Citizen Engagement Handbook for B.C. Government Employees

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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HIGHLIGHTS

Citizen Engagement is the process of inviting feedback from the public on our work. It helps us make better decisions by understanding what people want and consider important.

Citizen Engagement Requirements

Before starting, the Ministry must inform their Government Communications and Public Engagement (GCPE) Director and the Director of Citizen Engagement at GCPE. This is written into Core Policy, Section 22.3. This applies to all methods of public engagement, whether it is online or face-to-face, or both.

All B.C. government public engagement opportunities must be posted on govTogetherBC.

Managing communication with the public is an important role of GCPE. They can help manage messaging or issues, plan promotion and coordinate media. They also ensure that the project design meets corporate standards.

All public engagements must be branded as 'B.C. government' and This offer a consistent user experience. They must be easy to use and protect both citizen privacy and government security.

For online engagements, corporate software and technology must be used. Exceptions must first be approved by GCPE.

Hiring a Contractor to do Public Engagement

You must contact GCPE before hiring a contractor for public engagement services.

GCPE has a Corporate Supply Agreement (CAS) for this purpose. The CAS lists approved contractors that provide advice and support for public engagements. Ministries may use other contractors when there is rationale for their specific use. For example, they are subject matter experts or have worked on the project previously.

It is never too early in the process to reach out to the Citizen Engagement team for help. Contact the Citizen Engagement team at: CitizenEngagement@gov.bc.ca

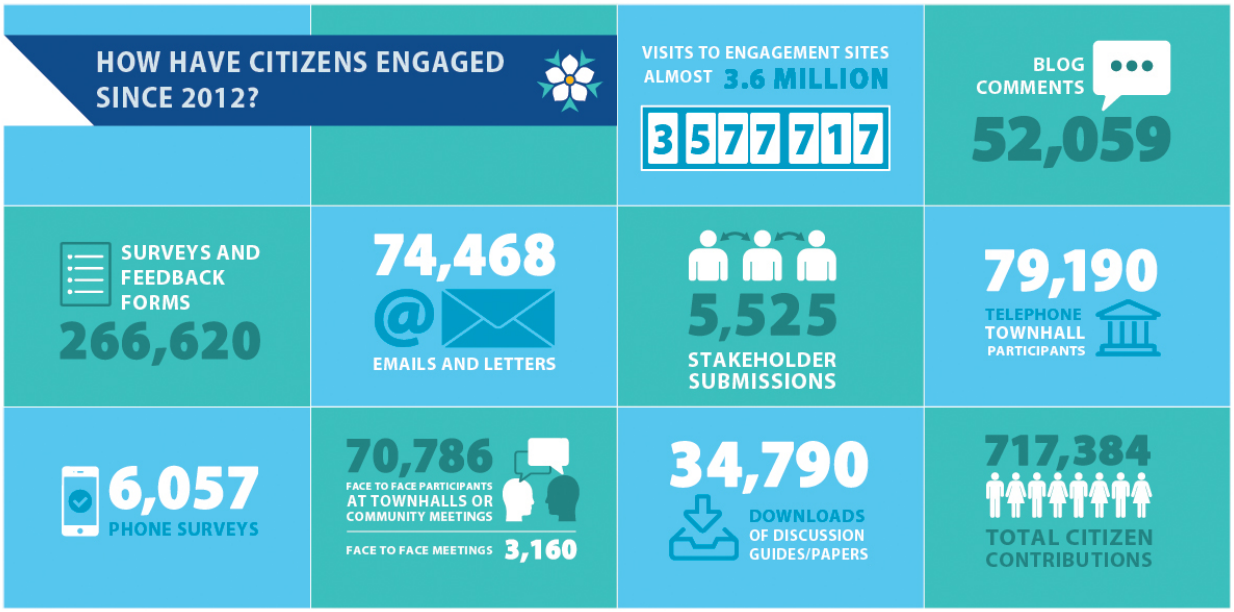
Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide direction to Government Communication and Public Engagement (GCPE) staff and B.C. public servants who are planning a citizen engagement project. The Citizen Engagement team will help to guide you through the process.

This document references many internal processes but may be useful to other governments and public engagement professionals.

A brief history

Since 2012, the B.C. government has talked to citizens about a variety of topics that impact their lives. As of October 2018, there have been more than 300 opportunities for the public to give. During this time we received 717,384 contributions from citizens through a variety of tools.



How have citizens engaged since 2012? Total citizen contributions were 717,384 with 52,059 blog comments, 266,620 surveys and feedback forms, 74,468 emails and letters, 5,525 stakeholder submissions, 79,190 telephone townhall participants, 6,057 phone surveys, 70,786 face-to-face participants at 3,160 face-to-face meetings, 34,790 downloads of discussion guides or papers, and nearly 3.6 million visits to engagement websites.

A full list of current and past engagements is available on govTogetherBC.

What are the stages of Citizen Engagement?

There are 4 stages to public engagement:

1. Pre-Engagement (Planning)
2. Active Engagement
3. Close Out
4. Archive

To get started contact the Citizen Engagement team at: CitizenEngagement@gov.bc.ca

Why engage?

- Citizens should have a say in decisions that affect them. Individuals are more likely to support outcomes when they have had a say in shaping them. Good public engagement gives people a sense of ownership over issues.
- We don't have all the answers. Addressing issues requires input from a lot of people to find positive long-term solutions.
- Listening to citizens helps us better understand peoples' interests and opinions. Knowing what's important to them helps us be more responsive and transparent.

Why do public engagement well?

Bad citizen engagement can create frustration in communities and negative public opinion about programs and policies. People want good services and decisions from their government, and they also want to be heard. By meeting those demands we can show:

- An openness to listening
- Support for change
- Informed decision-making

How do we engage?

By providing options of ways to take part, we can be more inclusive of diverse perspectives. Some of the tools that we use to gather feedback are:

- Face-to-face meetings, such as community meetings, workshops, open houses and townhalls.
- Feedback forms or surveys
- Online discussion forums
- Comments on draft documents
- Emails or letters
- Telephone calls or surveys
- Telephone townhalls
- Citizen panels/assemblies

PRE-ENGAGEMENT

Getting started

Ahead of the planning meetings, you must inform your Communications Shop (GCPE Shop) of your intent to engage the public. GCPE Shops are integral to planning communications activities and managing risks.

You should then contact CitizenEngagement@gov.bc.ca to initiate a first planning meeting, to discuss:

- **Commitment:** What commitment has been made to engage? What is the vision of your minister and/or executive.
- **Promise:** What is your promise to the public of what you will do with the information you gather?
- **Scope:** What is in and out of scope? Is it a regional or provincial project?
- **Timelines:** What are some key dates we need to consider?
- **Audience:** Who is your target audience? How will you know if you have reached them?
- **Outcome:** What will be done with the feedback? What will change as a result of your project? What kind of impacts might it have for individuals?

Following the planning meeting an engagement plan, tool options and a budget will be drafted.

How much does an engagement cost?

The Citizen Engagement team is cost recovery, which means that there is a charge for our services. The budget is determined after the planning meetings. Some of the factors that determine the cost of your project are:

- The complexity
- The length of the engagement
- The tools that will be used
- The support required from the Citizen Engagement team
- The use of contractors

The planning phase helps to shape the project and establish a budget based on your project's needs. The Team can also provide you with some examples in advance of comparable projects and costs.

Project Approvals

Depending on the project, there may be several levels of approvals needed. These could range from Ministry Executive, cross-government committees, the Deputy Minister's Committees, GCPE Executive, Cabinet Committees, Caucus, Minister's Office, Parliamentary Secretary's Office to the Premier's Office.

It is important to determine which approvals you will need ahead of time. Time to get your approvals should be built into your project plan and estimated timeline.

Staffing

Public engagements involve a lot of work at each stage of the project. Having enough staff is key to making your project runs smoothly. Do you have any staff that can help with administrative tasks? Provide subject-matter-expertise? Coordinate meetings? Help do analysis? Read comments? Theme ideas? Depending on the size of your project you may need between two to 10 ministry staff on your team.

Roles

The Citizen Engagement team is mandated to be involved in all public engagement projects as outlined in Communications and Public Engagement Core Policy. It might be helpful to understand that Government Communications and Public Engagement (GCPE) has several teams all with different roles.

The **Citizen Engagement team** in most cases will:

- Lead and help design the engagement;
- Create the project plan;
- Negotiate the budget and partnership agreement;
- Manage access to vendors available through GCPE's Corporate Supply Agreement;
- Get approval from the Joint Working Group on URLs;
- Help to gather approvals;
- Get sign off on the privacy impact assessment;
- Set up the engagement tool (for example online discussion, feedback form etc.);
- Liaise with GCPE graphics department, social media team and the marketing department;
- Post and tweet through govTogetherBC;
- Support ministers with social media content (if needed or in tandem with GCPE Shops);
- Moderate comments from citizens and export data for review;
- Provide weekly engagement results;
- Prepare a final theme report and do a preliminary analysis on the comments received;
- Close and archive the web content;
- Prepare the Lessons Learned.

The **Ministry GCPE Communications Shop** will have an integral role in a public engagement:

- Take part in planning meetings as needed;
- Coordinate approvals from the Minister’s Office;
- Find opportunities to promote the engagement;
- Lead and arrange any media events and news releases;
- Identify risks and issues, and manage responses to the media;
- Sign-off on all public facing materials related to the engagement, including website content;

- Sign-off the engagement plan;
- Take part in the Lessons Learned.

The **GCPE Graphics Department** will prepare the graphics, infographics and social media graphics for the engagement in coordination with the Citizen Engagement team, and Ministry GCPE shops.

The **GCPE Marketing team** will be involved in an engagement if there is any paid advertising (print, radio or social media).

The **GCPE Social Media team** are informed of all engagements so that they can help to promote through government social media channels.

The **Ministry's** role in a public engagement includes:

- Participate in planning meetings;
- Secure budget and resources;
- Provide subject matter expertise;
- Identify audience and stakeholders;
- Assist to facilitate approvals from the Minister and Minister's Office;
- Identify proactive communications opportunities to promote;
- Identify risks and issues;
- Feedback analysis;
- Policy development and implementation.
- Assist to draft publicly facing materials related to the engagement, including web site content;
- Assist to manage any issues that come up during the engagement; and
- Participate in the Lessons Learned.

Timelines

Having a clear, reasonable timeline is one of the keys to a successful public engagement. The Citizen Engagement team asks that you approach us four to six weeks ahead of going live with your project. This allows us time to prepare and plan appropriately. Engagements should be open to the public for no less than one month and no more than eight weeks. You also need to block off two to four weeks after your engagement for analysis and report writing. Timelines need to state when the results of the engagement will be reported back to the public.

Some things to consider:

1. What is the overall timeframe for the project? When do you need the feedback by?
2. Are there any key dates or deadlines that need to be considered?
3. At what stage of your project are you speaking to the public?
4. Will there be more than one phase of public engagement?
5. Do you need to travel for the project? Will weather be a factor?
6. Are you engaging during vacation periods?
7. Is your audience busy seasonally? When is a good time for them?

Defining the purpose

Defining the purpose is the first step in the planning process. You need to consider:

1) Who has responsibility for the outcomes? (For example: Your minister? Your branch? A task force?)
2) Why do you need public input?
3) How will you use the information you gather?
4) Who will it affect?
5) What is your timeline?

Understanding the purpose will help decision-making and approvals throughout the project. It allows for clear communication with your audience and helps avoid misunderstandings. One way to define your purpose is to use the following sentence as a guide:

[**Person/Entity**] is [**understand/learn about/seeking input**] from [**audience**] about [**the key issue**] so that they can [**achieve a goal or take an action**] by [**date/season**].

The Strategic Framework prepared by SFU's Centre for Dialogue is also helpful in defining your purpose.

Who is your audience?

Knowing who cares about your project helps you reach those who want to be involved. Plan for your audience to include different interests and opinions. Your audience is both people and organizations: how will you reach them?

What motivations do they have to engage with you? An opportunity to help government improve is not enough. People choose to engage when the topic aligns with their own personal interests, such as:

1. They have an interest in the topic.
2. It affects their lives.
3. They have a story to share.
4. They have skills or technical knowledge.
5. They want to be part of something meaningful that is bigger than themselves.

Some questions to help define your audience:

1. Who are the people who care about this issue? Think beyond the people or groups you hear from regularly.
2. What is their perspective?
3. Have you engaged with them before? On what? How? What did you learn?
4. How do you think your audience prefers to be engaged?

5. Who are your champions? Who can help you promote your project?

Communications Plan

Your GCPE Communications Shop will build a communication plan for your project. This includes the planning and timeline for using media, advertising and social media. It will also identify any events, news releases and media related to your project, such as:

- If there will be an event to launch the engagement.
- A News Release announcing the engagement.
- If/when there will be any media by the minister.

Signing a Partnership Agreement

The Citizen Engagement team will draft a Partnership Agreement between the ministry and our team. The agreement is a contract which outlines the:

- Scope
- Deliverables
- Timelines
- Costs
- Roles and Responsibilities

GCPE's Project Management Office and Financial Services Branch will coordinate the quarterly billing with ministries. Journal vouchers will be sent to the partner ministry requesting payment.

Managing Privacy

Public engagement always involves the collection of opinions and personal information from citizens. For that reason, the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* plays a significant role.

The Citizen Engagement team will draft a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA), which is a legislative requirement for each engagement. PIAs check and manage issues to ensure compliance with privacy protection rules and responsibilities.

Identifying and Managing Risks

Your ministry's GCPE Communications Director will help you manage and mitigate risks from public relations issues to timelines. However, before you start, you should consider the following:

- Who are your most active critics? How do they make complaints currently? What do they say? Are there possibilities for protests or online petitions?
- How will the media report on this project? Will they report it?
- How will people find out about the engagement? What will you do if no one participates?
- What will we do if the comments are very negative?
- What will we do if someone takes over the conversation?
- Are your formal stakeholders supportive? How do you engage with them currently? Will they have a specific role in the process? Do they need to find out ahead of time?
- Who in your ministry needs to know about the issues? How will we monitor them?

Engagement Tools

The Citizen Engagement team will help you determine the right tools to use based on your project. Here are some examples of different tools and their benefits:

Face-to-Face meetings

- People feel more involved when they hear from and speak to the people who are making decisions.
- When using only online tools you lose the information we get from body language and tone of voice.
- Without distractions, individuals are more engaged in the conversation.

What you'll need

- Easy to find information about the events. (website, posters, etc.)
- Enough staff to help facilitate and coordinate meetings and logistics.
- A way to record citizen comments at the meetings.
- Someone to coordinate the materials and to record how many attendees there were.

Some useful documents to help plan face-to-face meetings:

- Public Deliberation: The Manager's Guide to Public Engagement
- Reinventing Public Consultation
- A Guide to Hosting Successful Face to Face meetings

Online discussion forums

- Provides an easy to use platform for two-way conversation between government and citizens, as well as among citizens.
- Follows a formal Moderation Policy and Terms of Use to ensure thoughtful and polite dialogue.
- Easy to export comments for analysis.

What you'll need

- Moderators trained by the Citizen Engagement team.

Online feedback forms and surveys

- Easy to use and allows participants to respond privately.
- Well-designed questions can provide you with good detail to better understand the issues.
- Collects both qualitative and quantitative data that can be exported easily for analysis.

What you'll need

- To develop good questions with the support of the Citizen Engagement team.

Document commenting

- Provides an easy to use platform where individuals can comment on documents paragraph by paragraph.

- Follows Moderation Policy and Terms of Use to ensure thoughtful and polite dialogue.
- Easy to export comments for analysis.

What you'll need

- Moderators trained by the Citizen Engagement team.

Telephone townhalls

- Allows callers to ask questions directly to a decision-maker.

- Moderated to ensure thoughtful and polite dialogue.

What you'll need

- The main speaker (ie: the Minister)
- Panelists (Who will answer technical questions? ie: policy experts)
- Question selector: someone to rank and queue the questions.
- All will be trained by the contractor.

For examples of a current public engagement, please email: CitizenEngagement@gov.bc.ca

Accessibility

All British Columbians have a right to access their government. That means giving a group that represents a small percentage of the total population equal importance as the larger population. Accessibility means making it easier for everyone to participate.

Accessibility covers a wide range of needs and isn't always visible, such as: dyslexia, arthritis and low-literacy. For that reason, we have created some checklists to use when planning different aspects of your engagement. Please see Appendix A for guidelines on hosting an accessible engagement.

Always make sure to plan ahead and provide contractors with a copy of these guidelines.

Setting up an engagement website

Determining your URL

Each public engagement has a unique URL. The URL aligns your project with technical data, branding and social media. It cannot contain acronyms. When naming your project, think how a person might search for your project and what key words they may use.

To secure your URL, a Web Property Application Form needs to be completed and approved. The Citizen Engagement team will navigate the approval with the GCPE Joint Delivery Working Group. Once approved, we will build a test site.

The structure of the URL is always: engage.gov.bc.ca/*projectname*

Graphics

The GCPE Graphics team handles all graphic material for the B.C. government. Using corporate guidelines, they design and produce all types of media. Before you use any graphics on your project, they must first design or approve the material. As with all aspects of your project, final approval on the chosen graphics must come from your GCPE Communications Shop. To meet accessibility guidelines, all graphics used must include alt text.

The Citizen Engagement team will collaborate with the Graphics team on your project. Your project may need:

- A website banner
- Project timelines
- Advertising material such as posters or business cards
- Infographics

Website navigation

Through user testing, we have established best practices for website navigation. This includes the top navigation menu, sub-menus and content flow. All B.C. government public engagement projects follow the same standard navigation for a consistent experience.

Writing web content

Writing web content is the responsibility of the ministry and the Communication Shop. The Citizen Engagement team will provide you with a template to help you structure the content.

It needs to be clear to the public what is happening to their comments and when and how they will find out about results.

According to Statistics Canada, 45 percent of British Columbians read at a Literacy Level 2 or below. This means they have difficulty doing things like reading a newspaper or using instruction manuals. As such, it is very important that you write in plain language. Not sure how? Try checking your content using the Hemingway Editor, you should be aiming for a reading level between Grade six to eight.

The B.C. government has guidelines for developing, writing and formatting web content:

- Content Development Guide
- Plain Language Guide
- Web Style Guide
- Web Property Governance Standards

Once drafted, your GCPE Communications Shop must approve the content for the engagement website.

Social Media

Social media is a great way to get the word out about your project. The B.C. Government has several channels that will help to promote public engagements such as @BCGov News and @govTogetherBC.

For your project, your GCPE Communications Shop will lead the approach to social media. They will help to guide and direct you on the best strategies based on your project's needs. They will also determine if and how your minister wants to be involved. In some cases, ministers will tweet or Facebook about events or opportunities to participate.

Guidelines for Government Use of Social Media by B.C. Public Servants

Advertising

The Citizen Engagement team will coordinate with your GCPE Communications Shop and the GCPE Marketing team to determine if advertisements are appropriate for your project. Some examples of advertising include print or radio.

Planning for results

Every B.C. government citizen engagement project must include a public report back. Here are some ideas of how you can do that throughout your project:

- **Immediate feedback**: Auto-generate thank you notes to participants that leave a comment or complete a survey.
- **Short-term feedback**: Email participants with updates on the open project. Write blog posts about what you have heard so far. Report back after face-to-face meetings.
- **Long-term feedback:** Close the loop! Let participants know how their ideas helped. Write a report, send email updates, make an infographic or a video, make phone calls. There are lots of creative ways to tell people what is happening, find a way that works for your project.

Feedback Analysis

Ahead of your project it is important to consider what type of data your ministry needs to collect. Do you need more numeric information, such as: 800 out of 1,000 people said they agree with the suggested changes.

Or do you need to know more stories, such as: Jane commented that there needs to be an easier way for her elderly mother to access this service.

Once you have decided on the type of information you need, you need to decide who will do the analysis. This may be resourced by your team, the Citizen Engagement team, a contractor, or a mix of all three. When deciding, it's crucial to consider your timeline, budget and resource availability.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

An active engagement is the time between the launch and close of a project, meaning it is open for input from the public.

govTogetherBC

govTogetherBC records all B.C. government public engagement projects both past and present. It allows users to browse open and closed projects by keyword, topic, region or status. The results from closed projects are updated on an ongoing basis.

govTogetherBC's Twitter account highlights open engagements to its followers. Retweeting tweets about your project will help reach a larger, more diverse audience.

Moderation

Many engagements feature the use of an online discussion forum. To ensure that the conversation is respectful we use a 12-point Moderation Policy & Terms of Use. These are legal documents and may not be edited or altered. We post them to each website that hosts an online discussion.

A moderator reviews and approves each comment against these policies before they are made visible to the public. If a comment is not approved but is relevant to the conversation, the writer is contacted to let them know why so that they can resubmit. We never edit comments.

If you expect a large volume of feedback, you will need a moderation team. This team includes staff from both the ministry and the Citizen Engagement team. While you aren't expected to moderate 24/7, there may be evening and weekend shifts if a project is particularly busy.

Invitations

Throughout a public engagement project there needs to be a constant push to reach your audience. One way to do this is by reaching out to your champions and stakeholders. Stakeholders share a common audience with you and may be able to help you reach out to more people and regions.

Are your stakeholders actively participating in and/or promoting your engagement? If not, you may need to change your approach or use new tools. Consider sending them a letter or an email reminding them about your engagement.

Analytics

The Citizen Engagement team collects data during the active project, and provides weekly reports that track the:

- Number of visitors to the website
- Number of comments and emails received
- Average time on spent on the website & the top visited pages
- Top referring sites
- Number of face-to-face meetings held & number of participants
- A media scan

Some data, such as number of emails received, may be tracked by your ministry staff.

POST ENGAGEMENT

Closing, Reporting and Archiving

What you do after your engagement closes is as important as the engagement itself. People want to know what you did with their feedback:

- What were the results?
- What did you hear?
- What is happening next?
- What is the timeline?
- How will they find out about any changes?

Closing doesn't just mean shutting down your website and walking away. You need to report back to the public on the results from your project. You also need to record and archive your work in line with government record keeping standards.

govTogetherBC

After closing, a final summary including details of what will happen next are recorded in a Results Page on govTogetherBC. Results pages outline the public engagement process and record results, so people can follow the progress of a project.

It is important for ministries to check in regularly to keep the information on their project's results page current.

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned sessions help us build better services. Understanding what worked and what could improve, guides us in designing new projects.

After your project closes, the Citizen Engagement team may contact you to conduct a lessons learned session. Here are some questions we may ask:

- Did you understand your role and the roles of others during the process?
- Did you reach the audience you needed to? Were there any difficulties?
- How did you engage interested stakeholders?
- What would have worked better?
- What surprised you?
- What went well?
- What didn't go well?
- What advice would you offer to other ministries considering a public engagement?

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Checklists

Pre-Engagement: Checklist

- ☐ **Resources**: Ministry staff are available to help with administrative tasks and to act as subject matter experts. They must be available for the duration of the project.
- ☐ A **timeline** for approvals and project milestones has been drafted.
- ☐ A plan for how to **report back** to participants has been made.
- ☐ **The tools** you are using to engage the public are approved by the Citizen Engagement team to ensure B.C. government privacy requirements.
- ☐ Signed **Partnership Agreement:** outlines the fees and roles of each partner.
  Approvers: Director of Citizen Engagement and ministry expense authority.
- ☐ Approved **Engagement Plan**: outlines decision-making, planning and purpose statement.
  Approvers: Citizen Engagement team, ministry GCPE Director and ministry representative.
- ☐ A **Privacy Impact Assessment** has been completed.
- ☐ An **Outreach Plan** has been written to help reach your audience.
- ☐ **Written content is in plain language.** Your content must be clear and easy to read. See the Plain Language Guide for more information. Try checking your content using the Hemingway Editor, you should be aiming for a reading level between Grade six and eight.
- ☐ **Accessibility:** Your project reflects the diverse needs of British Columbians.
- ☐ Your **graphics and images** have been approved by GCPE Graphics.
- ☐ Your **engagement website content** has been approved by both the Citizen Engagement team and your GCPE Communications Shop.
- ☐ **Moderators** have been trained by the Citizen Engagement team (if applicable).
- ☐ The engagement is posted to **govTogetherBC.**
- ☐ (After closing) A **results page** is posted on govTogetherBC outlining what happened during the engagement and what is happening next. See some examples of results here.

Active Engagement: Checklist

- ☐ Web Trends are active.
- ☐ A News Release or Information Bulletin about the engagement is out. (if applicable)
- ☐ The engagement information is posted to govTogetherBC.
- ☐ A launch day report has been written.
- ☐ Moderators have been trained. (if applicable)
- ☐ A moderation schedule is in place. (if applicable)
- ☐ The stakeholders are informed and have resources to help to get the word out.
- ☐ An outreach plan is in place for reaching public participants.
- ☐ Weekly trending reports are being written.
- ☐ Government social media channels are used to promote the engagement. (govTogether, BCGov)
- ☐ Comments are being analyzed for themes and ideas.
- ☐ Weekly project status meetings occur weekly while the engagement is open, to check in and make any changes needed.

Post- Engagement: Checklist

- ☐ Site content is updated to reflect that the project is closed.
- ☐ govTogetherBC is updated to reflect that the project is closed.
- ☐ Analysis is complete.
- ☐ The report is complete.
- ☐ The results are posted to the site when the analysis is complete.
- ☐ The engagement website is closed within 6 months of posting the results.
- ☐ The comments are archived according to government records policy.
- ☐ Lessons learned are done.

Web Accessibility Checklist

- ☐ Make sure your site is accessible by keyboard.
- ☐ Structure your content.
- ☐ Present content in a meaningful order.
- ☐ Use informative page titles and headings.
- ☐ Use headings to break up text on pages.
- ☐ Explain all abbreviations and acronyms.
- ☐ Ensure it is clear where hyperlinks will take the user.
- ☐ Underline hyperlinks. Don’t use colour alone to indicate a link.
- ☐ Don’t rely on solely on colour (ie.: red to indicate an error).
- ☐ Clearly identify input errors.
- ☐ Provide text alternatives for non-text content (such as a graphic timelines).

- ☐ Only use text in graphics when the content is also available in text format.
- ☐ Use captions for videos with audio.
- ☐ Don't play audio automatically.
- ☐ Use approved colour contrasts.
- ☐ Use appropriate headings.
- ☐ Understand how punctuation impacts accessibility.
- ☐ Use plain language: you should be aiming for writing at a reading level between Grade six and eight.
- ☐ Don't use time limits.
- ☐ No content should flash more than 3 times per second.
- ☐ There are at least two ways to find each page on the site (ie: table of contents, site search)

Event Accessibility Checklist

- ☐ Provide information on your event at least 4 weeks in advance so people can plan their participation in your event (transportation, supports, assistants, etc.).
- ☐ Accessible parking: is there any? Where is it?
- ☐ Accessible transportation: is the venue close to public transportation? Where are the drop-off areas? Allow enough time for attendees to arrange HandyDART transportation and accompanying assistants. HandyDART users require at least a week's notice to book a trip. It can take between one to three weeks for people to arrange for assistants.
- ☐ Make sure the accessible paths to the entrance are well-marked.
- ☐ Place signage at eye level for people in mobility devices.
- ☐ Are there any barriers along the outdoor or indoor paths? The path should be one-meter wide to allow for easy travel for wheelchairs, walkers and strollers.
- ☐ Are the surfaces firm, stable and level? Avoid loose mats and thick carpets.
- ☐ Are there automatic doors available? If not, can you prop the doors open wide enough?
- ☐ Are the washrooms wheelchair accessible? Do they have a grab bar and low sink, soap & paper towel?
- ☐ Is there good lighting? Lighting helps people who are deaf or hard of hearing read lips or use sign language.
- ☐ Don't use flashing lights.
- ☐ Does the room have good acoustics? Echoes can create barriers for those who are hard of hearing.
- ☐ Clear floor space: is there enough space for people using mobility aids to move around the room easily. (an aisle width of one meter or more is recommended)
- ☐ Cover electrical cables or cords to avoid tripping hazards.
- ☐ If you are providing food: be sure to place food, drinks and utensils in easy to reach places for those in wheelchairs. Bendable straws and cups with handles are easier to grasp for those with limited use of their hands.
- ☐ Clearly label food for those with dietary requirements.
- ☐ Provide water; help pour it when needed.

- ☐ If you know ahead of time, reserve seating for people who need it. For example: for people who rely on lip reading it is better to sit closer to the presenter.
- ☐ Provide sufficient places with no seats for people with mobility devices.
- ☐ Put materials within easy reach.
- ☐ Use microphones, speak slowly and describe images that are projected on the screen.
- ☐ Provide real-time captioning. Ensure the site has the technology to support this.
- ☐ Are you using an ASL interpreter? (Allow at least two weeks ahead of your event to arrange for an on-site interpreter.)
- ☐ If an event is mostly standing, provide seating for those who can't stand for long periods.
- ☐ If a guest has a service animal, have a water bowl on hand for when the animal is thirsty.
- ☐ Consider providing childcare or children's activities at meetings.
- ☐ Consider language translation.
- ☐ Know the emergency evacuation procedures for all individuals including people with low mobility.
- ☐ Designate a person trained on accessibility issues as a point person.
- ☐ Provide orientation to all staff and volunteers on accessibility features.
- ☐ After using a venue, rate how it was for accessibility, this way we can track which ones worked well and which ones didn't.
- ☐ Ask for feedback from participants.

Invitation and Promotion Checklist

- ✓ Provide contact information.
- ✓ Provide information on accessibility features. For example: What do you need to fully participate? If you have any accessibility or dietary restrictions, please contact [contact info] by [date].
- ✓ Provide information on where to people can be dropped off and where to find accessible parking.
- ✓ Use at least 12-point sans serif fonts such as Arial or Verdana for print materials.
- ✓ Use plain language: simple words and short sentences
- ✓ Use high contrast colours.
- ✓ Advertise your event broadly using multiple methods to reach different audiences.

Sample community meeting invitation from the City of Vancouver:

CITY OF VANCOUVER

VANCOUVER

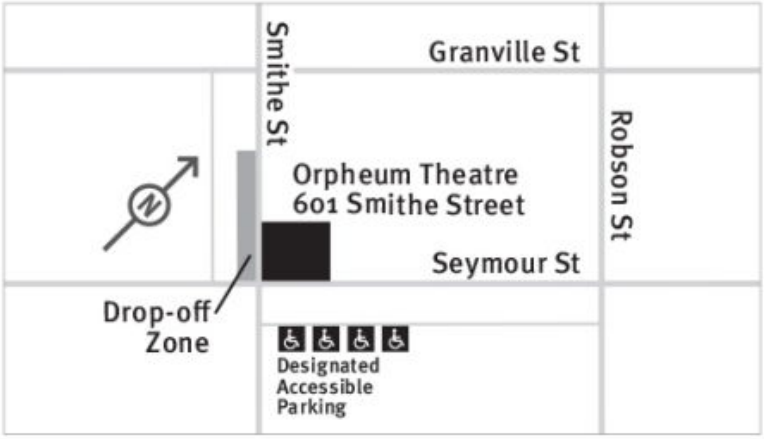
AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Important information

If you require any assistance related to accessibility or dietary restrictions, please include this information in your RSVP or contact [staff] at [email address] or [phone number].

Drop-off zone and designated accessible parking are available at specially marked meters (see the map below).

We encourage everyone to help maintain a scent-free environment.



This example meets all the criteria in the checklist, as it:

- ✓ Provides contact information
- ✓ Provides information on accessibility features
- ✓ Provides information on where people can be dropped off and where to find accessible parking
- ✓ Uses at least 12-point sans serif fonts such as Arial or Verdana for print materials
- ✓ Uses plain language: simple words and short sentences

APPENDIX B: Accessible Engagement Guidelines

Online Engagement

Screen readers

Screen readers don't always read exactly what is on the screen. Sometimes that is a good thing, but sometimes it leaves the user unable to understand the content. Punctuation is a good example: It won't read out the word 'comma', instead it will pause. However, the way screen readers treat punctuation is inconsistent from one software to the next. It helps to understand what it may read vs what it won't.

- Characters that all screen readers read out loud: @ (the at symbol), & (ampersand), / (slash), © (copyright), ® registered, ™ (trademark), • (bullet), $ (dollar), % (percent), ° (degrees)
- Some symbols that aren't read by all screen readers that can impact meaning: * (asterisks), + (plus), = (equals), "" (quotation marks), () (parentheses), - (dash, minus)

Plain Language

According to Statistics Canada, 45 percent of British Columbians read at a Literacy Level 2 or below. This means they have difficulty doing things like reading a newspaper or using instruction manuals. To make your content accessible to the public you need to use short, simple words and sentences. Avoid jargon. Explain complicated terms. Learn more about government standards for plain language.

Headings

Headings give structure to a web page. Headings are ranked, for example: Heading 1 is like a book title and Heading 2 is like a chapter title. Headings increase a page's usability by making it easier to scan. Even sighted people don't read full pages from top to bottom. Instead, one's eyes flow down the page looking for relevant keywords, links and headings. Screen readers read headings like a table of contents to allow the user to understand what is on the page. Headings also improve search engine optimization (SEO). SEO relies on word matches from headings, page content and metadata.

Visual Content

Graphics are a great way to engage your audience. For many, creating visual content is more accessible than written content. This often true for: those with learning disabilities, language barriers or Attention Deficit Disorder. Any graphic or image that contains important information, such as infographics or timelines, must also include alternate text.

Videos should not auto-play and should be controlled using a keyboard (as well as a mouse). All videos must have options for closed-captioning or transcripts for the hearing impaired.

Hyperlinks

Sighted users scan pages for linked text, screen readers do the same. As a result, screen readers often do not have the context ahead of the link. To avoid the frustration this can cause, link text which properly explains where it goes. For example:

- Don't say: "Click here to read the intentions paper." Instead say: "To learn more, read the Intentions Paper."

Hyperlinks must be underlined. For many people, it is difficult to notice a hyperlink without the visual cue.

Forms

Users need to understand what is required and what is not in a form. Required fields are often noted using an asterisk, which some screen readers won't read it out. Visual cues are important for sighted users. But to make sure it is read as required by a screen reader you need to add ARIA required="true", and ARIA required="false" for optional fields.

If there are any errors or missed fields, an alert should immediately inform the user of the error and its location. Once the form is complete, users need to receive a message confirming their submission.

Other

- Give users enough time to complete an action. Don't rush them or set impractical timelines.
- Explain what will happen after they participate. What are the next steps? What are the timelines?
- Provide options for how people can communicate with you.
- Design with mobile in mind. Make sure any graphics or images resize automatically.

APPENDIX C: A Strategic Framework for Public Engagement

SFU
MORRIS J. WOSK CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE

Courtesy of the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

View an online version of SFU Centre for Dialogue's strategic framework

1. What is the topic of Engagement?

- What do we need to engage?
- What questions does the public want to address?
- What is on or off the table?
- What are the risks of not engaging?
- What criteria will we use to make a decision?

2. What are we trying to achieve?

- Raising awareness & education
- Transforming conflicts
- Exploring ideas & information
- Contributing to decision-making
- Mobilizing collective action

3. How will our decisions affect communities?

- Who is affected?
- What is the degree of impact for each group?

4. What level of engagement are we promising the public? (IAP2 spectrum)

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
"We will keep you informed."	"We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals."	"We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision."	"We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible."	"We will implement what you decide."

5. What is the reach of this engagement initiative?

- How far and wide should the reach of engagement be?
- What are the budget and timeline for engagement?

6. How will we follow through?

- How will we report back on what we heard and how the public's input was used in making a decision?
- How will we evaluate the engagement and report on the results of the evaluation?

Other useful resources curtesy of Simon Fraser Centre for Dialogue:

- ✓ The 8 Characteristics of Highly Effective Public Engagement handout proposes key considerations and best practices for public engagement initiatives.
- ✓ SFU Centre for Dialogue Citizen Dialogues on Canada's Energy Future.
- ✓ The Inclusion in Open Government: Key Learnings and Strategies report was produced for the federal Open Government Team based on the Centre's original research.