

# **DRAFT City of Cincinnati Community Engagement Plan and Policy**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The City of Cincinnati is dedicated to engaging with members of the public to drive collaboration, trust, and transparency. We recognize that community members hold a vast level of knowledge that can enhance our mission and vision. We are devoted to providing a thoughtful and engaged approach to issues that are critical to community members and will commit resources to improving and enhancing engagement practices. The City of Cincinnati has an unwavering commitment to improving the quality of life for all community members and a responsibility to equitably interact with the public. Every agency in the City of Cincinnati will have the restoration of equity as part of the decision-making process. The City of Cincinnati will be cognizant of barriers and power structures inhibiting access to government and will be intentional about evaluating practices used to bolster equity through engagement.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Plan and Policy is to embrace the directive of the Cincinnati City Council. It will establish a framework for clear and inclusive communication with the community, address historical disparities, and work in harmony with AR69 and the guidance provided by Ordinance number 0358-2021. Through this regulation, a comprehensive city-wide engagement policy will be put into action, strengthened by a user-friendly employee guide outlining optimal approaches and benchmarks for achievement, alongside dedicated employee training initiatives. This policy will guide existing engagement regulations set forth by the City Manager's Office seen in Exhibit One.

## **VISION**

To be a thriving Cincinnati where all voices are empowered and engaged in shaping our shared future through transparency, collaboration, and access.

## **MISSION**

To have a well-organized and cohesive approach to equitable engagement practices, that strengthens the culture of community engagement in Cincinnati.

## **GOALS**

- We will embed diversity and inclusionary goals into community engagement practices.
- We will increase trust and transparency in city government and outline clear ways for community members to access local government.
- We will develop a proactive, equitable process for engaging with community members.
- We will strengthen relationships between city employees and the public.

## Recognizing History

We recognize that historical context is crucial to championing community engagement efforts. City leaders and staff will be provided with opportunities to expand their awareness of past policies and practices that have contributed to inequities in communities and impacted trust-building between community members and city government.

## Setting Expectations

We strive to create a collaborative and inclusive community engagement process that ensures projects are developed with the best interests of the community in mind, while also fostering positive relationships among all stakeholders. The following expectations will be carried out by all city staff, developers/applicants, and community members.

### Staff Expectations

- **Welcoming Attitude:** Our city staff will remain positive and friendly in efforts to ensure the satisfaction of community members and stakeholders. We will strive to make sure each person who interacts with the city receives equal, respectful treatment.
- **Transparency:** All city staff members will be transparent in all communications and interactions with community members and stakeholders. This includes providing accurate information, sharing project updates, and openly addressing concerns and questions.
- **Accessibility:** Staff members will be accessible and approachable to all stakeholders. Staff will respond to inquiries in an appropriate timeframe. Staff will foster a positive environment for all community stakeholders to engage.
- **Inclusivity:** We value diverse perspectives. City staff will actively seek input from all segments of the community, ensuring that underrepresented voices are heard and considered.
- **Accountability:** City staff members will take ownership of their roles in community engagement, meeting deadlines, and delivering on commitments.

### Developer/Applicant Expectations

- **Welcoming Attitude:** Developers/Applicants will treat all community members and stakeholders with dignity and respect. Developers/Applicants will actively seek to reduce/eliminate any potential barriers their project may cause. As unplanned delays and timeline changes are common, developers/applicants will effectively communicate these changes to those who may be directly impacted.
- **Transparency:** Developers/Applicants are expected to provide clear and accurate information about their projects to the community/stakeholders and city staff. Any changes or updates to plans should be

promptly communicated in a timely manner that allows time and space for the community to respond before a final decision is made.

- **Accessibility:** Developers/Applicants will provide appropriate resources to community members and stakeholders who are interested in learning more about current/future projects. We encourage Developers/Applicants to plan community engagement opportunities with accessibility in mind and make any appropriate accommodations within reason.
- **Inclusivity:** Developers/Applicants will actively seek input from community members and stakeholders. Developers/Applicants will demonstrate a willingness to incorporate reasonable feedback into their project plans.
- **Accountability:** Developers will develop strategies to address potential community concerns, such as but not limited to traffic management, safety, or environmental impacts. Developers/Applicants will adhere to all local regulations and zoning requirements and will work in collaboration with relevant authorities to obtain necessary permits.

### **Community Member Expectations**

- **Welcoming Attitude:** We expect and will not accept anything less than respectful and constructive communication from all community members. Disagreements are natural, but they should be expressed in a civil and respectful manner. Otherwise, City employees have the right to refuse to engage any further.
- **Transparency:** We value the lived experiences of all community members and stakeholders. We encourage community members to give honest feedback, be empathetic to others and their lived experiences, and be open to ideas and solutions separate from their own.
- **Accessibility:** We encourage community members to actively engage in the community engagement process, attending meetings, providing feedback, and participating constructively. We welcome all community members to contact city staff regarding any specific accommodations they need to actively participate.
- **Inclusivity:** We encourage community members to collaborate with staff, developers/applicants, and fellow community members to find common ground and work towards mutually beneficial solutions.
- **Accountability:** Community members should seek to stay informed about community projects, initiatives, and relevant developments to engage effectively. We encourage community members to communicate concerns to city staff within a timely manner to ensure that their concerns are addressed and/or resolved as quickly as possible.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our community engagement efforts will be guided by the following principles:

- **Inclusivity and Diversity Across Demographics:** We will actively seek and incorporate a diverse range of individuals, perspectives, ideas, and information to establish a foundation for effective outcomes and democratic credibility. We will also facilitate the engagement of those who may be influenced by or interested in the decision, ensuring fair representation. We will make a concerted effort to engage those who have historically been underrepresented in their local government.
- **Inherent Right and Shared Responsibility for Participation:** We strongly believe individuals impacted by a decision hold a fundamental right and collective responsibility to actively engage in problem-solving and decision-making.
- **Transparency and Trust:** We commit to providing clear and accessible information about city initiatives, decisions, and processes, and seeking public input at appropriate stages. We strive to cultivate an environment where all voices are heard, encouraging the exploration of novel ideas without predetermined constraints. We encourage the acquisition and application of knowledge to generate innovative solutions. We will also document organizers, sponsors, outcomes, and a spectrum of viewpoints, building trust and accountability.
- **Thoughtful Planning and Comprehensive Preparation:** The City will proactively engage the public through meticulous and all-encompassing planning and outreach. We ensure that the design of engagement meets participants' needs and empowers them with the requisite information for meaningful and impactful involvement. We encourage community members to participate in shaping engagement strategies. Refer to the IA2P Spectrum of Public Participation attached for guidance.
- **Collaboration and Collective Purpose:** The City will foster support and collaboration among participants, including governmental bodies, community institutions, and other key stakeholders. We will acknowledge and communicate the long-term needs and concerns of all community members.
- **Measurable Impact and Purposeful Action:** The City will ensure that each participatory endeavor can enact tangible change, with participants fully aware of this potential. We will articulate how the input of all stakeholders influenced the final decision-making process.
- **Sustained Engagement and Culture of Participation:** The City will establish and nurture a culture of ongoing, high-quality community engagement, spanning across departments, offices, programs, local agencies, business partners, and institutions.

- **Responsibility for Outcomes and Financial Support:** The City will hold city leaders and staff accountable for fostering meaningful community engagement in policy-making and municipal operations. We commit to prioritizing the necessary resources to ensure successful endeavors are sustained.
- **Openness and Learning:** We as a City are dedicated to helping all individuals involved listen to one another and explore new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes, learn, and apply information in ways that generate new options.
- **Accessibility:** We will make our engagement activities and materials accessible to all community members, including those with varying abilities and/or language barriers.

## **SCOPE**

We are dedicated to ensuring widespread participation and involvement with as many individuals as possible. This policy is designed to enhance the quality of community engagement initiatives across a broad spectrum of city-related activities, encompassing but not limited to the following key functions of local government:

### **Policymaking and Governance**

- Developing and implementing local policies, ordinances, and regulations.
- Overseeing the operation of local government departments and agencies.
- Making decisions on local issues, such as taxation, public services, and public safety.
- Ensuring compliance with state and federal laws.

### **Budget and Resource Allocation**

- Developing and managing the City's budget.
- Allocating resources to various city departments and programs.
- Ensuring fiscal responsibility and accountability.
- Monitoring revenues and expenditures to maintain financial stability.

### **Public Safety and Community Wellbeing**

- Managing local law enforcement and emergency services.
- Addressing public safety concerns, including crime prevention and response.
- Promoting community health and well-being through programs and services.
- Collaborating with social service agencies to support vulnerable populations.

### **Service Delivery and Improvements**

- Providing essential municipal services such as water, sanitation, and public transportation.
- Maintaining and improving infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and public buildings.
- Managing public parks, recreational facilities, and cultural programs.
- Addressing community needs for services and improvements.

### **City Planning and Development**

- Developing land use planning and zoning regulations.
- Managing urban development and growth.
- Approving building permits and conducting inspections.
- Developing long-term city plans and urban designs.
- Managing the sale of city real estate.
- Overseeing tax incentives/TIF districts.

### **Environmental and Sustainability Initiatives**

- Developing and implementing policies and programs to protect the environment.
- Promoting sustainable practices, such as renewable energy and waste reduction.
- Addressing issues like air and water quality, conservation, and green infrastructure.
- Encouraging community awareness and involvement in environmental matters.

## **STRATEGIES/ACTION STEPS**

Active community engagement and participation is important and highly valued by the city. The City of Cincinnati will make a concerted effort to identify community members and stakeholders who are impacted by decision-making and ensure that each person has an opportunity to provide their perspective regardless of gender, race, color, ethnic background, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or economic status.

The City of Cincinnati will employ various engagement mechanisms tailored to specific initiatives and community needs. Engagement strategies will be implemented through employee training and supported by the subsequent Community Engagement Guide.

- Public meetings and forums
- Surveys and feedback mechanisms
- Focus groups and workshops
- Online platforms and social media
- Collaborative task forces and working groups
- Informal engagement/volunteer opportunities

**Public Consultation:** Public consultation will be an integral part of our decision-making process, ensuring that community input is sought and considered before significant decisions are made.

**Capacity Building:** We will invest in building community capacity for effective engagement by providing training, resources, and support to community members, stakeholders, and city staff.

**Communication and Feedback:** We commit to providing timely and meaningful feedback to participants in engagement processes, sharing how their input has influenced decisions and actions.







**Evaluation and Improvement:** We will regularly evaluate the effectiveness of our engagement efforts and use feedback to continuously improve and refine our practices.

**Privacy and Data Protection:** The city will handle all community engagement data responsibly and in accordance with applicable privacy laws.

**Review and Amendment:** This Community Engagement policy will be subject to periodic review and amendment to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness, and identification of engagement gaps.

## Community Engagement Framework

City departments will be implementing the use of a modified version of the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) spectrum for community engagement opportunities. This tool is highly respected and utilized worldwide as best practice in many local governments. The IAP2 spectrum fosters impactful community engagement. IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to help select the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process.

Level of community power 					
	INFORM 	CONSULT 	INVOLVE 	COLLABORATE 	OWN 
<b>Public Participation Goal</b>	Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	Place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
<b>Promise to the Public</b>	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 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 look to you for 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.
<b>Example Techniques</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Committee Presentations</li> <li>• Development Notices</li> <li>• Social Media Campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Perceptions Survey</li> <li>• Public Comment</li> <li>• Focus Groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobile Engagement Unit</li> <li>• Connected Communities Policy Explorations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighborhood Plans</li> <li>• Community-driven Advisory Groups (MAG)</li> <li>• Place-based Problem Solving (PIVOT)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe &amp; Clean Fund</li> <li>• Boots on the Ground Fund</li> </ul>

## **Employee Support**

The City of Cincinnati values the contributions of all city employees and is committed to providing educational opportunities to expand our professional reach and contributions to community-centered practices. As such, resource prioritization will include, the City of Cincinnati offering continuous support to all staff in the form of community engagement guides, employee training, and personnel dedicated to the advancement and support of community engagement efforts.

All community engagement resources are designed to equip city staff with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively interact, collaborate, and involve community members and stakeholders in local decision-making and initiatives. The community engagement guide is an asset available to all staff members and will assist them in every step of the engagement process. The training aims to foster a more inclusive, transparent, and responsive local government. Department leadership is responsible for ensuring each City department receives training and stays current with engagement trends set forth by the Office of the City Manager. Topics of training include but are not limited to:

- Understanding Community Engagement
- Importance of Inclusivity
- Effective Communication Skills
- Building Relationships
- Tailoring Engagement Strategies
- Overcoming Challenges
- Navigating Cultural Sensitivities
- Collaborative Decision-Making
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Sustainability and Continuous Improvement
- Legal and Ethical Considerations

## **Engagement Tracking**

The City of Cincinnati is devoted to executing quality customer service. We will track engagement strategies implemented throughout each department by using a variety of data analysis tools. The City of Cincinnati will take an active interest in monitoring city staff and their community engagement efforts and make improvements where necessary.

## **Regular Review of Policy**

The City of Cincinnati is passionate about driving equitable, tangible results. City leaders and staff are held accountable for ensuring meaningful community engagement strategies are implemented throughout the city. We commit to providing the resources to ensure ongoing success. The City of Cincinnati will review the Community Engagement policy on a recurring basis to assess the need for appropriate modifications.



**Definitions: \*This section of the policy will incorporate community feedback to finalize how each term is defined. \***

**Community Member:**

**Community Engagement:**

**Equity:**

**Inclusion:**

**Diversity:**

**Transparency:**

**Trust:**

**Intentionality:**

**Accessibility:**

**Capacity:**

**To participate in direct engagement on this Plan and Policy, including development of the definition above:**

- Several in-person meetings are scheduled to allow community members to give direct input on the plan and policy and participate in an exercise to assist in development of the definitions. Those meetings are currently scheduled for **Tuesday, October 17, 2023 at Pleasant Ridge Recreation Center; Tuesday, October 24 at Hirsch Recreation Center in Avondale; and Thursday, November 2nd, 2023 at McKie Recreation Center in Northside** All meetings will begin at **6:00 p.m.** Community members can register for one of the in-person meetings at: <https://forms.office.com/r/PcusrZQG8Y>
- The Community Engagement and Communications SIET Team will hold weekly pop-up events at various locations throughout the City to gather additional insight on the draft.
- For those unable to attend an in -person meeting, there is a survey available through the month of October. The Survey can be found here: <https://forms.office.com/r/qGiXyUB5FQ>