DRAFT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN GUIDANCE

May 2020

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 community understanding of agency decisions, transparency, and trust in government actions, and builds more sustainable programs and decisions. State agencies have a responsibility to create 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."[1] Without it, as history demonstrates,[2] 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 and 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.[3] 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 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."[4]*

The foundation of meaningful community engagement must be an evaluation of who is negatively impacted and who is benefitted by any agency decisions meant to benefit the public as a whole., This stands in contrast to the common practice of 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

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[1] https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice
[2] https://archive.epa.gov/ncer/ej/web/pdf/brender.pdf
[3] 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.
[4] https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/ej-principles.pdf

populations in Washington have endured. The same communities have been, and continue to be, repeatedly impacted by environmental racism and disenfranchisement due to government decisions, policies, and actions. The Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) names the responsibility that government has in reversing these injustices 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."*[5]

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 whose time was supported financially by their jobs 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 a limitation to this work. Our work illustrates the critical value of designing the community engagement process into a project's 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
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by agencies receiving federal funding
- Executive Order 13166, requiring recipients of federal funding to accommodate people with limited English proficiency in their services and programs

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

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[5] GARE Racial Equity Toolkit

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:
  - *[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 decision-makers often do not have the same life experiences as people 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.

We recommend that agencies prepare themselves to create a community engagement plan by asking: *Who might be affected by the agency work?* We recommend agencies name who and which communities might benefit from or be negatively impacted by agency processes, projects, or programs. We recommend 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.

Agencies can 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 and which might not in an agency process, project, or program? And why?
- Which environmental justice-related existing assets, resources, and knowledge exist within communities?

Relevant Tools & Resources
- Community Engagement Self-Assessments:

- o [Office of Financial Management Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Council Resources](#)
- o [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, shared leadership, and 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 can 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 understand and address 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 represent 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 these opportunities are supported by the community's capacity to engage meaningfully. If needed, invest in building their capacity over 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 determining how community engagement fits into efforts as a whole using the considerations below. Planning considerations allow time for staff to identify and engage the

appropriate stakeholders and community members in meaningful ways. Engagement planning steps, timing, and considerations are often concurrent, and multiple engagement activities may be required within a project. To ensure communities are engaged in a way that produces optimal outcomes for all parties involved, we recommend State agencies 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 meaningful to the specific audience(s).
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:** Considier partnering 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 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. You can make access to funds more equitable with flexibility for expanded timelines or by providing technical assistance to support communities with less capacity to be competitive.
9. **Evaluate existing programs and projects**: Evaluate existing engagement to assess where community engagement is inadequate or is missing altogether and begin to plan and incorporate it 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 can 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, we recommend the agency evaluate its impact on the public and determine community engagement accordingly. This accommodates the reality 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 are most effective when 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 being evaluated.

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 burdens and benefits of the program
- Identifying who and how many people are burdened/benefit
- Identifying social relevance of the program
- Outlining the potential for the program to impact someone's legal, financial, physical, or social health
- Confirming legal notification and outreach requirements.

These steps are followed using a systematic tool such as the International Association for Public Participation P2 Spectrum.to align the level of public relevance with a suitable level of community engagement.

This process is applicable to all agency activities. The steps outlined above are as 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. 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. We recommend agencyies community engagement plans 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 identify of an individual.

When collecting quantitative data,ask:
- 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 surveying people who speak languages other than English, does the survey reflect the logic and nuance of each language?
- How will we protect the privacy and security of community members? And how will we convey this protection to community members? How will we honestly communicate risks?
- 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 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 may 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 for State agencies, given the required protocols for certain 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 to provide the best customer service possible for Washington's residents. Therefore, 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.

Key elements of your agency's community engagement plan identify available funds and resources to systemically and intentionally:
- Hire or contract expert community engagement coordinators, possibility through community organizations, to provide agency leadership on engagement planning and staff training.

- Communicate with communities in a culturally and linguistically relevant way, including creating a federally mandated language access plan, translating documents, and providing interpretation for all interactions and verbal presentations.
- Compensate community members and organizations 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 events that include members of the public.
- 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 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.

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, 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 is a part of any project or policy that might 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. It is necessary 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.

Identifying a Responsible Coordinator

Include identifying the role of an agency-wide contact person or coordinator in your agency-specific community engagement plan. To be effective, this coordinator will be 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. To be most effective, coordinators will 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 of 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, informational animations and graphics, and various formats and opportunities for communities to engage with an agency.
- Acknowledging and addressing internal biases and hiring and other 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. Agency-specific community engagement plans address the common barriers each agency encounters 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 to include 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 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.

If a language does not meet the thresholds described in federal compliance guidance, such as 5% of a given population, the impact of agency decisions can still have meaningful, direct impact on smaller linguistic groups. 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 significantly distinct "dialects."

Lastly, American Sign Language, while a key element of each agency's ADA accommodations, is a language and belongs in language access planning.

Relevant Tools and 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

Choosing Services and 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 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 are responsible to 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 to include in an agency-specific community engagement plan:

- Develop community engagement services that are not static but rather 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).
- Design services to impact the primary outcomes of the program or efforts.
- Establish 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.
- Develop engagement approaches that integrate 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, explore contracting with representatives of the community you are reaching out to, or work with your agency's recruitment and retention specialists on a plan to encourage more diverse candidates.

Training

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

Key issues on this topic to include 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 are important 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.

Policy and Legislative Development

All agency policies impact communities and populations differently, and can have unintended consequences unless impacted communities have an opportunity to contribute to policy development. It is important to apply the elements of your agency's community engagement plan when developing new or amending existing agency policies. This can lead to better policies as well as more positive public receptivity to proposals. In particular, developing agency request legislation and navigating input and amendments during legislative session can require specific planning to support community engagement.

Key issues on this topic to include in an agency-specific community engagement plan:

- **Clarify objectives regarding environmental justice.** We recommend the agency review primary objectives for proposed policies, and referring to and applying the agency's environmental justice strategy if one is in place. These objectives should be clearly articulated.
- **Develop a clear consultation and communication process in advance of legislative session:**
  - *Roles and responsibilities*. Clarify who are the primary contacts and how to communicate with them.
  - *Content.* Create clear guidelines for agency staff about what aspects of a draft policy should be shared and with whom.
  - *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.* Implement systems to record input, clarifying that main points have been understood. Thoroughly review and consider suggestions. 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. Either way, follow up with stakeholders and articulate how the agency will respond to their input.
- **Consider offering compensation** for the time community partners put into policy review.
- **Develop a clear plan for engagement during legislative session**
  - *Key policy details*. Clarify which parts of a proposed policy would need further engagement and review if amendments are proposed.
  - *Agreed points of contact during session*. Agree with community partners on who is willing and able to review proposed amendments and respond in a timely manner during legislative session.
  - **Refer back to objectives for quick turnaround decisions.** If agencies need to make immediate decisions during legislative session, they can refer back to the articulated objectives to ensure final policy details further these goals.

Agency Accountability and 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. Transparancy and consistent communication are key elements of accountability, which in turn builds trust with communities. 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.

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? Will it provide clarity for the agency to 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 (p. 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