



# DRAFT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN GUIDANCE

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## ABSTRACT

The Community Engagement Subcommittee recommends that each agency develop a Community Engagement Plan to fit agency-specific work. We have outlined elements of a plan in this document to support meaningful engagement. Our approach guides an agency to develop its own best practices, informed by successful examples, and comprising elements designed to overcome barriers to engagement that are typical of agency work.

Community  
Engagement  
Subcommittee

Washington Environmental Justice  
Task Force

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## I. Introduction

### Why Community Engagement is Crucial

Community engagement is at the heart of environmental justice. Meaningful community engagement increases understanding of agency decisions, transparency, and trust in government actions, and builds more sustainable programs and decisions. State agencies have a responsibility to strive for creating community engagement opportunities that allow all of Washington’s diverse communities’, “equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which people live, learn, and work.”<sup>1</sup> Without it, as history demonstrates,<sup>2</sup> entire populations are *repeatedly* left out, adding to existing social and health burdens. Furthermore, many agencies are directed by policy and federal, state, and local laws to implement meaningful community engagement and participation.

The Community Engagement Subcommittee recommends that **each agency develop a Community Engagement Plan to fit agency-specific work**. We have outlined elements of a plan in this document to support meaningful engagement. Our approach guides an agency to develop its own best practices, informed by successful examples, and comprising elements designed to overcome [barriers to engagement that](#) are typical of agency work.

### Community Engagement & Environmental Justice

All agencies can embed environmental justice into their missions by prioritizing and investing in meaningful community engagement, especially in [areas of critical concern across Washington](#).<sup>3</sup> One of the defining documents of the environmental justice movement is the *17 Principles of Environmental Justice*, which were drafted and adopted by the delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991. Principle #7 explicitly states the need for community engagement in order to achieve environmental justice.

***Environmental Justice Principle #7: “Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.”<sup>4</sup>***

The foundation of meaningful community engagement must be an evaluation of who is impacted and benefitted by any agency decisions meant to benefit the public as a whole, rather than starting with requirements outlined in law or policy. This guidance outlines and helps agencies identify common agency activities that do not typically involve, but can significantly impact communities.

### Acknowledging Current and Historical Harms

Intentional and meaningful community engagement is one necessary component to address and correct current and historical harms that communities of color, low-income communities, and other affected populations in Washington have endured. The same communities have been, and continue to be, repeatedly impacted by environmental racism and blatant disenfranchisement due to government decisions, policies, and actions. The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) names the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>

<sup>2</sup> <https://archive.epa.gov/ncer/ej/web/pdf/brender.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> As an initial step, agencies can consider prioritizing investing in community engagement in Census tracts ranked nine and ten on the Environmental Health Disparities Map.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/ej-principles.pdf>

responsibility that government has in reversing these injustices in order to eliminate environmental health disparities and build community trust in government systems and institutions.

*“From the inception of our country, government at the local, regional, state, and federal level has played a role in creating and maintaining racial inequity. A wide range of laws and policies were passed, including everything from who could vote, who could be a citizen, who could own property, who was property, where one could live, whose land was whose and more. With the Civil Rights movement, laws and policies were passed that helped to create positive changes, including making acts of discrimination illegal. However, despite progress in addressing explicit discrimination, racial inequities continue to be deep, pervasive, and persistent across the country....Institutions and structures have continued to create and perpetuate inequities, despite the lack of explicit intention. Without intentional intervention, institutions and structures will continue to perpetuate racial inequities.”<sup>5</sup>*

### Disclaimer

The Community Engagement Subcommittee built this guidance without the benefit of the tools and resources recommended in it. While we made every effort toward inclusion and representation, our work is inherently limited to the perspectives of those who were able to participate most. Namely, the voices represented in this document are largely from those who were supported financially and whose workload allowed time to participate. In this document, there are many instances when the Community Engagement Subcommittee speaks for people whose needs and experiences we do not fully understand, and we recognize that as an inherent limitation to this work. Our work illustrates the critical value of designing the community engagement process into a plan when developing timeline and budget.

### Authority

Washington State agencies are bound by several federal and state regulations that influence or rely on community engagement. Central here are:

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, and national origin.
- Executive Order 13175, which recognizes tribal sovereignty and requires consultation and coordination with Indian Tribal Governments.
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires agencies to conduct business in a way that provides access to people with disabilities.

These regulations have broadly influenced state- and agency-specific policies as well. Phrases such as “meaningful engagement” proliferate. We imagine that state-level compliance with these laws and policies would amount to an equitable governmental landscape, free of the objectively disproportionate impacts of state decision-making that have led to the Environmental Justice Task Force. Agencies that may have grown accustomed to nominal compliance with laws such as these are encouraged to re-evaluate their practices through the lens presented in this document.

### Relevant Tools & Resources

- [Title VI of the Civil Rights Act](#)
- [Executive Order 13166](#)
- Results Washington’s outcome measures:

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<sup>5</sup> [GARE Racial Equity Toolkit](#)

- [Efficient, Effective, and Accountable Government](#)
- [Healthy and Safe Communities](#)

### Who Washington State Agencies Serve

The most important function of a public agency is to serve the public. We know that demographic data is inherently limited as it leaves out major swaths of the population, such as people who are undocumented, Indigenous peoples, and the LGBTQ community. We also know that agency leadership and staff are often not representative of the population they serve, which means that decision-makers often do not have the same life experiences as individuals who may be affected by their decisions. Community engagement is, therefore, a crucial process that allows agencies to better serve the public through a greater understanding of the diversity of lived experiences and perspectives across Washington’s communities.

Agencies should prepare themselves to create a community engagement plan by asking: *Who might be affected by the agency work?* The agency should elucidate who and which communities might benefit from or be negatively impacted by agency processes, projects, or programs. We recommend that agencies create a “Who We Serve” section within the introduction of the agency community engagement plan to clearly name the communities that may be impacted in some way by internal or external agency work. In developing that section, demographic data will be a useful starting place, but direct communication with people in the impacted populations themselves will remain key to a meaningful understanding of the audience.

#### **An agency should ask themselves the following questions as part of developing the “Who We Serve” section of their plan:**

- Who or which communities benefit or are impacted by the outcomes of an agency process, project, or program?
- Who or which communities might be impacted in some way at stages throughout an agency process?
- Are there communities or groups of people that are especially vulnerable to impacts, disproportionately affected, and underserved in some way by the process, project, or program?
- Which communities might engage or not in an agency process, project, or program, and why?
- Which EJ-related existing assets, resources, and knowledge exist within communities?

#### **Relevant Tools & Resources**

- Community Engagement Self-Assessments:
  - [Office of Financial Management Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Council Resources](#) and
  - [City of Seattle Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide](#)
- [The DOH Community Engagement Guide](#)
- To Identify Stakeholders: [Community Engagement: Guidelines for Excellence \(pp. 126-128\)](#)

### Equitable Approaches to Community Engagement

Community engagement covers a range of approaches from outreach and consultations, to long-term collaborations and shared leadership, to supporting resident-led efforts. However, it goes beyond just a set of activities – it is a way of fostering trust, strengthening relationships, and honoring community knowledge. This leads to more effective and equitable solutions.

While the specific methods of engagement will differ depending on the context and the community, State agencies should find ways to center the voices of the highly impacted communities in planning and decision making.

As you work to advance environmental justice and equity across the State, embrace community engagement as an agency-wide plan that goes beyond the short-term needs of projects or programs. This plan should recognize communities' expertise and power to help shape solutions, as well as create planning and decision-making structures that are inclusive, accessible, flexible, and culturally appropriate.

**To foster trust building, center community voices, and create equitable outcomes, use an equity lens to identify your community engagement approaches:**

- Examine the power dynamics and structures within your agency that maintain inequities. These dynamics determine who you choose to engage and how, who is included and not included in decision-making, and how community members' power is valued and accounted for in your agency's work. Taking this first important step to understanding and addressing these dynamics is critical to meaningful community engagement.
- Ensure communications and engagement efforts are carried out in a way that honors community strengths and do not reinforce narratives that can re-traumatize historically marginalized populations. Partner with community liaisons, hire staff that represents the communities you serve, and train staff on cultural competency skills.
- Align engagement efforts with clear opportunities for community to influence agency decisions – in a process that prioritize the knowledge, concerns and ideas of the most impacted communities. Ensure that these opportunities are supported by the community's capacity to engage meaningfully. If needed, invest in building their capacity ahead of time.

**Relevant Tools & Resources**

- [Racial Equity Tools – Power Analysis](#)
- [Policy Link's Community Engagement Guide for Sustainable Communities](#)

**Planning and Approaches – Plan Stages in Detail**

Equitable community engagement begins before the project starts. Program, project/initiative, and policy staff need time to plan for fully determining how community engagement fits into efforts as a whole using the considerations below. Planning considerations allow time for the appropriate stakeholders and community members to be identified and engaged in meaningful ways. Engagement planning steps, timing, and considerations are often concurrent, and multiple engagement activities may be required within a project. To ensure that communities are engaged in a way that produces optimal outcomes for all parties involved, State agencies should require that all project plans include community engagement and outreach scope, goals and estimated funding needs.

**Key timeline and planning considerations for developing a community engagement plan:**

1. **Project scope:** Within the project scope, a community engagement plan should identify what regulatory, systemic, and environmental impacts and outcomes the program, project or policy will have (intended and unintended) on underserved, under-supported, historically marginalized, and overlooked communities or populations.

2. **Community impacts:** Identify how communities and populations may be disproportionately impacted and what guidance is needed and what input could be gathered?
3. **Types of community engagement:** Use a comprehensive approach to implement the types of engagement that are most appropriate.
4. **Equitable engagement:** Outline an approach to determine who should be engaged and how. Use the [Environmental Health Disparities Map](#) and/or [EPA's EJSCREEN](#) tool to identify additional areas of need. Include considerations for community groups and jurisdictions that are already active on this topic.
5. **Build relationships:** Key contacts or community champions provide critical access to hard-to-reach populations. Plan to take the time to solicit local and regional viewpoints regardless of knowledge or existing connection in the community.
6. **Budget for engagement activity:** Budget limitations may require you to partner with other agencies or entities to maximize time and funding. This may take time, so provide for this in the timeline.
7. **Media and promotion:** Plan to make time to research what media platforms are most used and most available to best reach your audiences. Consider a variety.
8. **Include timeline for application or request for funding (RFA/RFQ):** There are established timelines within procurement guidelines as outlined in [RCW 39.26](#). Equitable access to funds can be increased with flexibility for expanded timelines or by providing technical assistance to support communities with less capacity to be competitive.
9. **Evaluate existing programs/projects:** Agencies should each evaluate programs and projects where community engagement is inadequate or is missing altogether and begin to plan how this could be incorporated into ongoing efforts. For example, programs like the [Department of Ecology's Model Toxics Control Act](#) are currently going through rule revision and evaluating places where public engagement should be incorporated since it is an opportune time to incorporate community engagement into regular requirements of program action.

#### Relevant Tools & Resources

- [Strategic Prevention Framework](#)

## II. Elements of Your Agency-Specific Community Engagement Plan

### Determining Obligation

In the early stages of developing or revising any agency service or program, the agency should evaluate its impact on the public and determine community engagement accordingly. This accommodates the fact that it is not appropriate for all agency work to be moderated by a public voice, and the fact that the voice of those significantly impacted by agency decisions is a critical component of equitable, effective, and sustainable programs.

These evaluations should be conducted with a structured tool (see below for two examples provided in Attachments A and B), and can be simple screenings or complex processes, depending on the complexity of the program under evaluation.

The core elements of determining obligation include a series of steps to understand the relevance of the program to the public:

- Understanding the intentional and unintentional impacts and benefits of the program.
- Who and how many people are impacted/benefit.
- Social relevance of the program.
- Potential for the program to impact someone's legal, financial, physical, or social health.
- Legal notification or outreach requirements.

Followed by aligning the level of public relevance with the appropriate level of community engagement according to a systematic tool such as the International Association for Public Participation P2 Spectrum.

This process is applicable to all agency activities. The steps outlined above are as equally relevant to an agency's grant-making program as their proposal to make changes to a neighborhood infrastructure. They guide agencies to a more rigorous level of community engagement when the impact of their decision is greater, and a more streamlined approach for low-impact decisions.

### Relevant Tools & Resources

- Community Engagement Evaluation Tool
- Government Alliance on Race and Equity Toolkit
- International Association for Public Participation P2 Spectrum
- If agencies receive EPA funding, consider the [federal environmental justice and community engagement expectations associated with that funding](#).

### Addressing Ethical Data Collection

Given our increasingly diverse population, it is crucial that agencies think critically about the way data are gathered and why certain populations routinely are not counted or accurately represented. In order to get a more holistic understanding of the communities an agency serves, the agency must make a commitment to collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. An agency's community engagement plan should guide how the agency intends to address data gaps and prioritize ethical data collection policies and practices.

### Quantitative Data

A common way to gather quantitative data is through surveys, like the Census. Disaggregating demographic data allows State agencies to begin to identify how various segments of the population may be impacted by different policies, programs, or projects. We must also acknowledge that the way



we currently collect demographic information has limitations and cannot capture the full identity of an individual.

*When collecting quantitative data, we should be asking:*

- What will these data be used for?
- Who is left out? How are they left out?
- How can we frame our approaches and questions in a culturally relevant manner?
- When translating a survey, do the questions reflect the nuances of a particular language?
- How will we protect the privacy and security of community members?
- How will we share data with the broader community (e.g. the process to provide feedback on data interpretations, how data are represented in a recommendation or final report, etc.)?

### **Qualitative Data**

Community engagement is one important way to gather qualitative data. Agencies need to understand the nuances of a community's lived experiences to make informed decisions. Building relationships and conversing with community members and trusted community leaders provides greater insight beyond demographic data. When engaging communities, it is important to recognize and value the community as a partner in the process, including sharing findings with communities for their feedback before finalizing a decision that would affect their lives.

*Questions to consider when collecting qualitative data include:*

- How do we get informed consent? What does this mean for online spaces?
- How do we maintain anonymity if that is requested/desired? How does this happen when state agencies are required to follow specific protocols for public meetings?
- How do we collect and share data from marginalized or sensitive populations without further creating trauma or jeopardizing their safety?

### **Funding**

Providing adequate funds and resources for community engagement is the backbone to implementing best practices for meaningfully reaching diverse communities across Washington. Well-resourced community engagement lowers the risk of an agency being out of compliance with federal and state requirements and leads to greater agency efficiency. Investing in community engagement is necessary in order to provide the best customer service possible for Washington's residents. Therefore, all agencies must think critically about how to prioritize funds and resources for community engagement, which includes incorporating a funding element to an agency-specific community engagement plan.

### **The funding element of your agency's community engagement plan should identify available funds and resources to systemically and intentionally:**

- Hire expert community engagement coordinators, or contract with community organizations, to provide agency leadership on engagement planning and staff training.
- Communicate with communities in a culturally and linguistically relevant manner, including creating a federally mandated language access plan, translating documents, and contracting with interpreters.
- Compensate community for their time and expertise and streamline the reimbursement process for community engagement-related expenses.
- Provide funding for multiple community engagement formats (e.g. public meetings, focus groups, surveys, community festivals, community beautification projects or artwork, etc.).

- Make transportation, culturally appropriate food, and childcare available for all community engagement events.
- Support staff travel to different parts of the state to engage with diverse communities.

### Relevant Tools & Resources

- The [Valuing Engagement Toolkit](#) can help agencies identify and articulate the costs and benefits of engagement, and can assist with making the business case for community engagement.
- The [Independent Sector](#) values volunteer time at \$25.43 per hour, on average, across the U.S.
- Government example: The National Park Service & U.S. Forest Service valued its volunteers' time at [\\$179 million](#) in 2018.

### Identifying a Responsible Coordinator

Agency-specific community engagement plans should include identifying the role of an agency-wide contact person or coordinator who is able to strategize the agency's diverse engagement needs, introduce and disseminate best practices across the agency, and ensure that the standards identified by the agency are being met.

More specifically, responsible coordinators are especially important during environmental justice emergencies. Coordinators should be on the frontlines with highly impacted communities and sensitive populations to plan for and respond to emergencies such as hazardous substance releases and oil spills in order to assess the impact, monitor the situation, provide technical assistance, and evaluate the effectiveness of the response efforts.

### Relevant Tools & Resources

- [EPA's On-Scene Coordinators](#)

### Addressing Representation and Access

One of the most critical components of conducting meaningful community engagement is valuing the representation from community members who are most impacted by agency decisions. This takes hard work, and often means "swimming upstream" to question agency norms or the status quo of how an agency conducts community engagement.

#### At the core of representation and access is:

- A deep understanding an agency's audience, which cannot be achieved without valuing cultural humility, and building relationships and community trust.
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate communication, such as plain talk, translation and interpretation, and informational animations and graphics, and various formats and opportunities for communities to engage with an agency.
- Acknowledging and addressing internal biases and hiring/staffing practices that may unintentionally "screen out" individuals from highly impacted communities.

### Addressing Information

Much of the information agencies need to engage community members about is highly technical and contextual. Agencies should address the [common barriers](#) agencies encounter when they deliver highly technical, discipline-specific information to the public and how to share information and ask questions in ways that facilitate understanding among the public, especially individuals with little or no technical background.

### **Key issues on this topic that should be in an agency-specific community engagement plan:**

- Plain talk, including defining what it means for the agency and when and how to use it. This will include writing for people with varying levels of literacy, writing for translation, and speaking for interpretation.
- The use of visuals to support written copy.
- The value of education when an agency is going to engage communities with little technical or policy understanding, including educational tools. This will include ideas for partnering with community based organizations who already educate community members on similar topics.
- Culturally appropriate communication, including how and when to assess for cultural appropriateness and what to do when you misstep.
- Opportunities to partner with agency communications departments.

### **Language Access**

All state agencies that receive federal funding are bound by a 2004 executive order and pursuant guidance from federal agencies to ensure that their services and programs are equally accessible to people with limited English proficiency. Extensive guidance has been developed to support those legal requirements, see Relevant Tools and Resources below for details.

In addition to agency-wide systems that help staff decide when and how provide multi-lingual communication, cultural appropriateness of the communication and delivery method are critical considerations.

The thresholds described in the context of federal compliance neglect the value of reaching out to everyone in a community impacted by a particular agency decision. In those cases, special attention must be paid to providing accurate services in languages that are often overlooked. For example, indigenous Mexican languages, languages that have no or short histories of being written, and dramatically distinct “dialects.”

Lastly, American Sign Language, while a key element of each agency’s ADA accommodations, is also a language that should be considered and included in language access planning.

### **Relevant Tools & Resources**

- National standards for [culturally and linguistically appropriate services](#).
- [Federal guidance](#) for developing language access plans and providing language services.
- Detailed guidance from the Environmental Protection Agency on developing and fulfilling language access plans.

### **Engagement and Consultation with Tribal and Indigenous Peoples**

Tribal and Indigenous peoples have existed and prospered in what is now Washington state since time immemorial. Tribal and Indigenous peoples in Washington state are not homogenous – there are 29 federally-recognized Tribes, many non-recognized Tribes, tribal and Indigenous peoples that come from other parts of what is now the U.S., Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians, and Indigenous peoples from all across the world. Therefore, using a tailored approach to engage with tribal and Indigenous communities is not only necessary, but also acknowledges the diversity of tribal and Indigenous peoples in Washington. Tribal and Indigenous engagement should occur if any project or policy may affect these communities (which is almost all the time) and applies to governmental and non-governmental entities. Tribal and Indigenous engagement is *not* a substitute for tribal consultation, which is a specific process

of early, often, and meaningful communication and coordination between tribal governments and State or federal governments.

**Key considerations when engaging with tribal and Indigenous peoples:**

- **European colonization has disrupted virtually all aspects of tribal and Indigenous cultures.** This has led to a variety of disparate and disproportionate environmental, social, and economic outcomes for Indigenous peoples in Washington state.
- **Acknowledge and cede space to local tribal and Indigenous leaders and sovereignty.** Tribal sovereignty should always be centered, and space should be ceded to the tribal leaders and elders. Each Tribe and Indigenous community have their own leaders, cultural norms, and values. Consistency between an agency’s engagement intentions and agency policies are an integral part of honoring and respecting sovereignty.
- **Building trust and relationships is integral to have positive outcomes.** Many tribal and Indigenous communities and peoples are protective of who is allowed to hold influence and community platforms – even with external engagement events. There is a necessity to build trust and relationships with these communities, which means showing up and listening without pre-intended outcomes of what you want from them. This might mean giving something without expectation of reciprocity. One-off engagement events often do not build the trust and relationships needed for successful outcomes and is likely to lead to more long-lasting harm.
- **Pay for time and space.** If you want to do real engagement, you need to support the local community. That could mean renting local venues, hiring Native caterers and families, and compensating people for their time. In many communities, it is customary to bring gifts for key individuals to express gratitude for their presence and contributions.
- **Respect local norms and protocols.** There are often many formal and informal cultural and local norms and protocols. Oftentimes, relationships must be built before these norms and protocols become evident. Some general norms include, but are not limited to: respecting when elders and leaders speak, scheduling meetings around fishing and hunting seasons, and scheduling meetings around key community events (e.g., high school football games, tribal holidays, etc.)
- **Engagement outcomes are dependent on the investments into engagement with tribal and Indigenous communities.** People within and between tribal communities are part of a wide and communal network. Conducting poor engagement within a community is likely to result in poor communication and dissemination of information within the social networks of a community. Additionally, conducting poor or no engagement is likely to create a bad reputation across the tribal and Indigenous networks in the state, which may lead to additional barriers in the future when trying to engage those communities.
- **Tribal and Indigenous engagement does NOT substitute for tribal consultation.** Each Tribe is likely to have their own consultation procedures, which supersede agency policies. Consultation needs to happen early, often, and meaningfully.

### Choosing Services & Service Providers

Trust is critical to effective community engagement, and a currency that many agencies lack in public perception. In our analysis of barriers to community engagement, some of the key factors impacting trust included:

- Geographic, racial, and/or cultural representation in agency staff.
- Linguistic or cultural relevance of communication materials.

When engaging the community, the ability to listen and understand issues through their perspective is important. As a practitioner, you must provide a safe space and conducive environment, where

community members can freely express their experiences, stories, and frustrations with government entities without fear of negative consequences.

**Key issues on this topic that should be in an agency-specific community engagement plan:**

- Community engagement services should not be static but rather should be determined in response to several factors, which are further developed in Determining Obligation, above:
  - Relevance of the issue to the impacted population(s).
  - Specific linguistic and cultural needs of the impacted population(s).
- Services should be designed to impact the primary outcomes of the program or efforts.
- Standards of skills, experience, and knowledge for community engagement practitioners that value anti-racism and equity training, community outreach experience, cultural humility, and understanding of the specific cultures and communities at hand.
- Approach for integrating community leaders and community members as partners in engagement.
- Consider whether your agency supports community engagement staff who represent the ethnic and cultural makeup of the population you serve. If not, work with your agency’s recruitment and retention specialists on a plan to include such staff.

### Training

Each agency is encouraged to develop a community engagement plan, and a recommended way to implement the plan is through a training program.

**Key issues on this topic that should be in an agency-specific community engagement plan:**

Developing an agency-wide community engagement plan sets policy for your agency and communicates to staff and customers about engagement expectations and opportunities. A training program can assist with implementation by promoting awareness of the plan and teaching staff strategies and best practices for engagement. In addition to training agency staff about how to communicate the key functions of an agency with community, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), environmental justice, and cultural humility trainings should also be core competencies for community engagement.

### Relevant Tools & Resources

Reach out to peer agencies. They are often happy to share their plans, practices, experiences and training practices. They may even have a program you can use as-is. Do online research into community engagement plans and training programs.

### Agency Accountability & Responsibility

It is the responsibility of agencies to comply with, evaluate, and hold themselves accountable to these community engagement recommendations. There are two statewide entities that may help hold agencies accountable to community engagement, Results Washington and the future Office of Equity. The agency may also be accountable to ensure community engagement in achieving federal expectations, through funding or other relationships between state and federal entities. Agencies should maintain transparency with communities, as a method to build trust and ensure accountability. For this part of the community engagement plan, we recommend that the agency identifies mechanisms for evaluating community engagement work and reporting back to communities.

**In order to center accountability as agencies write a community engagement plan, we recommend agencies evaluate its community engagement work and consider the following:**

- How are highly subjective words like “meaningful” and “effective” used in the context of community engagement? Should the agency define these words within the community engagement plan?
- How will the agency know when the agency achieved “meaningful” or “effective” community engagement?
- Where are there pre-existing opportunities within an agency’s purview to expand community engagement to support the agency’s current work and obligations?
- Where is agency funding is coming from, and are there specific requirements for community engagement associated with that funding?
- How are agencies demonstrating the process by which they are incorporating and engaging communities in their decision making processes?

#### **Relevant Tools & Resources**

- [Racial Equity Toolkit](#) (pp. 9-10)
- [Existing toolkits and example evaluations of government community engagement work](#) (pp. 4)
- [WA Office of the Attorney General: Government Accountability](#)
- [Results Washington](#)
- [The Community Engagement Continuum: Outreach, Mobilization, Organizing and Accountability to Address Violence against Women in Asian and Pacific Islander Communities](#)

### III. Examples of Community Engagement Best Practices within Common Agency Activities

#### Policy Development

New policies impact communities and populations differently, and can have unintended consequences unless impacted communities have an opportunity to contribute to policy development. Both for proposed legislation and in rulemaking processes, agencies need to ensure community engagement and input is supported at appropriate stages in the policy development process. Establishing and implementing processes that support policy analysis and community engagement will lead to better policies which can also lead to more positive public receptivity to proposals. This section demonstrates key steps to engage communities during a policy development process that should be part of all agencies' community engagement plan.

#### Community engagement plans for policy development should include:

- **Clarification of objectives regarding environmental justice.** Does the agency intend to track how its actions affect vulnerable populations, or try to reduce disparities and benefit certain populations? Ideally these objectives will be defined and clearly articulated at the agency level by executive leadership, which in turn guides policy development.
- **Established policy analysis guidance processes** that will allow for identification of any disproportionate impacts a policy may have on different communities; articulating intended impacts and assessing unintended ones.
- **A process to identify stakeholders, and ways to monitor and respond to their input.** This should include methods to identify and track:
  - Stakeholders or communities that initiate a policy idea, if any
  - Representatives from industries or communities that the policy intends to target
  - Representatives from a wide section of communities that might be impacted disproportionately (community organizations, tribes, workers and unions, etc.)
- **A clear consultation and communication process with a transparent timeline:**
  - *Roles and responsibilities.* Clarify who are the primary contacts and how to communicate with them. This will make it much easier for external stakeholders to know who to reach out to and how.
  - *Content.* Agency staff should have clear guidelines about what aspects of a draft policy should be shared and with whom. They should be encouraged to be as transparent as possible so that all components that may have significant impacts on certain communities are made available for input.
  - *Timeline.* Ensure a clear timeline is provided that allows sufficient time for policies to be communicated about, understood, and for feedback to be provided (especially for smaller organizations with more limited resources and capacity)
  - *Review and responsiveness.* Agencies should have systems in place to record input, clarifying that main points have been understood. Suggestions should be thoroughly reviewed and considered. Agencies should plan to implement suggested changes where possible (this may at times require new ways of thinking or flexibility on the part of the agency), or propose alternatives when needed. If recommendations won't be taken, take time to articulate why, and have follow up discussions.
- **Consider offering remuneration** for the time put into policy review.
- **Repeat** as necessary!