



**Citizen Engagement Strategy**



## Introduction

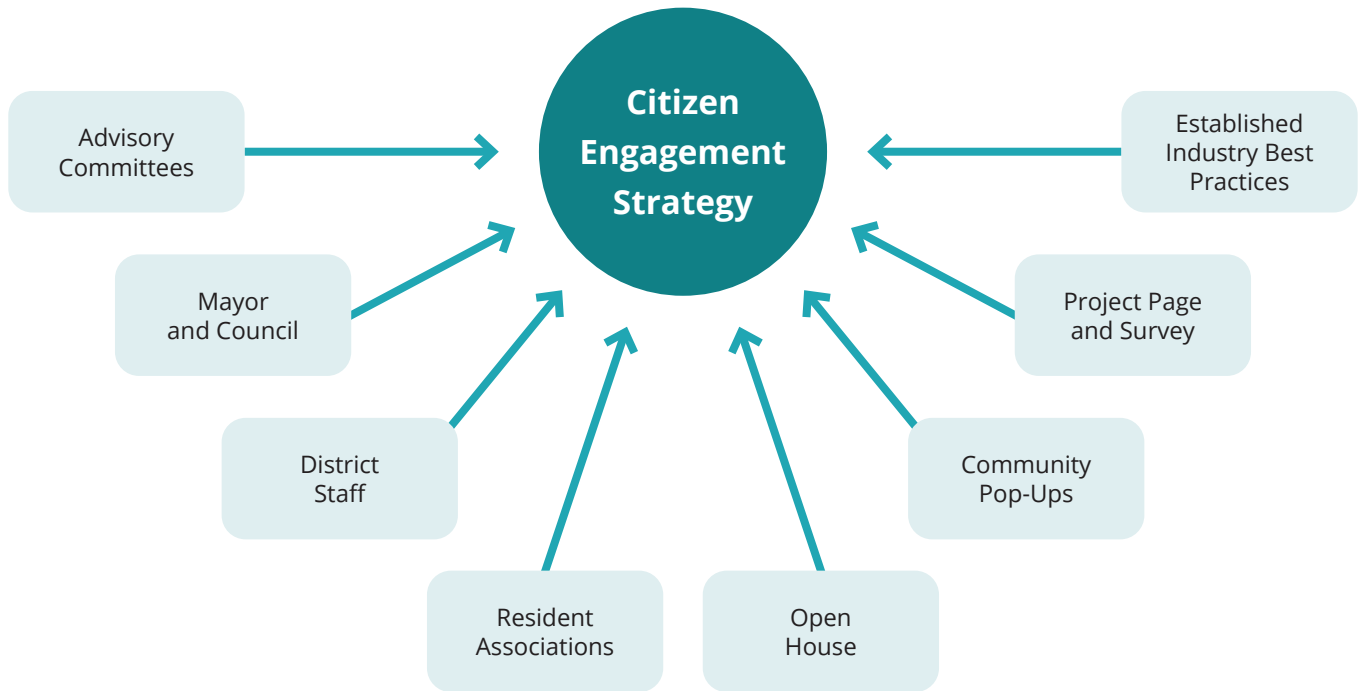
In its 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, North Saanich Council prioritized the creation of a Citizen Engagement Strategy as part of **Goal 5**. This initiative reflects the Council's commitment to fostering trust and confidence in local government through open, transparent communication. By developing and implementing this strategy, the District aims to increase community participation and strengthen relationships with residents. Together, these efforts will ensure a more inclusive and collaborative approach to shaping the future of North Saanich.

The District of North Saanich recognizes the many benefits of strategic engagement, as individuals desire the opportunity to influence decisions that impact their families, lives, and communities. Effective engagement nurtures strong connections, collaboration, and trust among decision-makers and the greater community.

This strategy builds on our current practices, incorporates research from other municipalities, and follows established best practices in public participation. It is shaped by what we have learned through consultation with the community, District staff, and elected officials.

To effectively build on past efforts and approaches, the district has invested in increasing its capacity, tools, resources, and expertise to strategically address and respond to the evolving needs of our citizens. It has also adopted a set of guiding principles that support meaningful engagement.

## How the Citizen Engagement Strategy was created



### Purpose

This policy ensures the District has a consistent, coordinated, and outcomes-centered approach to engaging the community. This means:

District staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources to deliver meaningful community engagement;

The community understands the facts that drive District decision-making, know why their participation is important, and have what they need to participate;

### Scope

This policy applies to public engagement processes led by the District of North Saanich staff and Council, as well as contractors, consultants, external organizations, and volunteers that provide services on behalf of the District.

## Why engage?

The District often makes decisions that impact the lives of its residents. These decisions may affect day-to-day services, new strategies and policies, and large District-building capital projects. Engagement is about bringing people into these processes. Making real connections with people creates relationships and builds trust. This encourages community buy-in for initiatives and fosters civic participation.

We engage because, although we have skilled technical experts working across our organization, no one knows a community and its nuances better than the people living and doing business in it every day. When we engage, their input becomes part of the decision-making process, helping elected officials, residents, and staff create communities that are responsive to what the community has indicated as important to them.

## Benefits of public engagement

When public engagement is meaningful, everyone gains something valuable. Governments benefit from hearing diverse perspectives and understanding the public's interests, concerns, and priorities, and the public gains a greater understanding of roles, responsibilities and requirements. With increased communications, our accountability to residents is enhanced. By providing timely access to quality information, there is less misinformation, and residents feel heard.

"Engagement encourages participation and provides a means for including the public's values, interests, needs, and desires into decisions that affect them." — IAP2 quote

# Vision and Guiding Principles

The District of North Saanich prioritizes the input of its citizens and the community. By fostering meaningful engagement, we are dedicated to planning and providing the resources necessary to ensure the highest quality of citizen involvement in decision-making processes. Your voice matters, and together we can shape a vibrant, responsive community.

## Vision

In late 2024, District staff led an effort to engage residents, community organizations, staff, and other interest-holders to identify what is needed for effective citizen engagement in North Saanich. A series of in-person and online consultations were conducted, and the following insights gathered contributed to the development of the emerging Citizen Engagement Strategy.

We asked about what was working, what challenges were being experienced, what gaps might exist, what priorities need to be considered, and what could the future of engagement look like in North Saanich?



Promote engagement with multiple tools and methods to increase awareness, reach and access.

Ensure people can connect in-person and not solely through online methods.

Go where the people are to ensure connection and participation.

Leverage relationships with organized community groups who legitimately represent the interests of residents and citizens.

Consider North Saanich's unique demographics and landscape when developing engagement opportunities.

Ensure you are clear and transparent about the opportunity and possible outcomes.

Evaluate your efforts, learn and make change with ongoing engagement efforts.

Close the loop and report back on what was shared and possible next steps.



## Guiding Principles

- Inclusiveness — Making every effort to reach, involve, and listen to those affected by discussions and decisions. Key information will be widely shared using various methods during each engagement opportunity.
- Capacity – Investing in training and education results in more meaningful engagement. Increasing staff's capacity to conduct engagement and the public's capacity to understand the process and their role in it, can lead to better engagement and project outcomes.
- Transparency — It is essential to provide clarity on why we seek input, how different voices can influence decisions, the limitations involved, and how the feedback will be utilized to guide our actions. We aim to keep interest-holders informed about the outcomes. All information will be clear, timely, and complete, including details about any constraints related to decision-making.
- Responsiveness — Striving to fully understand and consider the impacts on citizens and the community. Promptly sharing feedback and reporting back to participants.
- Accountability — Ensuring that planning, processes, and reporting reflect a strong commitment to valuing citizen and community input and that the adopted framework is used to meet engagement expectations.

## When does the District engage?

Public engagement processes are held when the public's input may influence a District project. Public engagement does not apply to day-to-day operations, nor does it include or replace the ongoing discussions with interest-holders and the public intended to address issues that arise and ensure evaluation and improvement of existing programs.

### Public Engagement will be considered on projects when

- Creating a new policy, program, project or service;
- Evaluating an existing policy, program, project, or service;
- Fulfilling a legislated requirement;
- Responding to a Council-directed request; or,
- Building community and strengthening relationships.

# How We Engage

## Assess

Determine which level of engagement is appropriate based on the specific initiative and what inputs we are looking for from the community.



## Design

Identify scope, goals, who is impacted, input sought, timelines, and how best to plan for effective participation.



## Invite

Share details on what input is being sought, known constraints, how to participate, and how input will be used in the decision-making process.



## Connect

Connect, listen, and learn from the various methods planned for acquiring input.



## Report Back

Recognize participation, share nature of input heard, and report back on developments and next steps.



## Evaluate

Review process and determine opportunities to inform and improve future engagement efforts.

# Engagement spectrum

## What is IAP2?

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) is a non-profit organization committed to advancing the practice of public engagement. Municipalities across Canada and around the world use IAP2 guidance. The District of North Saanich uses IAP2 to ensure engagement follows international best practices.

The IAP2 developed a number of tools that have become commonplace amongst local governments. The Core Values and Spectrum of Public Participation assist in establishing clear expectations and defining the level of participation in any public engagement process.

The District has identified three levels of public engagement: **consult, involve and collaborate** (as adapted from the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation). Each level outlines the District’s responsibility within the public engagement process and identifies the extent of the public’s influence in shaping the decision.

	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
Goal	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
Promise	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.



## Engagement methods

We communicate using	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
<a href="http://connectnorthsaanich.ca">connectnorthsaanich.ca</a>	Surveys	Workshops	Advisory Committees
<a href="http://northsaanich.ca">northsaanich.ca</a>	<a href="#">Focus Groups</a>	<a href="#">Site Visits &amp; Tours</a>	<a href="#">Resident Panels</a>
<a href="#">Social Media</a>	<a href="#">Community Meetings</a>	<a href="#">Design Charrettes</a>	<a href="#">Task Forces</a>
<a href="#">Emails to community organizations</a>	<a href="#">Pop Ups</a>	<a href="#">World Cafés</a>	<a href="#">Open Space Meetings</a>
<a href="#">Community pop-ups and Sounding Boards</a>	<a href="#">Open Houses</a>	<a href="#">Liaise with community organizations</a>	
<a href="#">Ads and mail inserts</a>	<a href="#">Public Meetings</a>		
<a href="#">Quarterly newsletter</a>	<a href="#">Public Input Sessions</a>		
	<a href="#">Town Hall Meetings</a>		

### \*Note (December 2024)

IAP2 has launched an international review to modernize the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. IAP2 Canada has retained the services of strategic communications and engagement firm Believeco Partners to gather diverse perspectives from across Canada. The goal is to ensure that the enhanced international framework reflects the richness and diversity of Canada’s evolving social landscape. Insights gathered through this review will be compiled and shared in early 2025, contributing to a global effort to modernize public participation practices. Canada’s review will align with parallel initiatives in the United States, Australia, and Asia, reinforcing a commitment to inclusive engagement.

# Roles and responsibilities

Community engagement is by its very nature, a relational commitment. Multiple audiences must work together to achieve the community's vision.

## Elected officials

Elected officials are formally responsible for making decisions that represent the interests and values of the community. They have an important role as decision-makers and advocates for public engagement and can contribute in the following ways:

- Represent residents and connect with them to determine top priorities for engagement
- Prioritize engagement efforts by working with staff to identify areas where public input can make a meaningful difference to decisions and help set public engagement priorities
- Help promote engagement initiatives and opportunities in order to facilitate a high rate of participation by a wide range of residents
- Direct residents to the established processes for garnering, monitoring and compiling input, and avoid circumventing these
- Allow staff to take the lead role in identifying best practices and methods for engaging the public on various issues
- Consider input gathered from residents and interest-holders when making decisions and clarify the rationale for decisions reached
- Ensure time and resources are allocated to support successful engagement efforts
- Listen and observe public engagement and processes

## Staff

Staff lead the planning, implementation and reporting back from engagement initiatives. As trained professionals, staff members are responsible for developing and applying professional expertise in the area of public engagement, as well as being technical experts that provide background and advice on decisions being made. Staff responsibilities include the following:

- Work with elected officials to identify where public input can make a meaningful difference to decisions, program development and service delivery
- Establish channels and processes to clearly identify community priorities for engagement, then ensure that the organization responds
- Establish and communicate engagement priorities, then apply a consistent set of policies and procedures in designing and implementing engagement activities
- Consult with elected officials and consider previous public feedback regarding engagement priorities, process design, framing issues, effective communications, and increasing engagement over time
- Ensure timely and respectful communication with all those who engage, and show how their input has been used to influence decisions, programs and services
- Engage in ongoing learning and professional development about public engagement best practices
- Ensure that community input is well documented and that communication efforts are as complete and well-timed as possible

## Residents

Residents contribute to informed decision-making and the quality of life in their community by sharing their ideas, experiences, and concerns in a constructive and respectful way. Their contributions can include the following:

- Help identify community needs and priorities
- Identify barriers to participation
- Make efforts to stay current and learn more about issues within the community
- Participate in engagement initiatives and encourage others to participate
- Express their point of view and contribute ideas while respecting opposing perspectives in a respectful way
- Be willing to listen and learn from other community members
- Vote in local government elections

## First Nations

First Nations are important rights holders, and we are committed to working closely with our local First Nations communities. Consultation and engagement with First Nations communities occurs independently from the engagement of the broader public and requires a customized approach.

# Evaluation and continuous improvement

The District adopts a continuous improvement mindset and embraces innovation as it relates to community engagement.

## The District is committed to

- Trying new things, evolving tired approaches, and investing in community engagement innovation;
- Regularly inviting and using community feedback to make community engagement practices better;
- Using the community engagement design principles to measure and report on community engagement; and
- Continuously evolving the Citizen Engagement Strategy to respond to the changing needs of the community and the context of the world at large.

The District is committed to ensuring that this strategy remains relevant and achieves its intended outcome. This strategy will be reviewed, at minimum, every two years.

## Thank You

The District of North Saanich would like to acknowledge and extend thanks to the many Canadian communities from which we drew inspiration, ideas, and best practices during the development of this strategy.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the residents of North Saanich for sharing their valuable feedback, as well as to members of Council, Advisory Committee members, and District staff for their thoughtful contributions. Your insights and support were instrumental in shaping this Citizen Engagement Strategy. This collective effort would not have been possible without your collaboration and commitment to building a stronger, more connected community. Thank you.

# District of North Saanich

## North Saanich Communications

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