping civic engagement strategies into other revenue streams.

Funding

- A dedicated budget line for civic engagement, accessible to all departments, to support investments in areas of high need where funds are lacking, or civic engagement is not currently required or prioritized.
- A staff position that provides guidance, coordination, and strategic support for the development and implementation of civic engagement investments, across the City and in partnership with external constituencies, community groups, and neighborhood residents.
- A system of justification and prioritization for civic engagement investments in the budget allocation process, potentially managed by the proposed Civic Engagement Steering Group and enlisting in one or more of the tools described above.
- A catalyst fund to support innovative proposals for civic engagement that address an existing challenge, build new relationships with residents, encourage risk-taking or experimentation, and/or create cross-departmental collaboration.

Case Study: Participatory Budgeting - Vallejo, CA

The City of Vallejo’s innovative approach to municipal budget allocation has made it a model for government institutions worldwide. A town of 120,000 people in the Bay Area, Vallejo established its participatory budgeting process in 2012. The process has engaged more than 20,000 residents during the last 6 years, allocating \$8.3 million in funding for 47 projects. While the process represents a small percentage of the annual budget, the impact on local civic engagement is substantive.

Participatory budgeting operates through four stages: first, residents submit ideas for projects that could improve the city; next, volunteer delegates turn ideas into proposals; then, residents aged 16 and older vote on what to submit to City Council; and finally, City Council allocates the funding for the approved projects. The process relies on a variety of levels of resident participation, with residents assuming the roles of budget delegates, steering committee members, meeting facilitators, workgroup members, poll workers, ballot counters, and outreach advocates.

In addition to increased levels of co-production, resident trust, and local democracy, Vallejo has become the gold standard for public participation and collaborative government, winning multiple awards and receiving widespread media attention.



Vallejo, California’s innovative approach to budgeting has made it a model for government institutions worldwide. PATRICK NOUHAILLER

FUTURE WORK

As the City of Tacoma embarks on future civic engagement capacity-building work, we recommend that the City's RFP process include the following as part of a continued scope of work:

Ensure broad public participation and input in this process: This falls outside of the scope of this project, but a deeper understanding of the public's experience as they engage with the City is essential in crafting future strategies for engagement. In particular, City staff working alongside community liaisons or consultants to gather this input will result in increased public trust in the process.

Include the steering group of internal and external stakeholders to provide leadership for this work: Recognizing the wide array of practices happening across the City, the organization stands to benefit from input of staff in different departments and at different leadership levels, as well as from the input of community members who serve in a leadership capacity. This could be the first task of the Civic Engagement Steering Group proposed above.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AS A PATH TO EQUITY

Overall, this report highlights the importance of inclusive, robust, and sustainable civic engagement practices, which together form a core pillar of equitable city government. Cumulatively, the findings and recommendations presented by this document support the City of Tacoma as it strives to implement Tacoma 2025 and the Equity and Empowerment Framework. In addition to the importance of civic engagement for local democracy, more effective civic engagement will aid the City of Tacoma in crafting better public policy as it accommodates growth and pursues sustainability goals.



MA Community Planning students sorting through data from interviews with City staff. All of the recommendations included in this report are based on the City of Tacoma's unique context and designed to support the organization as it continues to promote equity through improved civic engagement. ANNEKA OLSON

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Appendix A
List of Departmental Interviewees

Note: The following titles reflect positions held at the time of student interviews.

Andersson, E. Tacoma Public Utilities: Public Affairs and Communication. (2018, February 1). Personal interview.

Anderson, R. Tacoma Public Utilities: Public Affairs and Communication. (2018, February 1). Personal interview.

Armstrong, A. Office of Equity and Human Rights. (2018, January 24). Personal interview.

Babbitt, P. Environmental Services: Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability. (2018, February 1). Personal interview.

Bailey, R. Public Works. (2018, February 1). Personal interview.

Beason, A. Office of Equity and Human Rights. (2018, January 24). Personal interview.

Bedier, K. Director, Tacoma Venues and Events. (2018, January 24). Personal interview.

Bell, C. Office of Management and Budget. (2018, February 8). Personal interview.

Boudet, B. Planning and Development Services. (2018, January 21). Personal interview.

Bryant, T. Tacoma Venues and Events. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Buchanan, G. Director, Human Resources. (2018, January 25). Personal interview

Calderon, S. Finance Department. (2018, January 31). Personal Interview.

Cappell, J. Hearing Examiner. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Casparian, D. City Attorney’s Office. (2018, January 25).

Cherullo, A. Director, Finance Department. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Coleman, L. Office of Equity and Human Rights. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Dewhirst, S. Deputy Director, Tacoma Water. (2018, February 1). Personal interview.

Drennan, D. Tacoma Public Utilities: Public Affairs and Communication. (2018, February 1). Personal interview. (2018, February 9). Follow-up over phone.

Duggan, J. Chief, Tacoma Fire Department. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Federighi, P. Interim Director, Information Technology. (2018, January 25). Personal interview.

Flemister, L. Planning and Development Services. (2018, February 1). Personal Interview.

Fosbre, B. City Attorney. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Fritz, S. Human Resources. (2018, February 8). Personal interview.

Gleason, C. Tacoma Public Utilities: Public Affairs and Communication. (2018, February 8). Personal interview.

Green, T. Deputy Chief, Tacoma Fire Department. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Grabinski-Young, N. Community and Economic Development. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Griffith, A. Neighborhood and Community Services. (2018, February 1). Personal interview.

Harding, M. Finance Department. (2018, January 24). Personal interview.

Hatcher, S. Deputy Director, Tacoma Public Utilities: Customer Service. (2018, February 1). Personal interview.

Hoogkamer, L. Planning and Development Services. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Huffman, P. Director, Planning and Development Services. (2018, February 8). Personal interview.

Johnston, K. Budget Officer, Office of Management and Budget. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Jumper, T. Interim Director, Media and Communications Office. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Kao, P. Planning and Development Services. (2018, February 8). Personal interview.

Kaufman, J. Tacoma Public Utilities: Management Services. (2018, February 8). Personal interview.

King, D. Deputy Director, Tacoma Rail. (2018, February 8). Personal interview.

Kingsolver, K. Director, Public Works (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Larsen, K. Director, Tacoma Public Library. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Larson, D. Finance Department. (2018, January 25). Personal interview.

Legg, Louisa. Office of the Hearing Examiner. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Lueders, J. Media and Communications Office. (2018, January 24). Personal interview.

Lynett, K. Environmental Services: Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability. (2018, January 24). Personal interview.

Magoon, J. Planning and Development Services. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Mason, L. Director, Customer Service Support Center. (2018, January 24). Personal interview.

Mather, C. Tacoma Public Utilities: Public Affairs and Communication. (2018, February 1). Personal interview.

McBride, A. Community and Economic Development. (2018, January 24). Personal interview.

McLaurin, V. Neighborhood and Community Services. (2018, January 24). Personal interview.

Parvey, J. Environmental Services: Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability. (2018, February 8). Personal interview.

Pauli, E. Tacoma City Manager. (2017, November). Kick-off meeting with LCY student researchers.

Powers, D. Director, Office of Equity and Human Rights. (2018, January 25). Personal interview.

Ramsdell, D. Chief, Tacoma Police Department. (31, January 31). Personal Interview.

Robinson, C. Deputy Director, Deputy Director Tacoma Power. (2018, February 8). Personal interview.

Scott, J. Environmental Services: Wastewater. (2018, February 1). Personal interview.

Slevin, M. Director, Environmental Services. (2018, January 25). Personal interview.

Sorum, D. City Clerk. (2018, January 31). Personal Interview.

Stewart, L. Director, Neighborhood and Community Services. (2018, January 25). Personal interview.

Taylor, CP. Tacoma Police Department. (2018, April 25). Round table meeting.

Thompson, D. Environmental Services: Wastewater. (2018, January 25). Personal interview.

Walkowiak, E. Community and Economic Development. (2018, January 24). Personal interview.

Wille, T. Assistant City Manager. (2018, January 25). Personal interview.

Wojtanowicz, L. Neighborhood and Community Services. (2018, January 31). Personal Interview.

Wolfe, C. Community and Economic Development. (2018, January 24). Personal interview.

Wright, C. Neighborhood and Community Services. (2018, January 31). Personal interview.

Appendix B
Survey Tool

Questions

- 1. How would you define civic engagement? What is it supposed to accomplish?
- 2. For Tacoma residents, not employed or closely connected to City government, what do you think they understand about what your department does?
- 3. What requirements does your department have for civic engagement – for instance, are there policies or funding requirements that require you to interact with the public?
- 4. Can you tell us about the various civic engagement practices that take place in your department? This could be outreach, meetings, customer service, information sharing, partnerships, other things – how you connect with residents.
- 5. To your knowledge, how have the civic engagement practices in your department changed over time? Do you do things differently than you used to, and if so, what caused the change?
- 6. How does your department decide to allocate funding or staff time to civic engagement?
- 7. Research shows that civic engagement is highest for community members with relatively high levels of income, education, and residential privilege – which can mean that the voices of many residents are not heard. How does your department address this problem?
- 8. What civic engagement tools or resources would you be interested in trying or learning more about?
- 9. (Is there anything else we should know about civic engagement in your department?)

Appendix C
Student Biographies

Ben Fincher has been a GIS Mapping Technician for governmental and community-based organizations in the South Puget Sound. Most recently, he worked at Safe Streets in Tacoma, where he led Participatory Action Research projects that utilized geospatial technologies as a tool to enhance community building and document community experiences. Prior to this, he was an AmeriCorps volunteer for Federal Way Public Schools.

Karina Haaseth has a background working on community events and programs for Skagit County Parks and Recreation. Upon moving to Tacoma, she worked at the Humane Society doing community outreach for a grant offering resources for 98404 residents, planning events, and working with volunteers.

Marie Hofmann works at United Way of Pierce County as a Program Officer for the Centers for Strong Families. She recently moved to Tacoma, but is a lifelong resident of the South Puget Sound region.

Sarah Koestler identifies as a heterosexual female, vegan, Christian, and has earned three degrees in the last seven years, including a BA in Urban Studies and an MA in Community Planning from UW Tacoma. 36 years old and single, Sarah was raised in a biracial household that moved frequently—including 20 different locations in the 253 area code—setting up her passion for advocacy for those who are disempowered. She has traveled to three different continents and plans to see the other four by age 40.

Eric Lane works at the Tacoma Housing Authority in the Policy, Innovation, & Evaluation department where he implements pilot programs related to housing and education. He is also an instructor at Highline College in the business department. He has lived in the Tacoma area for the past ten years and enjoys spending time at home with his wife and two kids.

Lauren Miles moved to Washington in 2010 after earning a BA in Philosophy with a minor in Spanish from Mississippi State University and has spent eight years working with people experiencing homelessness, primarily youth, and veterans in Washington. She has worked at Habitat for Humanity, YMCA Oasis Teen Shelter, Cocoon House, ROOTS Young Adults Shelter, New Beginnings, Pierce County Alliance, King County, UW Tacoma, and is currently completing an internship with Pierce County in Long-Range Planning.

Anneka Olson has worked on a variety of community-level projects in active transportation advocacy, historic preservation, and neighborhood storytelling. Currently, she works for the City of Tacoma in the Historic Preservation Office and as an editor for the Livable City Year partnership. She holds a BA in Historical Studies from Bard College.

Garrett Stone researches socio-economic trends and their relationship to policy and appropriations; he is currently engaged in projects concerning intraregional municipal coalition building and the spatial-temporal experiences of Tacoma youth. Prior to this, he was a Logistics Officer in the US Army and studied geospatial technologies.

Jeremy Trenhaile works at King County Metro Transit as a Transportation Planner focusing on ADA Paratransit and ADA Compliance. Prior to this, he was a Service Representative with the Social Security Administration and served as a Medic in the United States Army. Jeremy lives in Puyallup with his wife, two cats, and dog.

Ed Winkley has worked as a Professional Landscape Architect for the State of Washington over the past twenty years. As a lifetime community member of the South Sound who is involved daily with the development of the built environment and protection of the natural ecologies that comprise the region, he advocates for methods and strategies that improve community through intentional design, collaboration, persistence, and understanding.

Faculty Biographies

Anne Taufen, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the UW Tacoma Urban Studies Program, where she helped to develop the undergraduate BA in Sustainable Urban Development, as well as the MA in Community Planning. Her research and teaching focus on questions of inclusion and equity in urban planning and governance, with a topical emphasis on urban waterways and waterfront development.

Jennifer Arnold, Ph.D. is an affiliated faculty with UWT Urban Studies and owner of Reciprocity Consulting, LLC based in Tacoma. She has over 15 years of experience researching, facilitating, and teaching collaborative approaches to community development and conservation with an emphasis on equity, controversial issues, and organizational change.

Appendix D
Overview of Findings

PURPOSEFUL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



WHAT WE BELIEVE
VALUES OF
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement is valued across departments as a path to building equity in the Tacoma, and the City is taking steps to align practices with its commitments. Staff expressed the importance of relationships and becoming more inclusive as an institution through expanding access, connecting with community, and building trust and transparency.



WHAT WE DO
VARIATION IN
PRACTICE & PURPOSE

In practice, civic engagement varies widely across the City; accordingly, civic engagement performs different functions for each department. Recognizing this variability, uniform standardization of civic engagement across the city poses significant challenges. However, consistent support, allocation of resources, and the development of shared values can enable improved civic engagement practices.

CHALLENGES IN PRACTICE



UNDERSTANDING
EACH OTHER

City staff perceive a general lack of understanding about how to access the breadth of services provided or how city government functions. To address this, resources are spent producing and distributing information. Interviews with staff also highlight a need for further understanding of the needs and desires of community members through communication and engagement methods.



FLASHPOINTS
& CATALYSTS

Flashpoints, or high levels of participation that are passionate or urgent in nature, can emerge surrounding controversial issues. This can cause the City to invest considerable energy on specific decisions and can sometimes come at the expense of more sustained relationship-building work. However, these moments can also be catalysts for more meaningful engagement.



ACCESS &
REPRESENTATION

The City struggles to have broad engagement in decision-making and delivery of services, possibly held back by inflexible systems and complex bureaucracy. Under-represented communities are often not heard, with few examples of combatting this problem. Staff say this discrepancy can skew the City's understanding of the public.

OPPORTUNITIES + TOOLS



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
STEERING GROUP

- Development of a civic engagement statement of values;
- Providing department-level support for operationalization.



APPROACHES &
DESIGN TOOLS

- Department-level planning tools to address potential civic engagement challenges in practice.



INCREASED
RESOURCING

- Dedicated budget for innovative civic engagement at the department level;
- Improved training and resources.

Appendix E
Civic Engagement Statement of Values



Civic engagement is an **Opportunity** to provide resources and venues for residents to develop skills, take part in decisions, build relationships, access and take advantage of city services, and improve mutual understanding between City staff and community members.



Engaging with residents is an opportunity to embrace the asset of diversity in all of the City's work. We seek to bring forward **Equitable** practices by addressing uneven access and representation among all communities by recruiting, building relationships with, and supporting diverse residents, including youth, in our partnerships, decision-making, and service delivery.



The City of Tacoma values **Partnerships** with all members of the public. Due to the inequities in access to government resources for many neighborhoods, the City works to develop partnering strategies that ensure all residents have access to government services and decision-making processes.



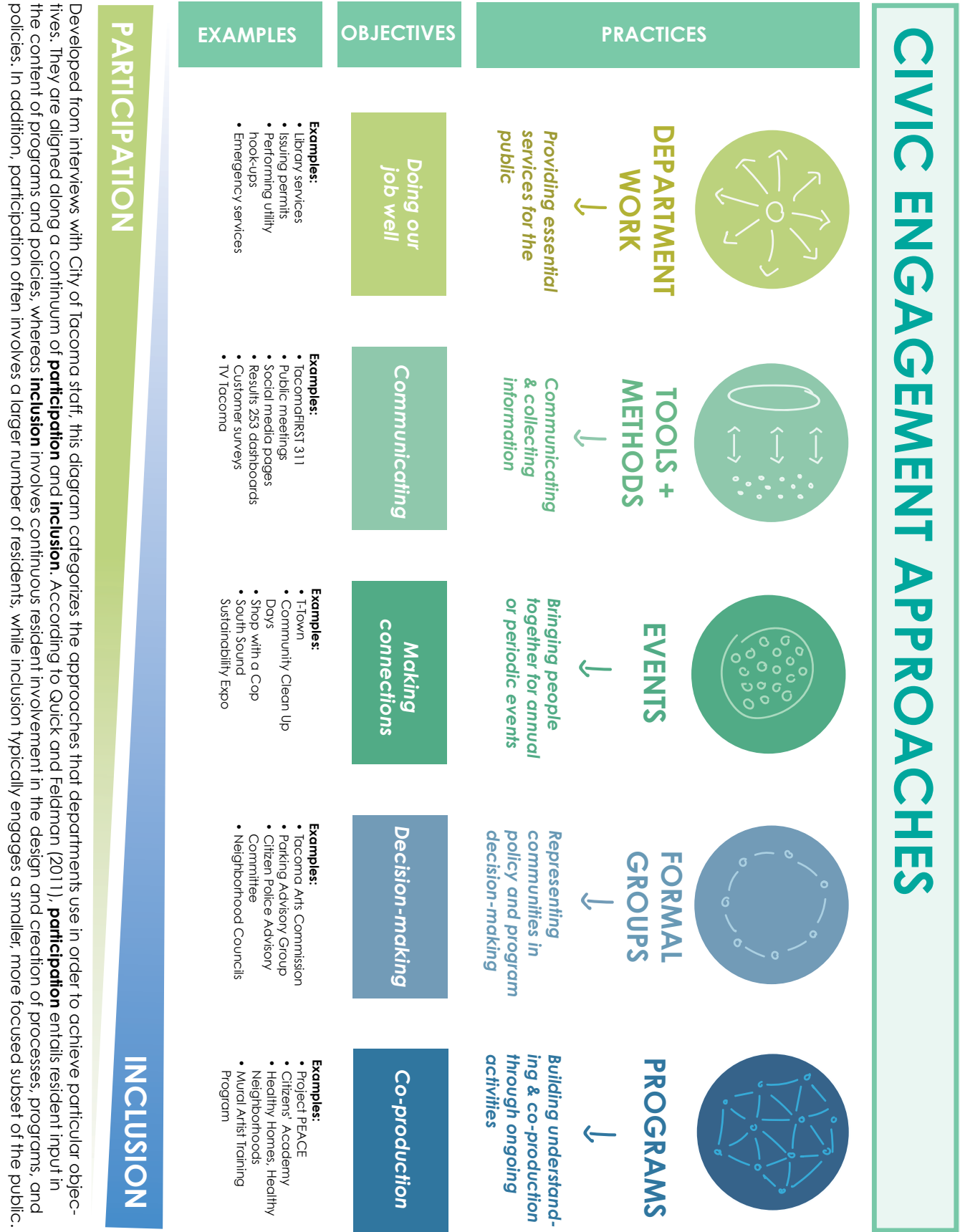
We recognize civic engagement as an ongoing **Accountability** to residents in all our work, and strive to make clear commitments and set realistic expectations around public participation, resident representation, community partnerships, and service delivery.

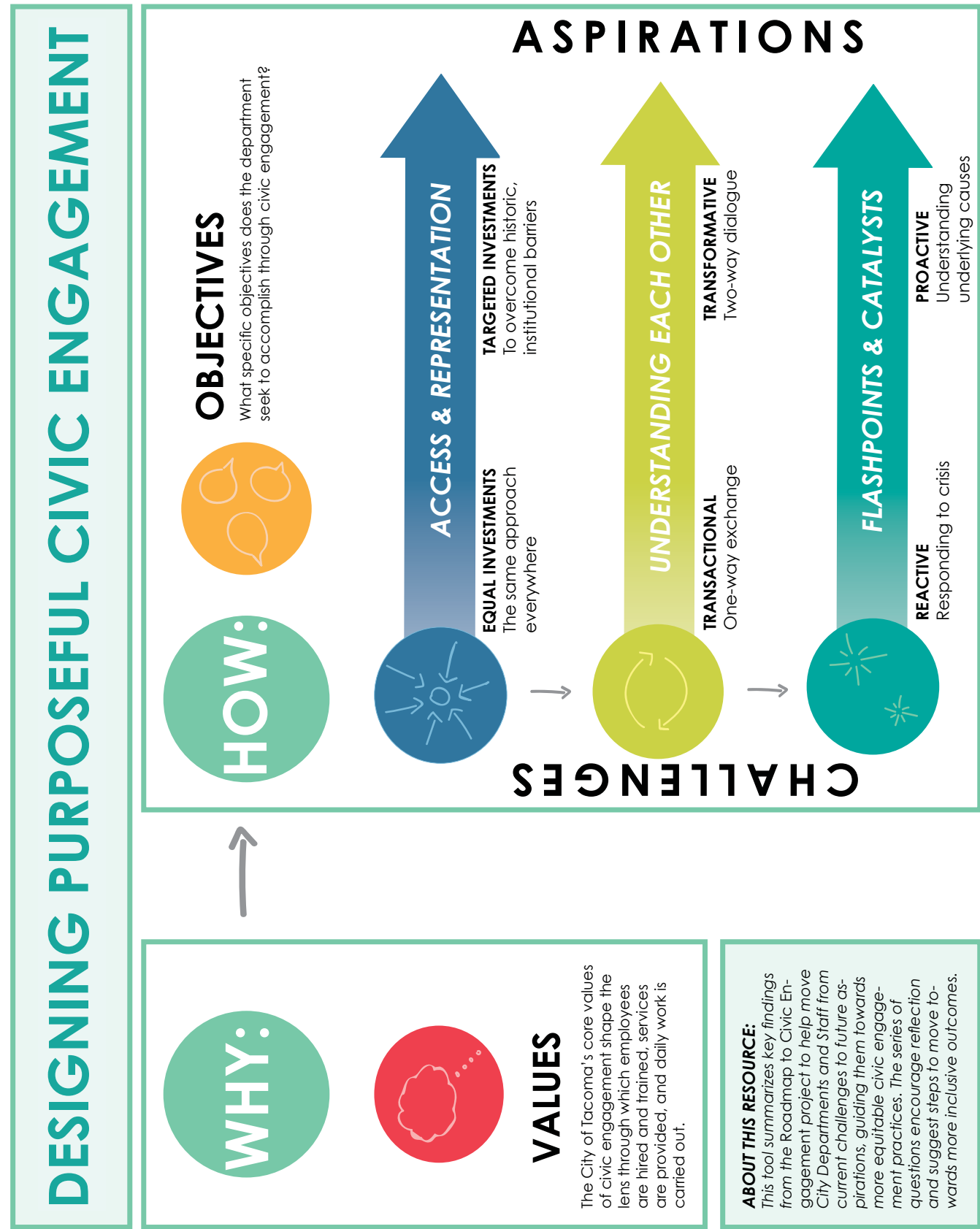
CORE VALUES

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

is connected with the four goals of Tacoma 2025:
Opportunity, Equity, Partnerships, and Accountability.

Appendix F
Civic Engagement Approaches





DESIGNING PURPOSEFUL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE: This tool summarizes key findings from the *Roadmap to Civic Engagement* project, supporting City departments and Staff from current challenges to future aspirations and guiding them towards more equitable civic engagement practices. These questions encourage reflection and suggest steps to move toward inclusive outcomes.

WHY: VALUES
How do department goals around civic engagement align with the Civic Engagement Value Statement? (See **Civic Engagement Statement of Core Values.**)

HOW: OBJECTIVES
What specific objectives does the department seek to accomplish through civic engagement?

- What do I need from the community?
- What does the community need from me?
- What is my promise to the community?
- What degree of citizen control is possible on this project?

(See **Civic Engagement Approaches Tool.**)

FROM CHALLENGES TO ASPIRATIONS

ACCESS & REPRESENTATION: The City struggles to have broad engagement in decision-making and delivery of services, possibly held back by inflexible systems and complex bureaucracy. Under-represented communities are often not heard, and staff say this discrepancy can skew the City's perspective of public understanding.
Guiding questions:

- How are marginalized communities impacted by your work and what do they have to gain or lose by interacting with the city?
- How can resources be targeted to reach communities where they are?
- How can the department prepare to receive and act on suggestions from under-represented communities? How will we respond when their suggestions fall outside of normal duties?

UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER: City staff perceive a lack of understanding about how the City functions, so resources are spent producing and distributing information, a one-way, transactional approach. A transformational approach emphasizes two-way dialogue and collaboration.
Guiding questions:

- What institutional policies and historic events have affected communities with respect to the work you do?
- How are outreach and communication materials tailored to specific communities? How have those been received?
- What opportunities does your department offer to open a two-way dialogue, allowing the community and city staff to build mutual understanding?
- How will you communicate with the public about how their input was used?

FLASHPOINTS & CATALYSTS: Flashpoints, or high levels of participation that are passionate or urgent in nature, can emerge surrounding controversial issues, causing the City to invest considerable energy on specific decisions. However, these moments can indicate important community needs and be catalysts for more meaningful engagement.
Guiding questions:

- How have the city's previous responses to crises impacted relationships and credibility with city residents?
- What are the underlying causes of flash-points and how can your department be proactive in addressing these?