WHAT'S NEXT ALEXANDRIA

What's Next Alexandria

Handbook

for Civic Engagement

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA VIRGINIA

September 2013 DRAFT

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Introduction

What's Next Alexandria is a City initiative to gather information and develop and implement strategies for improving and expanding civic engagement in Alexandria. Through a series of community conversations and online participation starting in September 2012, and ending in June 2013, members of the community collaborated with City staff, appointed, and elected officials to talk about how Alexandrians can best participate in public decision-making processes that shape the City.

We know that collaboration between community members and city government leads to better results than either working in a vacuum. One without the other misses out on a whole range of good ideas. More importantly, public decisions that are developed collaboratively produce better results and better stand the test of time. The *What's Next Alexandria* initiative focused on understanding how to use civic engagement to improve this kind of collaborative give-and-take that will always be more effective than community members or City staff working alone.

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) white paper entitled *Connected Communities* explains that civic engagement is both the "right" thing to do as well as the "smart" thing to do. As the "right" thing to do, effective citizen engagement supports "democratic ideals and our desire to build a sense of community identity and responsibility…with a shared sense of place and purpose." At the same time, it is the "smart" thing to do, knowing that government cannot solve community problems without community input.

"In the best of all worlds, the right thing and the smart thing reinforce each other in order to promote shared ownership of problems and a willingness to contribute to their solution. Citizen involvement that achieves extensive participation from persons affected by a decision, promotes understanding of the issues involved, and grounds the decision in citizen preferences that help to build support for the principle of citizen engagement."

Why does What's Next Alexandria use the term "engagement"? And what is civic engagement, anyway?

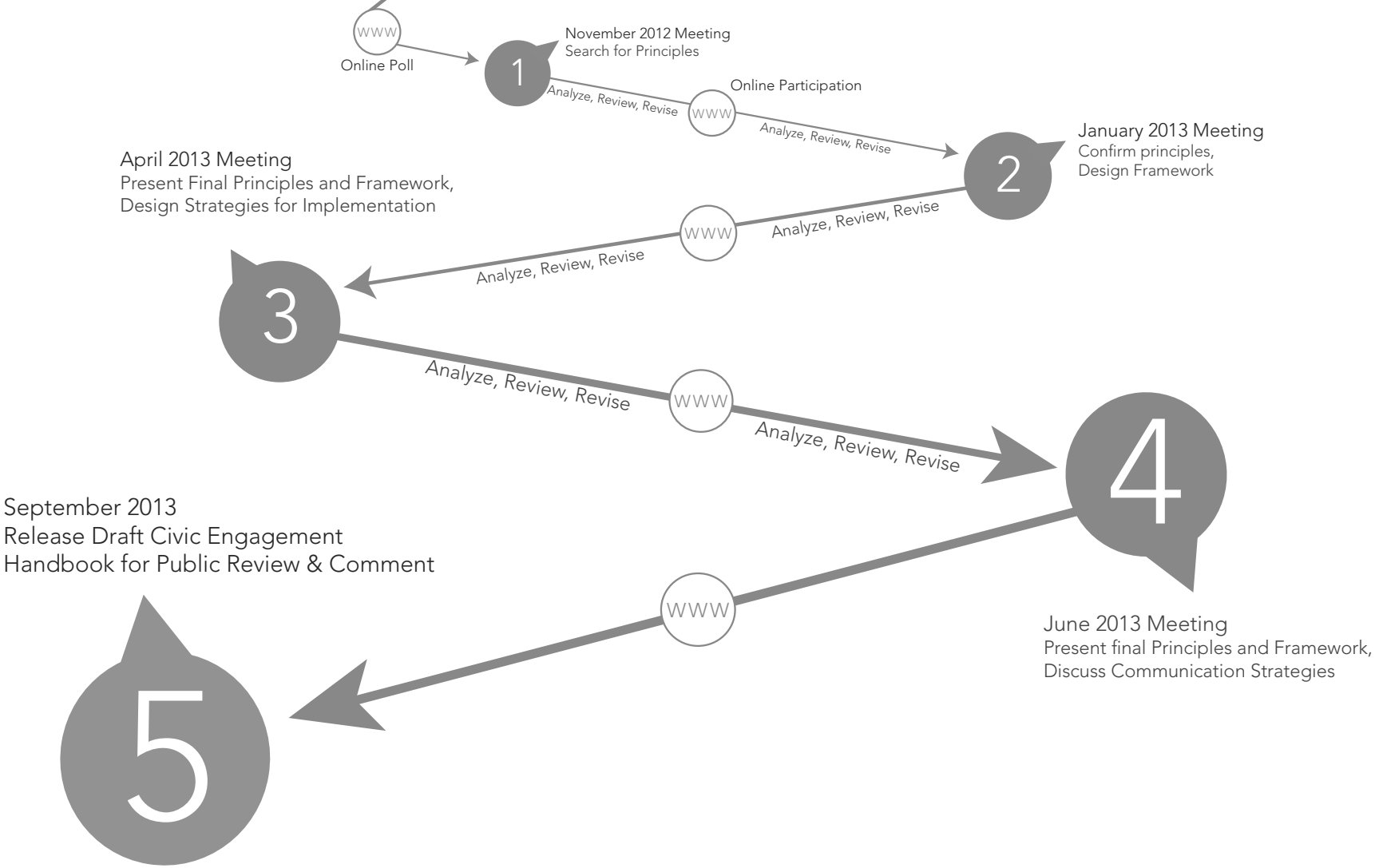
As described in *Connected Communities*, "In any of their interactions with citizens, local governments should look for the opportunity to encourage engagement rather than simply seeking an exchange of information." The term "engagement" implies more than simply hosting or attending a meeting. ***Engagement involves conversations, debates, deliberation, and creating new relationships with neighbors.***

"Most importantly, I think just the bringing people together is a good start. I think the people at our table were motivated and ready to act."

- What's Next Participant

What's Next Alexandria Process:

How we got here.



The most powerful tool for planning for the future and solving problems is community members providing their own perspective and actively listening to different points of view. Civic engagement rallies community members, City staff, and elected and appointed officials to engage and collaborate with one another on public policy, planning, and development decisions that affect the lives of all Alexandrians.

Community collaboration over the course of the *What's Next Alexandria* process resulted in three key elements:

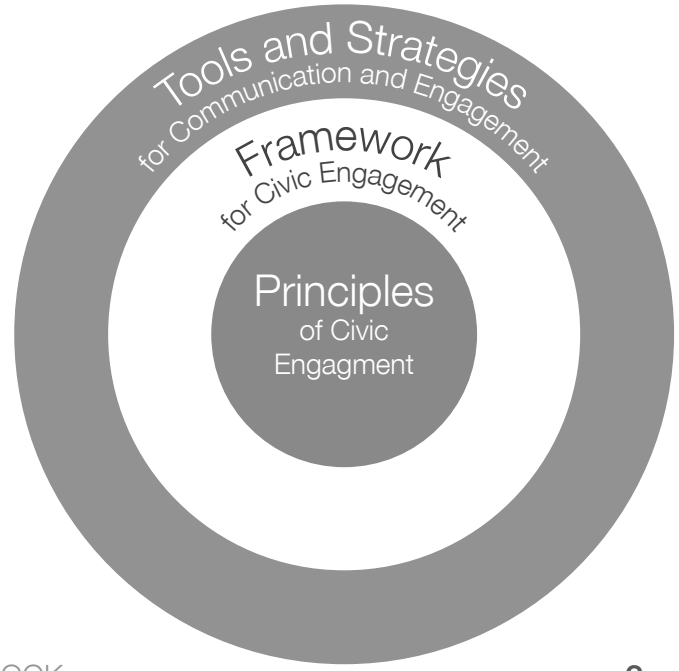
- **Principles** for civic engagement
- **A Standard Framework** for civic engagement
- **Tools and Strategies** for communications and engagement.

Together, these important pieces make up Alexandria's Civic Engagement Handbook, which will serve as a guide for future public decision-making processes in the city.

This Handbook is for community members and City staff who will work together to improve or expand:

- **Understanding** about how to participate in public decision-making in Alexandria.
- **Knowledge** about planning and development in Alexandria.
- **Skills** to participate in civic engagement processes in a meaningful way.
- **Participation** to include a broad representation of our diverse city.
- **Solutions** for cooperative, productive, and sustainable public decision-making.

This circle motif will be used throughout the Handbook to continuously connect Principles, the Framework, and Strategies



Patch

JUDY
CARTER

Focused on Outcomes

To effectively meet the current and future needs of its residents, organizations, and businesses, the City must productively engage community members in decision-making processes, including planning, operations, development and implementation. Successful civic engagement helps to ensure that every action the City takes is well-informed and maximizes benefits to the community.

Productive engagement is not an easy task, nor is it the task of local government working alone. ***The community is a partner and shares responsibility, as they know best the issues affecting their neighborhoods.*** A process that invites ongoing public engagement in policy, resource and planning discussions is the hallmark of a healthy community.

The primary goal of the What's Next Alexandria initiative is to improve the quality of Alexandria's public participation process so that members of the community are actively, constructively, and meaningfully involved in the public decisions that affect their lives.

The process by which the community is involved must by its nature be realistic, transparent, and representative. Providing neutral and accurate information to representative groups of residents coupled with their collective understanding of the impacts of their participation pays off when projects are implemented that benefit the whole community and align with their vision.

What does success look like?

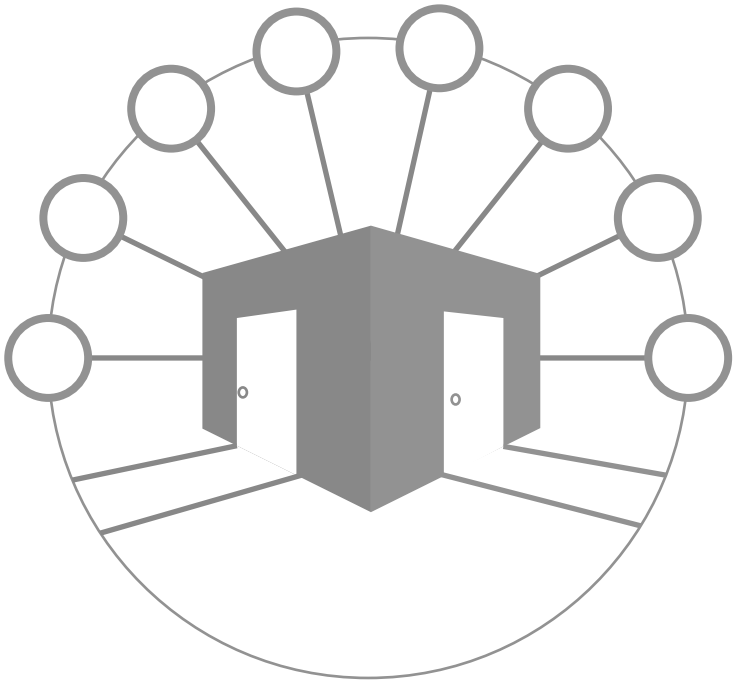
With the goal of improving Alexandria's public participation process in mind, this Handbook is a tool for pursuing, achieving, and measuring positive outcomes for civic engagement. Desired outcomes for improved civic engagement are straightforward:

"La participación de todas las presentes va a tener éxito." (Everyone's participation will bring success.)

- What's Next Participant

- ***Improved understanding*** of the value of working together to solve common problems.
- ***Fully informed public*** that knows how to participate.
- ***Increased Participation***, representative of the City's demographic diversity.
- ***Active Leadership*** by community members in organizing their community to participate in civic engagement processes and help shape broader goals of the City.
- ***Ownership***: Members of the community endorse decisions and actions by the City because decisions clearly reflect public participation in a transparent process.
- ***Consistency*** across City departments, Boards and Commissions in the application of civic engagement principles and process.
- ***Confidence*** in the equity of the public decision making process.
- ***Mutual Trust*** between the community and City government

By achieving these outcomes, Alexandria will thrive as demonstrated in the quality of the daily life of its citizens and their participation in shaping the city's future.



Community engagement will bring everyone to the table and create a unified decision-making process.

Principles of Engagement

Alexandria's Principles of Civic Engagement were developed by the community during the *What's Next Alexandria* process to guide the City and its residents in how Alexandrians can best participate in public dialogue for decisions that shape the city for years to come.

The following Principles serve as the foundation for public participation in Alexandria.

Respect	Page 6
Inclusiveness and Equity	Page 7
Early Involvement	Page 8
Easy Participation	Page 9
Meaningful Engagement	Page 10
Mutual Accountability	Page 11
Transparency	Page 12
Sustained Collaboration	Page 13
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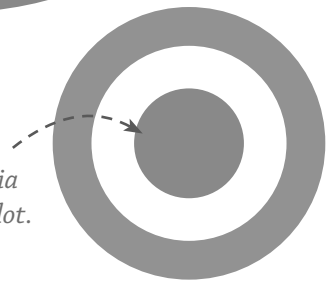
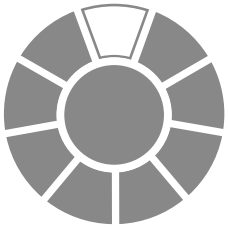


At the core of civic engagement in Alexandria are the Principles, represented by the blue dot.

Respect



Alexandria values a process of engagement where participants demonstrate respect in words and actions and approach decisions with open-mindedness so that everyone feels comfortable expressing their opinion regardless of differences.

Actions

- ☐ Clearly articulate participation ground rules based on mutual respect from the beginning of the project. *(Ground rules can be found in the appendix)*
- ☐ Recruit and train staff and community facilitators to assist with and manage productive meetings.
- ☐ Support facilitators and the project team and share responsibility for maintaining respect of all participants in the projects.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Use these checkboxes during a project to ensure that Actions and Outcomes are being accomplished throughout a project or process.

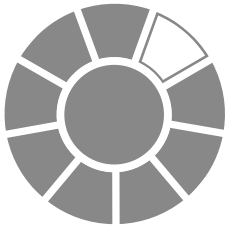
Outcomes

- ☐ Participants build meaningful relationships with one another and focus on the work to be accomplished in each project.
- ☐ Participants respect the outcome as intended for the greater good of the City even if they do not agree with all recommendations.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Use the blank spaces to add any content that might be appropriate for a particular project or process.

Inclusiveness and Equity

Alexandria reaches out to and encourages the participation of all members of the community in dialogue and decision-making processes, including those who will be affected by the issue as well as those who have not historically been engaged. All members of the community are informed and empowered to participate; all views are equally heard and inform the outcome; and all impacts and benefits are fairly distributed.



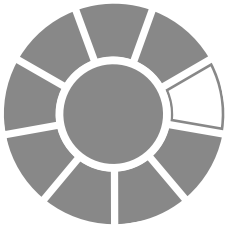
Actions

- ☐ Develop a communications and engagement strategy for each project outlining a plan to reach out to all community members, especially those traditionally under-represented.
- ☐ Recruit and involve people most impacted by a project.
- ☐ Design agendas and other materials to facilitate easy understanding for all participants.
- ☐ Respect cultural and language differences; provide translation and interpretation when appropriate.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Outcomes

- ☐ Increased participation by under-represented constituents and those constituencies impacted by the project.
- ☐ Understandable, meaningful process seen as worthy of community participation.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Early Involvement



Alexandria identifies and involves stakeholders early in decision-making processes. Community members are involved in framing issues before any conclusions have been drawn, requiring early and ongoing communication with participants through each phase in the process.

Actions

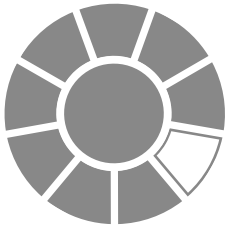
- ☐ Begin community outreach well before the project begins so that residents have ample time to prepare for active participation. This should include developing a project website and beginning outreach through volunteer communicators and via digital and print flyers (or other on-site methods) in the affected neighborhoods.
- ☐ Provide an opportunity for the community to shape the project's definition, scope, expected timeline, and strategy for engaging the public well before the project begins.
- ☐ Clearly delineate and broadly communicate the community's opportunity for involvement.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Outcomes

- ☐ Community members participate from the beginning and throughout the project.
- ☐ Projects are better defined and scoped.
- ☐ Early identification and resolution of community's issues of importance so that resources can be applied toward resolving them.
- ☐ Planning and completing the project is highly collaborative.
- ☐ Broad support for the completed project.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Easy Participation

Alexandria promotes open and readily accessible government. Communications and information are timely, easy to understand, and offered in a variety of formats, appropriate to a given process. The City will provide clarity about the public decision-making process, including milestones and a defined endpoint. Participants will have the flexibility to participate in a variety of ways, including online and in person.



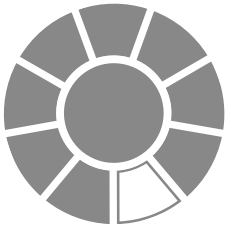
Actions

- ☐ Share project scope, deliverables and timeline with the community well in advance of the project start date, and at least one week before the first public meeting.
- ☐ Develop public materials to be clear, concise, and easily understandable by a wide variety of constituents.
- ☐ Conduct a robust and coordinated communications process prior to and throughout the project, using multiple communications tools.
- ☐ Foster cooperation among all partners (City, community, individuals, community organizations, and businesses) to invite and increase awareness, participation, and engagement.
- ☐ Ensure that multiple opportunities for both online and in-person participation and input are available throughout the project.
- ☐ _____

Outcomes

- ☐ Civic participation is robust. A variety of stakeholders demonstrate sustained engagement in the process in numbers that exceed expectations.
- ☐ Participants generally represent the demographics of the City or the project area.
- ☐ Meeting evaluations or community polls demonstrate that barriers to participation (such as too many meetings, limited notice or inaccessibility of meetings, lack of online information or opportunities for input) have decreased, and satisfaction in civic engagement has increased.
- ☐ The number of residents from the community invested and participating in civic engagement processes grows.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Meaningful Engagement



Alexandria provides opportunities for all community members to participate in an open and unbiased process, free of predetermined outcomes, to consider and deliberate feasible options. The City authentically solicits, acknowledges, incorporates, and responds to community input.

Actions

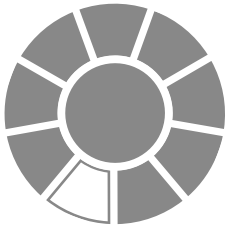
- ☐ Invite meaningful input before any conclusions have been drawn as demonstrated in the materials and activities for each project.
- ☐ Present multiple feasible options based on community input for the community to consider; Make it clear what issues are on and off the table.
- ☐ Demonstrate how research, analysis and community input shapes decision points and recommendations at each phase in the process.
- ☐ Utilize ongoing evaluation to inform whether processes should change and how they should be modified.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Outcomes

- ☐ Community members understand and accept the purpose of proposed projects.
- ☐ Projects proceed with less conflict; where there is no consensus, each alternative is given fair consideration.
- ☐ Participants clearly see the impact of their participation throughout the process.
- ☐ Results of projects are beneficial to the community and the city overall.
- ☐ Increased confidence in the process and project outcomes.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Mutual Accountability

The City and community are mutually accountable for a fair process, honest and respectful participation, informed and fact-based discussion, outcomes that reflect input, and acceptance of the result. City processes will include meaningful assessments to measure progress, implementation of improvements as needed, and effective communication of both.



Actions

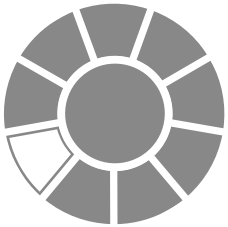
Community members and City staff share in the responsibility to:

- ☐ Demonstrate respect for all participants' time and effort by following the engagement principles and conducting productive meetings and online activities.
- ☐ Conduct a meaningful process and encourage each other's efforts with positive reinforcement and constructive criticism.
- ☐ Apply resources for civic engagement appropriately.
- ☐ Provide opportunity to evaluate the process – participate in evaluating the process.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Outcomes

- ☐ Outreach, engagement and decision making is improved.
- ☐ Increased trust in City government.
- ☐ Process documentation and outcomes illustrate that members of the community are assisting the City with community organizing and participation.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Transparency



City government will act with integrity in an open process, and will provide timely access to clear, trustworthy information, presented and employed by all parties from the beginning to the end of the process, including the reasoning that leads to and supports policy conclusions.

Actions

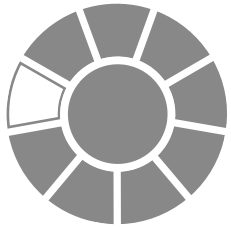
- ☐ Share background information and meeting materials with the community at least one week in advance of public meetings via eNews, Email distribution, or on the City's webpage.
- ☐ Design materials that are informative, impartial, and easily understood.
- ☐ Share publicly all public input from all sources, whether from meetings, online polls, online comment boards, in person polls, etc.
- ☐ Demonstrate how input will shape recommendations.
- ☐ Post evaluations online.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Outcomes

- ☐ Participants understand the purpose of the project and their role in the decision-making process.
- ☐ Community members have access to all of the information that is used to make a decision in a form that is easy to understand.
- ☐ The City understands the needs of community members for productive participation.
- ☐ The community has a clear understanding of how public input shaped the final recommendation.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Sustained Collaboration

Alexandria promotes a culture of community engagement that enhances public decision making processes and invests in long-term working relationships, learning opportunities and ongoing, open collaboration among community members, community groups, City leaders and staff.



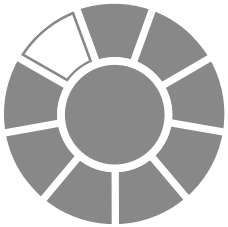
Actions

- ☐ Community members volunteer to serve in supportive roles such as community organizing, meeting facilitation, and evaluation committees.
- ☐ The City actively recruits leaders of organizations, businesses, associations and clubs as active partners in civic engagement.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Outcomes

- ☐ The tools for recruiting community members to engage in City projects are streamlined and easily executed.
- ☐ Community organizations, businesses, associations and clubs agree to active participation in projects as appropriate.
- ☐ Civic engagement principles and practices are widely known and understood, therefore residents know how to participate and increase their degree of involvement.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Evaluation



The City will work in partnership with the community to periodically assess the application of civic engagement principles. The evaluation will quantify participant feedback, document lessons learned, and identify strategies for refinement.

Actions

- ☐ Participants complete an evaluation form at the end of each public meeting or at least once during each phase of a process, or if more suitable, via an online survey. City staff works collaboratively with residents to address concerns in a way that does not impede the project schedule.
- ☐ Share evaluations with the community via the project webpage.
- ☐ Conduct annual reviews of civic engagement performance following the first year of implementation of the *What's Next Alexandria* process and the utilization of this handbook, including the outcomes of each principle, and recommendations for improvement and revisions to the Civic Engagement Handbook, if needed.
- ☐ Share recommendations with the public for a round of comments, review and agreement.
- ☐ _____

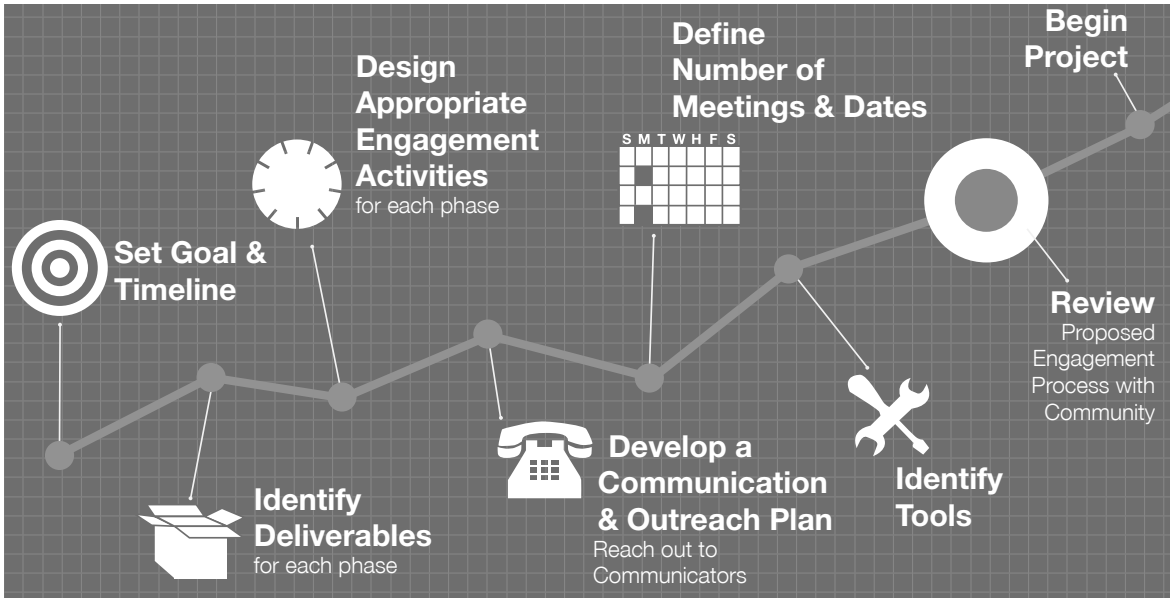
Outcomes

- ☐ Increased participation.
- ☐ Meeting evaluations or process surveys indicate that principles are being met. (If not, the engagement strategy will be modified to be more effective before the project is completed).
- ☐ The annual review ensures that "lessons learned" are applied to future projects.
- ☐ Trust in the civic engagement process increases.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Framework for Engagement

The purpose of establishing a standard Framework for the civic engagement process is to ensure consistency in how the City engages the community in different projects. ***The Framework establishes a shared understanding of what to expect in every process, and will be used by City staff at the outset of all City projects that require and benefit from public participation.*** Beginning each project with a shared understanding of the four standard phases and the proposed engagement strategies, tools and deliverables of each, builds trust and transparency in public participation. As a tool, the Framework provides a realistic and achievable way of unifying community engagement efforts across departments.

All projects will start with the menu of options shown below and will be tailored to fit the needs of that project.



Before a project can begin, the framework helps staff plan out and communicate a proposed process

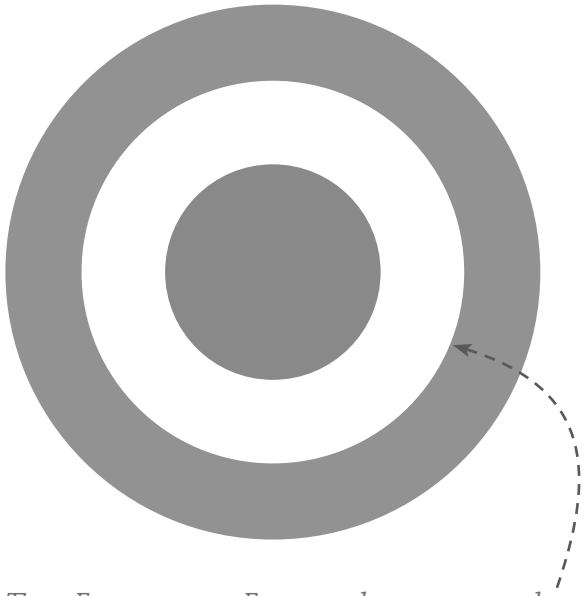
Before any major work begins, City staff will fill out the proposed engagement framework and share it with the community for review and feedback.

The Framework will be posted on the City's webpage and paper copies provided in key locations as appropriate.

The Framework will include the following information about the project:

- Goal(s)
- Timeline
- Deliverables for each phase
- Activities required to accomplish deliverables
- Anticipated number of meetings and/or other engagement opportunities needed within each phase. (Some projects may require few public meetings, and more complex projects may require more than one meeting per phase)
- Tools to be used for each phase

The framework will be refined based on community input as the project gets started. Any changes will be shared with the community by keeping a current version posted on the web page and sharing it at each opportunity for community input. The project can move on to the next phase when the majority is satisfied that the current phase has been completed. In addition, each phase will be evaluated to assess whether goals are being met and allow for adjustments along the way.



The Engagement Framework, represented here by the middle white band, builds on the Principles of Engagement

A Tour of the Framework

The first step in an engaged process is to gather, organize, and understand information.

Engage the community to discuss and evaluate feasible options.

Hone down the best options to create the final recommendation.

Carry out the project as planned, with continued communication and outreach, so the community can monitor implementation and know their work is being honored.

Phase 1 Information (Gathering, Organizing, Understanding)

Key Principles:
- Meaningful Engagement
- Mutual Accountability
- Early Involvement
- Easy Participation
- Inclusiveness and Equity

Engagement Activities:
- ☐ Hold public meetings that are well-organized and include group work to hear community opinions
- ☐ Collect research and identify community concerns
- ☐ Hold public meetings about issues about the project (online and in person)
- ☐ Reach out to the community to encourage participation (phone calls, door knocks, flyers, online)
- ☐ Visit project location as a group

Tools:
- ☐ Offer online participation (surveys, forums, social media)
- ☐ Use graphics, maps, 3D models, & pictures to explain project

Products:
- ☐ Community engagement plan
- A preliminary report that describes the project, schedule, tasks, and budget
- ☐ Clear goals for each step of the process that must be met before moving to the next step
- ☐ Community's list of issues to address

For each phase, be mindful of applicable Key Principles that should guide all actions and decisionmaking.

For the Complete Civic Engagement Framework worksheet, see Appendix D on page 72

2 Options (Discuss and Evaluate Options)

Key Principles:
- Sustained Collaboration
- Easy Participation
- Transparency
- Inclusiveness and Equity

Engagement Activities:
- ☐ Hold public meetings that are well-organized and include group work to hear community opinions
- ☐ Provide information about options, including what has worked well in other places
- ☐ Research possible options and potential impacts

Tools:
- ☐ Offer online participation (surveys, forums, social media)
- ☐ Hold group meetings with people who are affected by project
- ☐ Use graphics, maps, 3D models & pictures to explain project

Products:
- ☐ Short term report with realistic options for achieving the shared view
- Provide tools to help the community
- ☐ choose between the options

Each phase should utilize engagement activities to arrive at the best possible outcome.

3 Recommendations

Key Principles:
- Transparency
- Easy Participation
- Sustained Collaboration
- Mutual Accountability
- Meaningful Engagement

Engagement Activities:
- ☐ Hold public meetings that are well-organized and include group work to hear community opinions
- ☐ Present final options and how/why they were selected
- ☐ Hold public hearings where community members can make statements for City officials to consider, revise, and/or approve

Tools:
- ☐ Offer online participation (surveys, forums, social media)
- ☐ Hold group meetings with people affected by project
- ☐ Hold meetings open to the public for elected officials to hear comments and make decisions

Products:
- ☐ Report with options that have been reviewed and chosen; Report will show how community ideas guided the final recommendation, and will include the proposed plan and schedule to complete the work

Use these tools to assist in engagement efforts along the way.

4 Implementation and Maintenance

Key Principles:
- Transparency
- Meaningful Engagement
- Sustained Collaboration
- Mutual Accountability
- Evaluation

Engagement Activities:
- ☐ Offer visits to project sites as needed
- ☐ Evaluate how well the plan is being carried out
- ☐ Identify someone from the City who is responsible for the work and who citizens can call
- ☐ Involve the community in carrying out the plan in each phase of the process

Tools:
- ☐ Provide a schedule of project activities to carry out the plan
- ☐ Notify community about public meetings

Products:
- ☐ Use objective measurements to determine if the community engagement in the decision-making process was successful
- ☐ Provide regular progress reports

Each phase identifies deliverables that will denote successful execution of that phase.

Shared Responsibility

"If we are fully engaged in the process there is no 'them', we are all 'us'."

- What's Next Participant

The entire community shares the responsibility of working toward broad and inclusive participation in decision-making that impacts how the city grows and develops. Community members have an important role to play in encouraging a representative group of people, as many as possible, to participate.

While City staff can facilitate this work, ***community members are most effective in engaging their neighbors in decisions that reflect the best interest of all Alexandrians***.

Many Alexandrians have expressed a willingness to partner with the City and other organizations/ institutions in expanding civic engagement through an informal network of community volunteers. The City will build on this volunteer spirit as well as continue to strengthen its partnership with the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), Leadership Alexandria, and the Citizen Academy to "deputize" graduates in filling this important community role.

Volunteer Community Organizer

Staff will utilize this important and growing community resource as needed and appropriate to enhance outreach, expand understanding about a given project, and **call on community facilitators if needed**.

Below are the key roles of a volunteer community organizer to expand community capacity for engagement and the empowerment of individuals to influence decision-making in Alexandria.

Communicator

Share information about city government or decision-making processes; use your personal network to disseminate information; attend and provide updates at neighborhood, school and faith-based meetings; post or distribute flyers at neighborhood gathering spots or shopping centers; knock on doors, or find other effective avenues for information sharing. The communicator serves as a bridge builder, forming partnerships between the City government and Alexandria's institutions, organizations, businesses, and individuals.

Educator

Empower others to participate by providing fact-based information about plans or projects and how to participate in government processes. This requires stepping back from personal areas of interest to attract the broadest base of constituencies possible. Providing facts about projects also results in increased community capacity to participate, increased understanding of city issues, and emergence of new local leaders to support project implementation and future efforts.

Facilitator

Serve as an impartial discussion leader for a small group table at a large community meeting to ensure that all attendees have an equal opportunity to make their opinion heard. Facilitators attend training sessions in order to be well-prepared and to understand the project content. Volunteer facilitators send a message to community members that civic participation is important and valuable to the City and that no decisions have been determined in advance of the engagement.

Engagement Strategies

There are many strategies for engaging the community in the public decision-making process, some better suited to particular projects than others, and some better suited to particular phases in the process than others.

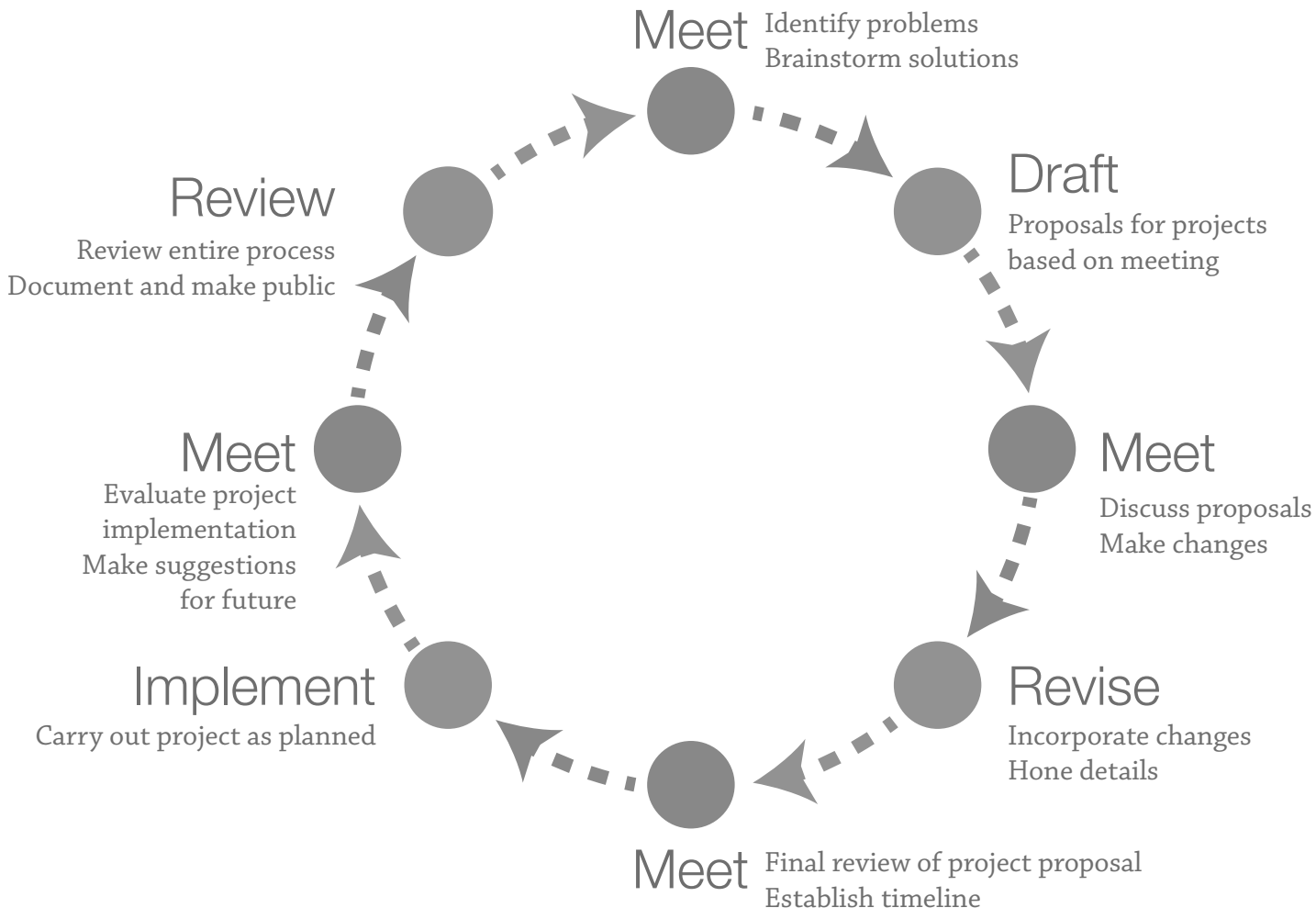
A civic engagement toolbox providing a comprehensive list and short description of many tools available and in what situation they are most appropriate is included in the appendix to this document.

> *"I think the process is going well. It's good that the process has been so transparent. I appreciate all the effort."*
>
> *- What's Next Participant*

Regardless of the strategies used, there are some fundamental guidelines to follow as projects are carried out:

- **Keep** a written and visual record of the process.
- **Respect** individual points of view.
- **Be mindful** of participants' time. Engagement opportunities (online or in-person) should be constructive and meaningful, contributing to the overarching process goal.
- **Provide feedback** results in verbatim and summary form.
- **Prioritize the transparency principle** at each step of the way.
- **Show** how input in each phase has led to the next phase.
- **Always ask** participants how the process can be improved.

Engagement Process



This graphic shows the continuous and iterative nature of the civic engagement process.

Meetings

As explained in Section 4 describing the Framework, an overall civic engagement plan (including number and type of engagement opportunities) should be established and published prior to initiating a public engagement process.

While meetings are certainly not the only way to inform and hear from the community, they are often an important component at some stage in the process, and therefore warrant detailed description. It should be emphasized that ***the community's preference is for fewer, more efficient meetings.*** This section reviews primary meeting types with information about when and how each is appropriate.

The value of a single meeting process cannot be over-emphasized. The advantages over multiple separate small group meetings are significant, including:

- Most efficient for City staff to conduct.
- Avoids multiple conversations on parallel tracks that are difficult to bring together.
- Greater clarity and transparency, and therefore trust-building, rather than divisive.
- Achieves forward movement without being derailed and losing focus.
- Fewest opportunities for special interest groups to exert outsize pressure and influence.

5 Meeting Types

1 Facilitated, Small Group Dialogue & Feedback

Best meeting tool for allowing transparent participation in a public project.

Designed to be iterative, which means that the results from one meeting are used as a starting point and built upon in subsequent meetings.

Provides opportunity to share information with the group as a whole and take advantage of the ability to work in small groups.

Capitalizes on the natural human tendency for conversations. Activities take place in small group tables of 6-10 participants. Participants share experiences, solve problems and answer questions by working together. Group facilitators guide the collaborative discussion to make the meetings as efficient and productive as possible.

Allows opportunities to hear divergent points of view while still encouraging every participant to express an opinion. Small groups can quickly report out to the larger group and explain the work the table or group was able to complete.

Can work well with simultaneous online participation to accommodate community members who can't attend in person. If the meeting activities are suited to online work, the online group participates in a "Virtual Table," viewing the meeting in real time and participating with others in moderated online discussion.

Mobile Workshop &

2 Non-traditional Meetings

Meet people where they are. Host meetings or informal dialogues in coffee shops, parks, or other neighborhood locations, to engage those who don't typically participate in night meetings on topics directly related to their neighborhood.

Attend or host a table at community events, festivals, or farmers markets to provide information and gather feedback through surveys.

Arrange bus tours, site visits, or neighborhood walks with City Staff and community members to view project sites and discuss issues.

3 Open House

Typically suited to the beginning or end of a project.

Open to the public to drop in when convenient and visit tables set up with information in a standing and browsing format.

Informative as opposed to working meetings.

Generally not appropriate for gathering feedback, actively involving meeting participants or encouraging interaction and collaboration between attendees.

4 Separate Small Group Meetings

Used sparingly during engagement processes. They can build distrust by sending the message that certain organizations deserve an audience while others do not.

Require significant additional staff time and pose the risk of duplicating the engagement process or creating multiple tracks that are difficult to bring back together.

Primarily serve as an information-sharing tool and secondarily as an engagement tool, if used.

Can be effective as one-time meetings in the beginning of a project in order to engage key constituents who might not otherwise attend larger community meetings.

Only used as a tool for bringing outside groups or hesitant organizations into the larger meeting process. The larger Community Meetings must drive the process.

Advisory Groups are a type of small group meeting tool that can be effective in specific circumstances, such as engaging participants in highly technical projects or projects which require ongoing focus/monitoring of a particular issue over a long period of time. Successful past examples of Advisory Groups include the City's 2009 Infill Task Force, the Beauregard Rezoning Advisory Group and Small Area Plan Implementation groups. The benefits are having a consistent group of engaged participants over the long term, as well as a membership that has a particular technical capacity.

Avoiding process duplication, emphasizing transparency and providing clarity about how members of the public can meaningfully participate are crucial issues to be addressed if an advisory group is selected for a public decision making process.

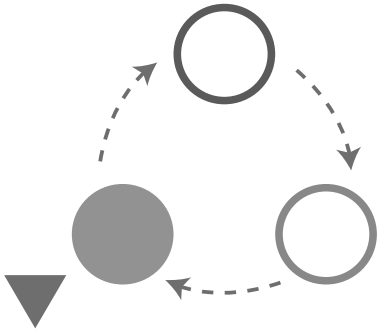
5 Town Hall

Attendees voice opinions one-at-a-time and/or ask questions of staff or elected officials. Allows a limited number of people to participate in the discussion and excludes most attendees from providing their opinion. Not an effective means of gathering meaningful input from community members in a sustained way, and should be used sparingly.

Most productive at the end of a planning project that has involved robust community participation. If participation in the planning process has not been robust, and/or when residents don't feel their voices have been heard, a Town Hall meeting can devolve into a personal venting session that is highly adversarial, rather than productive in terms of collecting feedback.

Participants from past meetings should speak or present to mitigate the potential for adversarial meetings. A diversity of viewpoints is best expressed when past participants are present to counterbalance angry voices.

Before a Meeting: Gather Information



GATHER AND PRESENT CONCRETE BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND DATA AS A FOUNDATION FOR EACH PROJECT.

Trust & Transparency
Participants should see that the City has spent time reviewing past plans, feedback, history, and current events that may affect the project under consideration.

Brevity
Presentation of this information should be kept to a reasonably short period of time during the meeting.

Determine Accessibility Needs

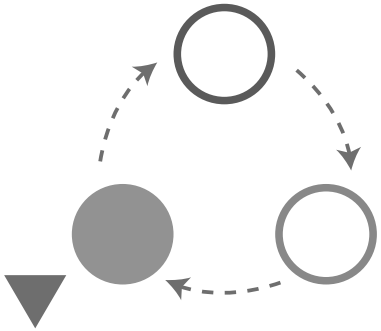
Meeting venue
Select a venue that is easily accessible by transit, centrally located within the City, and/or within the project/plan area. The venue should be a neutral place where all people feel comfortable going.

Language barriers
Is there a high percentage of foreign language speaking residents in the project area? Providing simultaneous language translation at the meetings and translating all materials, including online, will go a long way to engaging those who don't speak English. It is important that this be built into the project budget at the beginning.

Childcare
Is it likely that the meeting will benefit from better attendance if the City provides childcare? Does the project relate particularly to families with children? This is a relatively low cost investment in encouraging parents with children who might not otherwise attend to get involved in their community.

Online participation
Live Internet video engagement is an excellent way to include members of the community who don't have time or ability to attend in person. This option serves as a "Virtual Table," allowing participants to watch the meeting in real time and participate with other viewers in group exercises through a moderated live chat. While this tool may not be cost effective for all City meetings, it provides a great option for people who cannot attend meetings.

Determine Facilitation Needs



Determine if the meeting would benefit from small group facilitators.

Role of the Facilitators

The facilitators' role is to explain things clearly, keep participants on track, and ensure that everyone at the table has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

Volunteers

Staff managing each project will have access to a growing cadre of community volunteer facilitators. The list of volunteers will be maintained by City Manager's office. Staff will conduct a brief facilitator training prior to each meeting so that facilitators have a basic understanding of the project and fully understand the meeting objectives and activities. Advanced review is critical in order for facilitators to provide a productive meeting experience for participants. Facilitators should arrive early to review table set-up and meeting materials, and greet participants at their table as they arrive.

Staff

In some cases, when community facilitators are not available, staff will need to perform the facilitator role, either at small group tables or in front of the large group. In order to perform this role effectively, staff must also be well prepared and should attend the City's facilitator/civic engagement training.

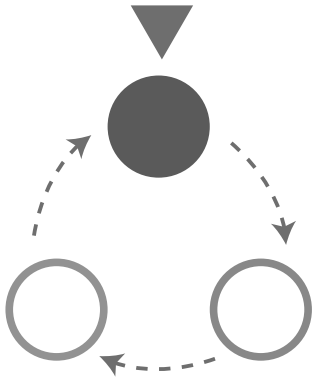
Master of Ceremonies

Some community meetings should be led by a volunteer Master of Ceremonies (MC) in order to keep the meeting on track and ensure impartiality. This MC may be a leader or director of a known organization or institution and should be recognized as a neutral party.

A volunteer MC may not be necessary for every meeting process, but should be especially considered for citywide meeting processes or projects that might benefit from a neutral party leading the meeting. A volunteer MC also demonstrates the importance of participation in civic life of the City.

> *"Involve the stakeholders from the beginning and let the group shape the process."*
>
> *- What's Next Participant*

Developing a Meaningful Agenda and Conducting a Meeting



AGENDAS SHOULD BE SIMPLE, STRAIGHTFORWARD AND PROVIDE CLEAR OBJECTIVES ABOUT HOW THE MEETING WILL PRODUCE MEANINGFUL RESULTS TO INFORM EACH PROJECT.

It should be clear from each agenda how the meeting will move the ball forward by soliciting discussion and feedback from the community. This is one of the most important components of a successful process.

Focused Agenda

- Aim for quality in the work and experience of the participants.
- The agenda should be focused on the work to be accomplished, removing extraneous tasks and presentations.
- Remove politics from the process as much as possible. Brief introductions of public officials are sufficient.
- Presentations to the larger group must be short, engaging and to the point.

Activities

- Prepare one or two hands-on, creative, and engaging activities per meeting.
- Meeting activities should be simple enough for newcomers to quickly understand while simultaneously addressing a specific component of the work or project at hand.
- Avoid the use of similar activities from one meeting to the next. Meetings over the course of a process should provide a variety of ways that people will be engaged.

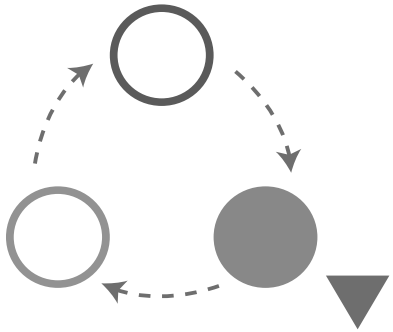
Group Work

- Participants must spend most of their time doing meaningful work and/or participating in meaningful conversations with fellow community members.
- Participants should work in small groups (between 6 to 10 persons) so that they can build off of each other's ideas and all have a chance to contribute.

Report-Outs

- After each activity (or at the end of the meeting), the facilitator should invite groups to stand and report out to the larger group what they discussed or accomplished.
- Report-outs should focus on sharing overall ideas of the group's work.
- Report-outs should be kept to 1-2 minutes per report. Total reporting time for meetings should be kept to 10 minutes or less. At the conclusion of report-outs, acknowledge that all work will be posted online in verbatim and summary form.

After the Meeting



Openly communicate engagement results from public meetings and online activities in as many ways as possible. Post/distribute engagement results within as short a timeframe as possible following the meeting (preferably less than 10 days).

Communications

Avenues for communicating post-meeting results should include the City website, eNews, project email lists that develop, community listserves, and social media. Posted information should be widely accessible as JPEG images, publicly accessible Google maps, or PDFs.

Reiterate at Next Meeting

At the beginning of the next community meeting, share the results of the previous meeting (and online work, if applicable). Ensure that participants at subsequent meetings understand that their work has been acknowledged and synthesized. The hallmark of an iterative community meeting process is that participants know how their work informs the progression of the project.

Be Concise

The presentation of results should be short and to-the-point. However, it is a crucial part of transparency and trust-building that overall themes of participant work are covered with reference to verbatim or raw data available online (or in the appropriate place).

Meeting Process Checklists

Use these checklists during the process as a way to measure your progress

Before a Meeting

- ☐ Provide background information.
- ☐ Demonstrate that the City has spent time reviewing past plans, feedback, history, and current events.
- ☐ Present this information concisely.
- ☐ Determine accessibility needs: meeting venue, childcare, language barriers, online participation.
- ☐ Determine facilitation needs.
- ☐ Train and prepare facilitators.

Developing a Meaningful Agenda & Conducting a Meeting

- ☐ Meeting agenda should be simple and produce meaningful results. It should be clear from each meeting agenda how the meeting will solicit discussion and feedback from the community.
- ☐ Aim for quality in the work and experience of the participants.
- ☐ Participants must spend most of their time doing meaningful work in small groups.
- ☐ Remove politics as much as possible.
- ☐ Speaking and presenting to the larger group must be short, engaging, and to the point.
- ☐ Prepare one or two engaging, hands on, simple activities per meeting. Avoid the use of similar activities from one meeting to the next.
- ☐ Use 10 minutes to invite groups to stand and report out on what they discussed or accomplished. These should be 1-2 minutes each.

After a Meeting

- ☐ Communicate engagement results from public meetings and online activities.
- ☐ Use all appropriate methods of communication.
- ☐ Share previous results at next meeting.
- ☐ Be transparent yet concise.

Online Engagement

Online community engagement is now part of the norm nationwide, and regularly expected of public processes by young and old participants alike. Websites, blogs, online forums, social media and other platforms provide easy and accessible opportunities for communication and process documentation.

For those individuals who are unable or unwilling to physically participate in a community meeting, online platforms provide a crucial option for engagement.

There are many digital engagement tools available today, including smartphone apps, text message tools, online town halls, and many others. Many are briefly described in the *Engagement Toolbox* provided as an appendix to this Handbook. The City already utilizes a broad spectrum of online communication and will continue to evaluate the benefits and constraints of online tools as new options are developed to consider the benefits and constraints (including how resource-heavy they may be from an implementation standpoint).

Below are some guidelines for online engagement:

Do not consider online participation the primary method for community engagement. Although it can be efficient, it is less successful at building the kinds of relationships formed during in-person meetings which allow participants to understand each other's' point of view, to brainstorm together, and to reach consensus.

Consider which kinds of activities are appropriate for online engagement. The previous section on engagement strategies emphasizes the importance of designing meaningful and creative meeting activities. In some cases, these collaborative group activities don't translate well to the digital realm. However, these activities can be accommodated through live-streamed "virtual tables," where people can participate via live moderated chats in the same activities as those attending in person.

Online engagement can be an effective and efficient resource for interim work done between in-person meetings. Consider using **synthesized** feedback from an in-person meeting as a starting point for interim online participation. Polling, voting, confirming or **augmenting** community work during the previous meeting is a great way to allow online participants to contribute.

Online activities between in-person meetings should not edit work that took place during those meetings. Instead, online activities should build on past work in ways that respect the work of in-person participants.

Opportunities for online interaction should be free and readily accessible to the public. Tools that are hidden behind pay walls and special accounts are discouraged.

"Synthesizing" *typically involves eliminating duplicity, correcting spelling errors, or simplifying large volumes of data in order to make meeting results easily understandable for the next meeting.*

"Augmenting" *the results of a community meeting is deeper than synthesizing. Augmenting typically involves using synthesized meeting results, but re-organizing the information into categories useful in the next meeting, or adding to the community-generated information with research or visual aids.*

Social Media & Virtual Meetings

Social Media

Social media is an effective and valuable tool for quickly disseminating information to a wide audience (and second-tier networks), and reaches community members that might not typically attend meetings or know about City projects.

- As it doesn't reach everyone in the City, it should be ***viewed as a supplement to other channels*** of communication.
- Use the ***City's Facebook and Twitter accounts*** to promote upcoming projects or meetings and direct people to project websites with more detailed information.
- Before creating a dedicated Facebook page or Twitter account, ***consider the amount of time required*** for consistent production of fresh material and rapid response requirements.
- Use Twitter as a platform for an ***interactive Town Hall***, which has proven to be an engaging tool that may capture the attention of individuals who don't typically attend community meetings.
- Use other social networking/sharing tools such as Tumblr, Flikr and Pinterest to engage the community by inviting them to ***share images of places and things*** they think the City could emulate in new projects or development.

Virtual Meetings

There are myriad options for hosting "virtual meetings" --meetings that can be video recorded and Livestreamed on the Internet for people to watch and participate in real time via a live chat, offering a "virtual table" addition to the in-person tables at the meeting.

- Can be used for ***real-time polling, voting, and live chat*** sessions.
- Requires a ***trained facilitator and camera operator/ technology aide.***
- Uses ***widely accessible technology*** – video, City's Livestream account, and an Internet connection. Add a smartphone, Twitter, email or Textizen, and people can participate on the go.
- ***Recorded meetings*** can be posted on the web or Channel 70, with options for commenting.
- For more information about how virtual participation can be integrated into an engagement process and when it may or may not be appropriate, see "Meeting Types" on pg. 26 of this document.

Online Comment Boards & Virtual Town Halls

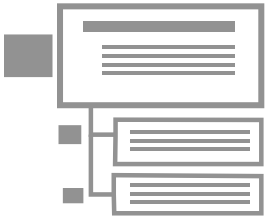
Online comment boards and virtual town halls can be a useful tool for supplementing in-person engagement because they allow people (with computer access) the flexibility to participate any time or place.

There are many commercial vendors that provide "town hall" type online platforms for an annual subscription fee. (See the engagement toolbox in the appendix for a listing of these tools).

Staff pose specific questions asking for public feedback on a particular project or question and participants respond, with the ability to view comments from fellow community members, and conversation threads on a particular topic that can spark useful dialogue.

The benefit? The easy to read presentation of the dialogue, and the ability for responses to be analyzed and presented in user friendly formats.

The success of comment boards or virtual town halls is dependent on the following ingredients:



- A ***strong marketing campaign*** encouraging the community to use the tool, with links from the City's website and to social media to engage a broader audience.
- ***Clarity about the objective*** of the forum and ***how input will be used.***
- ***Dedicated staff resources*** to develop questions, provide monitoring and ensure a timely response.
- ***Clear rules of engagement*** and comment monitoring. Avoid platforms that allow anonymous comments.
- ***Easy to use, and, easy to find***.
- ***Suited to the group that the City is trying to reach***, particularly with regard to computer/Internet access and potential language barriers.

Online Polls

Online polls are a quick and convenient option for residents to share their concerns or ideas; they are effective for staff because of the ease of compiling, analyzing and sharing the feedback.

Online polls are especially valuable when it's important to get feedback from a broader group than those who can attend meetings in person.

Some things to keep in mind when considering use of an online poll:

- Online polls are ***typically not considered a statistically valid*** measure of broad public opinion, but simply record the opinions of the group that chooses to respond.
- ***Questions must be well written*** so as to be clear and balanced.
- Respondents should understand ***how the poll feedback will inform the process.***
- ***Polls can be conducted out in the field where community members already congregate***; using iPads or smartphones, staff can get information from community members who might not otherwise know the City wants their feedback.
- Textizen is a polling platform that relies on text message surveys on smart phones. It combines old-fashioned outreach (posters, fliers with a QR code) with smart phone technology, ***capturing the community's opinion right where they are***.
- For those without technology access, ***printed polls*** can be mailed or shared through libraries, recreation centers and schools. ***Telephone polls*** are also still a useful alternative, even in an age of cell phones and unwanted phone solicitations. Community members are often willing to answer a phone poll that directly affects their neighborhood.

Visual Aids

Visual art can both improve public understanding in a project and create opportunities for informal community engagement. Some examples are listed below; see toolbox in Appendix for more information.

Del Ray community mural

- ***Interactive public art projects*** allow people to express their unfiltered opinions (through art) in the public realm. The process of expression provides an opportunity for the community to interact and also creates an intelligent piece of temporary public art.

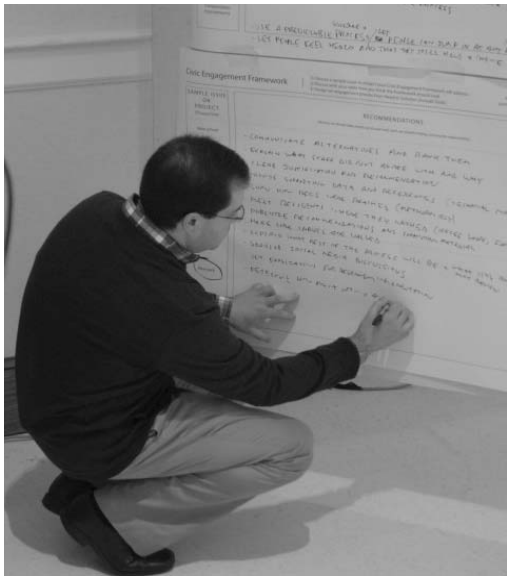
- Public ***art projects in schools or at open houses*** can be used as a tool to engage families through their children, occupying and educating children while parents have an opportunity to learn more about the topic at hand.

- ***Illustrative plans, models, graphic renderings, blocks and Legos*** provide an opportunity to illustrate planning concepts and projects in a way that is visually appealing and engaging, and can level the playing field by reducing the importance of literacy and written language translations.

- ***Short informative videos*** on basic planning principles or current projects convey information and engage public interest. They can be informative and inspiring – simple enough for kids to understand, but profound in the message they deliver. Videos are posted on the City's YouTube Channel and links can be shared broadly.

- ***Storytelling*** can be coupled with visual arts to shape and inform neighborhood revitalization plans and development projects by sharing stories of the community and aspirations for its future.

- ***Well-designed maps*** are a useful tool for telling the story of a particular project, visualizing data associated with various options or recommendations, showing change in an area over time, etc.


Civic Engagement Framework

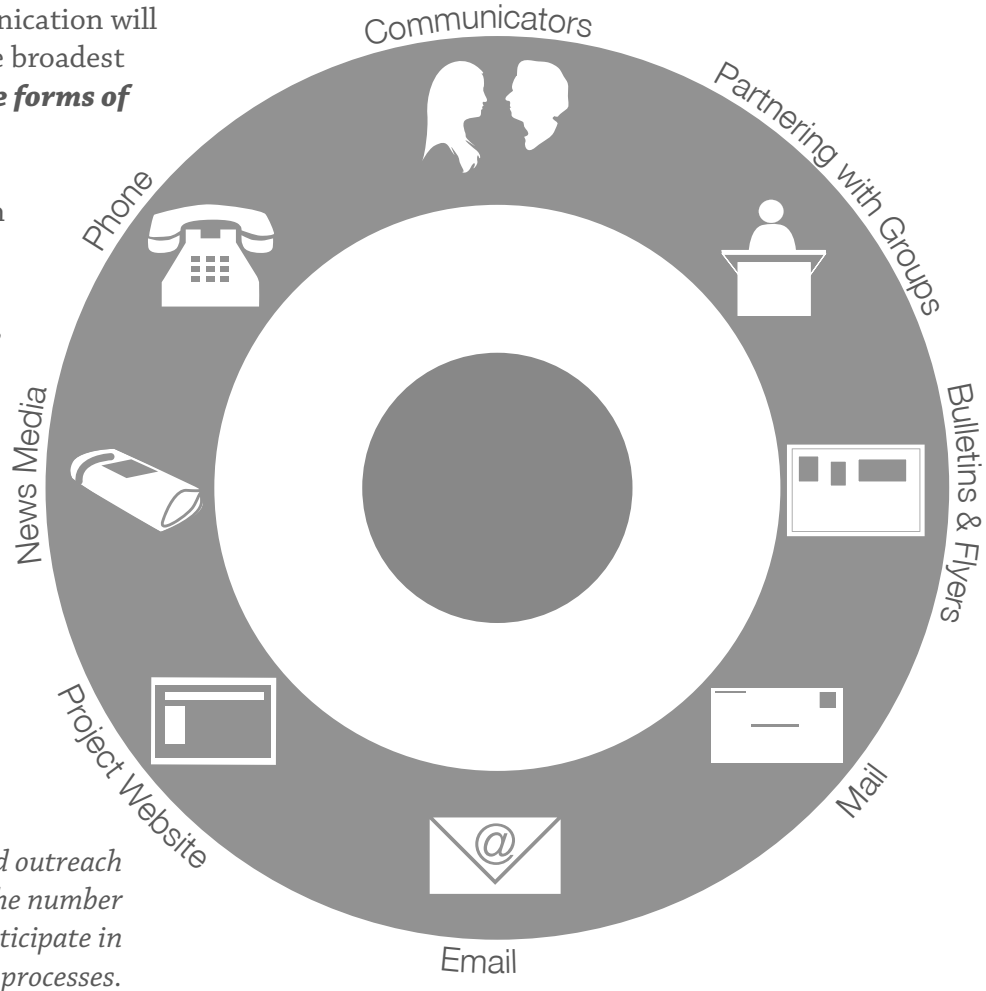
10

Communication & Outreach

It is clear that no one method of communication will suffice in successfully reaching out to the broadest possible audience. ***Continuous, multiple forms of communication are necessary***.

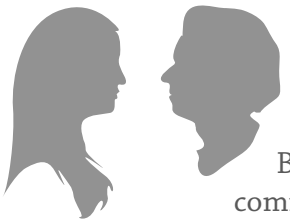
Regardless of the type of communication used, information must be provided ***early*** in a decision-making process, ***consistently*** throughout, and in ***simple***, understandable ways. This requirement is memorialized in the civic engagement principles and the framework, and cannot be emphasized strongly enough.

The following pages describe many methods of communication suitable for civic engagement.



A variety of communication and outreach tools are crucial for expanding the number of community members who participate in City decision-making processes.

Communicators



There is no substitute for person-to-person information sharing.

Being encouraged to attend a community meeting by your well-informed neighbor who can explain why your participation is important is much more likely to get you to a meeting than an email from the City.

Therefore, having a cadre of informed communicators on a given project is critical to increasing participation and ensuring a productive process that stays on track.

- Communicators are volunteers who bridge communications and information gaps between government and the community, and expand the number of participants.
- Communicators can include anyone – community members, civic leaders, elected officials, and decision makers.
- City staff must provide accurate, timely and clear information so that communicators are well informed and able to respond intelligently to questions from stakeholders.
- It is essential that communicators remain engaged and active throughout a project in order to be effective.
- While communicators serve an important function, they will not have greater influence in the process than any other community member.

Partnering with Existing Groups

In some cases, staff does not have adequate social capital to be effective in engaging communities without assistance. ***It is critical to forge appropriate partnerships with organizations and trusted leaders within the organizations to share information and solicit participation from their members.***

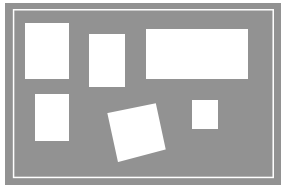
- Community leaders can provide key information at meetings of their respective groups (cultural, advocacy, or faith groups, civic or Parent Teacher Associations, among others), where the message will carry more weight when delivered by someone known to the group. Attendees can in turn share the information with their own personal networks.

- Effectiveness depends on factors such as meeting attendance, flyer distribution/translation, and ability to clearly communicate the connection between the project at hand and quality of life issues for the people in the room.

- Social service providers are an excellent channel for Information sharing.

- Face-to-face contact works best for some populations within the city, reaching people who might not have email or access to computers, and can negate language barriers.

Print: Posters, Bulletins, and Flyers



Today, many cities experience a digital divide impacting populations without Internet access. Even as Internet access increases, on smart phones and in public facilities, many people are still not reachable by Internet, which is why offline communication is still important.

Flyers in neighborhood locations and word of mouth are often the only way many community members hear about upcoming meetings.

For those populations whom the City has not yet successfully engaged in public decision-making, and until more effective tools are successful, print materials will continue to provide an important communications link and send a positive message about the City's goal to expand participation. Therefore, print communication should be an integral part of project communications, and should be taken into consideration when developing a project budget.

- Flyer distribution is time consuming and can be a major drain on staff resources; a volunteer force of communicators willing to distribute flyers in neighborhoods can divide the task into manageable pieces and encourage further neighbor-to-neighbor connection.

- Print materials can be distributed at religious institutions, local shops and restaurants, gyms and schools – any place that residents congregate or spend time.

- Materials should include project and meeting information, including ADA compliance, transit accessibility, language translation, and childcare, if applicable, and a Quick Response (QR) code, which, when scanned by a smartphone, links the user to the project website.

Print: Mail

Print materials can also be distributed by mail, but this is a significantly more expensive approach. ***Its reach can be broad or targeted but its effectiveness can be partially undermined by the volume of junk mail***. Staff needs to consider cost and frequency when establishing a budget for this engagement tool.

There are some items that are better suited for mail distribution:

- Printed items with a longer shelf life than a meeting notice, such as the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services' Spring Cleanup bulletin – items that might get posted on the refrigerator.
- Initial flyers or postcard that announce the kickoff of a new planning process and providing the project website, scope, timeline, and opportunities for community participation.

Important Print Communications issues to consider:

- Consistency in branding/ identity – are City materials easily recognizable?
- Do the materials clearly address the issue, why it's important and for who?
- Are the materials for citywide distribution or specific to a neighborhood?
- Should the flyer/postcard be translated into multiple languages?

City eNews & Email

The City's eNews subscription service offers a way for residents to sign up to receive email or text message updates on projects that are important to them.

The City will continue to promote this tool widely to expand the number of residents who subscribe.

While staff needs to avoid inundating the community with too many email and eNews updates, they are basic, easy tools for sharing information, taking the following into consideration:

- Ask community members to share emails and eNews with their own networks.
- Provide regular updates and information to relevant eNews groups as well as to the email contact list of stakeholders specific to that project.
- Respond to emails from the community in a timely manner. Delayed response or unanswered emails lead to lack of trust and uncertainty that comments have been considered. If time constraints don't allow for responses to multiple messages on the same topic, summarize the email communication – such as listing responses to frequently asked questions or noting frequently suggested policy or actions.
- Use community listserves for periodic updates of planning processes, public hearings, and upcoming event information. Alexandria boasts many neighborhood and professional listserves that can be used by the City or communicators.

Project Website

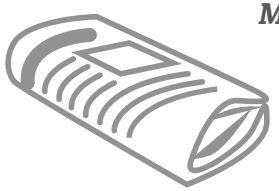
The City's dedicated project webpages should provide consistent, detailed information about projects and issues, and serve as an effective and accessible public record of the process.

Webpage checklist:

- ☐ Ensure that information is always up to date, easy to navigate, well organized, and comprehensive.
- ☐ Designate a staff person to manage each project page.
- ☐ Provide an easy way for the new or infrequent visitor to get a quick summary of the project goals, purpose, current status, timeline, and what remains to be decided.
- ☐ Take feasible steps to provide information to non-English speaking residents.
- ☐ Include staff contact information.
- ☐ Highlight important upcoming dates.
- ☐ Demonstrate how community input will be or has been incorporated and how decision-making will occur or has occurred throughout the process.

- ☐ Provide links to audio and video recordings of past meetings.
- ☐ Provide Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet, with answers and brief explanations to common questions.
- ☐ If there is an area on the site for feedback make it clear how feedback will be responded to and how it will shape the process.

News Media



Many community members rely on local print and online news sources for their information. There are a number of ways that the City can utilize these resources to help communicate important information:

- Media advisories through the City's Office of Communications can provide news agencies (including local radio and TV channels) with fact-based information about projects.
- Information about meetings for inclusion in local calendars, such as the Thursday insert in the Washington Post.
- Letters to the Editor.
- Advertising – this can be an expensive option and will require consideration about budget and target audience. City staff is continuing to test the effectiveness of targeted online advertising.
- It may take longer to publish information in print media due to time constraints associated with the medium. Using daily online news can be faster and may reach a broader audience.

Phone

While using the telephone might seem antiquated or inefficient as an outreach tool, there are limited situations in which it may be appropriate and worthy of consideration. ***The simplicity of the tool means that it is accessible to many.***

- Particularly suited to short timelines, connecting with individuals who don't have computer access, and when a personal contact is needed in order to engage people in a project.
- Phone calls to personal friends can be an effective way of encouraging neighbors to participate in a given process.
- Communicators, or even City staff, can kick off an informal, old-fashioned phone tree that has the power of personal contact which eNews or flyers do not.
- Robo-calls can be targeted to specific areas to notify residents of an upcoming planning process.
- Telephone town halls provide a way for community members to call into a massive conference line to hear a brief update and ask questions.

Reaching the Community's Full Diversity

Alexandria is fortunate to have such a diverse community. However, a common concern of staff and community members alike is the lack of diversity in engagement from all parts of the community. The City has consistently had difficulty successfully engaging certain segments of Alexandria, particularly racial/ethnic minorities, low income residents, immigrants/foreign language speakers, renters, people who live in condominiums, persons with disabilities, parents of young children, and young Alexandrians (younger than 30).

Reaching all community members can prove challenging for a variety of reasons, common among them are:

- People are busy with jobs and families and are unable to attend meetings to learn about issues affecting them.
- People don't know about opportunities to participate, or they can't easily tell what the issue is or how it affects them.
- Lack of Internet/computer access.
- Many residents do not speak English.
- Many people do not have cars or have physical disabilities that prevent them from going to meetings.
- Country of origin does not have a culture of civic participation.

"We have to find ways to involve the people who have dismissed or given up on the process of engaging in the Democratic process."

- What's Next Participant

Reaching Diversity: Strategies

Staff will continue to work on improving outreach to segments of the community who do not typically participate and will develop an action plan to reach these community members. In order to encourage first time participation, it is important to identify community leaders to engage these populations, engage people where they are, personalize the communications, and improve the accessibility of information and events. Below are strategies to assist in this ongoing effort:

Develop relationships with formal or informal community leaders who are already known and trusted by the community and can best convey potential impacts or the importance of getting involved in a particular issue.

Hold group discussions after religious or community gatherings to reach those residents who are normally unable to attend meetings during the week or evenings. Use the opportunity to solicit suggestions on the best ways to communicate with the group.

Utilize digital communication. Not everyone has access to computers, but most people have access to a cell phone. Texting, Twitter, Facebook, community listserves and email alerts are effective tools for making multiple connections quickly. Translating brief alerts can be more feasible than disseminating entire documents in several languages.

Distribute flyers at neighborhood businesses and gathering places like grocery stores, Laundromats, gyms, schools, clinics, coffee shops and religious institutions. Get permission to post flyers in condo and apartment buildings on bulletin boards or in elevators, or in workplaces. Usually flyers can be easily/quickly translated into multiple languages.

> *It is always a great experience meeting different people with different viewpoints working toward a common goal. Alexandria is ours to prepare and preserve for the next generation.*
>
> *- What's Next Participant*

Contact local radio and TV stations to focus outreach on particular groups: Spanish-speaking channels (AM/FM); religious stations (AM); ACPS channel; local access channels.

Provide translation services and translated materials during meetings. Doing so makes everyone feel welcome and encourages participation. People do want to be involved in what is happening in their city – our job is to make that as simple as possible.

Consider transportation. Many residents rely on public transportation, which does not run frequently in the evenings; others cannot drive at night or have other restrictions precluding them from driving to meetings. Individuals with mobility issues or other special needs face great barriers in arranging evening transportation.

Provide childcare at key meetings to encourage and make it possible for parents with young children to attend.

Meet people where they are, in parks, recreation centers, community or school events, neighborhood businesses, even bars.

Reaching Diversity: Summary

Expanding participation in decision-making in the City will require a multifaceted communications and engagement approach. Because residents get their information in many different ways, multiple channels of communication are necessary, from low-tech to high-tech, and everywhere in between.

Staff time and resources are limited, so the process will work best when the community shares in the responsibility for outreach. Communication needs to occur early and then consistently throughout all City planning/decision-making processes.

Finally, communication must be clear and understandable so people know what is being asked of them and how they can participate.

Implementation

This Handbook sets forth the policies and procedures for consistent implementation of the *What's Next Alexandria* civic engagement work, an effort that spans City government. Application of the principles and framework must be fundamentally consistent citywide, but the level of effort may vary from project to project to be realistic and achievable.

An effective organizational structure is necessary for successful implementation. The City will utilize a hybrid structure, with some elements centralized and others decentralized to ensure both consistency and cost-effectiveness/efficiency as shown on the right.

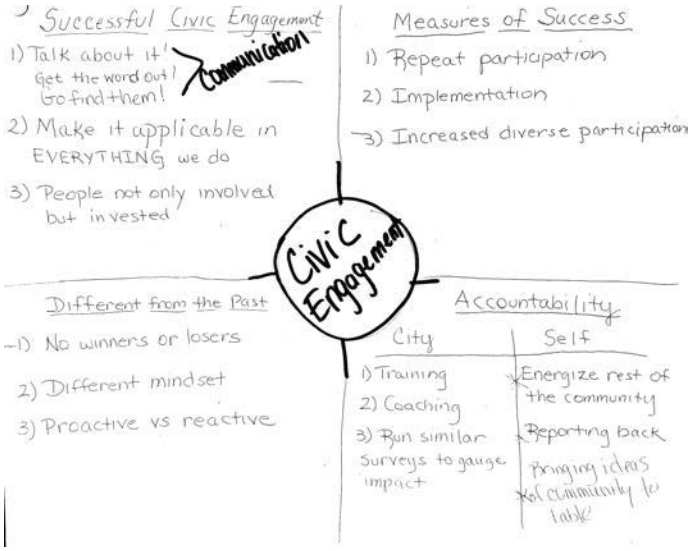
The City Manager's Office will provide oversight to ensure that expectations are clear, resources are adequate to meet expectations, and staff is held accountable for results. A key element of this role will be management of resources to provide facilitation training to staff involved in civic engagement work throughout the City. Facilitation training for staff and members of the community will help embed this new approach – and in some cases, culture shift – in everyday work in a consistent way.

Centralized (City Manager's Office)

- Setting expectations: Policies/Procedures
- Allocating resources for training
- Managing performance accountability
- Managing internal communication

Decentralized (Departments)

- Applying the principles
- Using the civic engagement framework
- Developing the scope of the project
- Managing civic engagement processes



Implementation

Staff training will consist of two parts: skill building and content.

The skill-building piece will focus on how to run productive meetings, facilitate small group discussions, and manage difficult situations. The content element will train staff in Alexandria's new civic engagement "way" – how to apply the principles, use the framework, and run a meaningful and constructive civic engagement process.

In order to create staff ownership of the new approach, trainers will help staff understand why this effort is important to the City as a whole and what the benefits are to them in their work. Training will be accompanied by a short staff manual (essentially the appendices of this Handbook) outlining the policies and procedures. Training will be followed up by regular communication to the departments about expectations.

The individual departments will integrate the new standards and framework into their existing operations. All of the planning efforts included on the City's Interdepartmental Work Program will follow the principles and guidelines established in the Handbook.

Having the departments lead the implementation effort, rather than through a centralized administrative function, allows the civic engagement approach to meet the needs of the specific project. It also encourages ownership of implementation, which speeds the internalization of the new civic engagement approach.

Because the projects are of different scales, from a Small Area Plan process to a more focused technical study, each project's civic engagement framework will be distinct, but the common threads will be the principles and the agreed upon phases of the process overall.

An interdepartmental working group will monitor civic engagement implementation across departments and provide guidance on refining the organizational structure as needed. This group will develop a set of guiding criteria to serve as a threshold for understanding when a City project requires a civic engagement plan or when the Handbook is simply a reference document for general engagement on smaller projects. Performance accountability will be managed by the City Manager's Office following recommendations from the interdepartmental group.

Evaluation

City departments, led by the Civic Engagement Interdepartmental Working Group, will conduct ongoing assessment of civic engagement performance by project.

Staff will develop a brief summary of each project's civic engagement process and outcomes as well as a brief evaluation. Staff will consider the following data points and performance to develop the evaluation using the project evaluation template provided in the appendix.

- ***Track and review data on participation.*** It would be intrusive to ask participants to report their demographic characteristics at every civic engagement event, but it is still possible to gauge the diversity of the participant group. For example, it is possible to report on data such as how many families used the provided childcare, or how many individuals used the translation services. Some questions can be added to the sign in sheet to help track participation, such as "is this your first time participating in a City process?" One way of tracking geographic diversity is to ask participants to place a dot on a map where they live and work.

- ***Assess the organizing and communication process:*** Which outreach methods were used, how frequently were they used and how did they succeed in garnering participation?

- ***Review and assess use of the Framework:*** Was it shared with the community in advance of starting the process? Was it used properly and followed? Was it updated if needed?

- ***Review meeting evaluations*** for further insight into department success. Participants may have the opportunity to evaluate each meeting, as in the *What's Next Alexandria* Process, or each phrase, or the project as a whole.

- ***Assess project accountability and transparency:*** Did departments make the Framework available prior to each project? How quickly were meeting results and summaries posted for the public?

- ***Assess performance of each principle,*** using the actions and outcomes checklists.

Annual Evaluation

During the first year, the Interdepartmental Working Group will develop a proposed plan for future annual review of civic engagement performance, taking into account the costs and benefits of an annual effort. While the benefits of an annual review are clear – ongoing assessment and refinement of the City's Civic Engagement performance – the staff resources to conduct such an effort could be significant. The City should not devote resources to assessment at the expense of doing the actual civic engagement work well.

Therefore, the Working Group will need to carefully consider and weigh the ***most efficient and effective model for evaluating performance and holding the City accountable*** for its commitment to civic engagement.

The proposed plan will be shared with the community for comment. An annual evaluation would consider the following elements and identify areas of improvement:

Evaluate use of the framework; Was it used consistently by all applicable City processes? Does it need to be revised?

Evaluate departmental use of the Handbook: Is the Handbook being frequently used and referenced when designing community engagement processes? Are certain elements of this Handbook out of date and in need of being updated? Is there anything missing?

Evaluate Communications/ Outreach success and update the City's understanding of communications networks; Have new communications avenues become more popular? Which organizations and networks are the best up-to-date tools for outreach and communication? How can the City reach into spaces where the public is already active?

Evaluate new and emerging online and digital engagement techniques: Have new forums for online engagement become popular or free?

Celebrate small victories: Increasing public engagement across the City will require years of sustained, collaborative, and considered progress.

Define the process for revising the Civic Engagement Handbook when necessary.

Assess the City's implementation structure. Is there a problem with consistency or has the effort become too administratively onerous? Does the hybrid approach need to be adjusted to gain more consistency or to allow for more flexibility based on workflows? Portland, Oregon, which underwent a similar civic engagement process to Alexandria's, established a Civic Engagement Advisory Commission to perform the evaluation assessment, five years after completing the original civic engagement initiative.

"We need to establish a culture of community -wide engagement and develop relationships that last beyond the meetings."

- What's Next Participant

"We began to think differently and more sensitively about participation in process, what we can bring to the table and how that participation will enrich us as well as the community."

- What's Next Participant

"Engaged citizens are *honest*, *ready* to compromise, and are part of *the solution*. *Leave* your ego at the door *open* your mind and ***LISTEN***."

"Participate and be informed, speak intelligently and constructively, and then have a willingness to accept outcome of fair process."

- What's Next Participant

- What's Next Participant

Appendices

A-1 **Appendix A** *What's Next Alexandria Process*
Learn about the progression of the *What's Next Alexandria* initiative from concept through completion, including a timeline of community engagement opportunities and plans for implementation.

A-7 **Appendix B** Resources
Resources and background information collected on public participation throughout the United States.

A-9 **Appendix C** Civic Engagement Meeting Ground Rules
Community meeting ground rules utilized during the *What's Next Alexandria* process.

A-11 **Appendix D** Civic Engagement Framework Template
Process framework template to be utilized by staff at the outset of all City projects that require and benefit from public participation.

A-13 **Appendix E** Communications and Engagement Toolbox
Matrix of suggested community engagement and communication tools with descriptions, resource requirements and applications.

A-27 **Appendix F** Meeting Evaluation Template
Sample evaluation form to be completed by participants of community meetings.

A-29 **Appendix G** Project Evaluation Template
Sample project evaluation form to be completed by staff upon completion of city projects.

Appendix A: What's Next Alexandria Process

Summary

What's Next Alexandria is a City initiative to gather information and develop and implement strategies for improving and expanding civic engagement in Alexandria. Through a series of community conversations and online participation starting in September 2012 through June 2013, members of the community collaborated with City staff and City officials to talk about how Alexandrians can best participate in the public decision-making process that shapes the City. Opportunities for engagement included four community dialogues where participants worked together in small groups, four opportunities for online engagement, some of which supplemented dialogue work; and three opportunities for real time online video engagement during the dialogues. The final product is Alexandria's Civic Engagement Handbook, to guide the City and the community in future public participation efforts.

A hallmark of the process was modeling the civic engagement principles that emerged from the community's early input in the first community poll and as they developed over time, and responding to community suggestions and concerns. At times, this meant making changes that ultimately enhanced the process and the end product. The overarching effort was to establish standard practices to build trust and increase transparency, and expand the opportunities for participation. This included: asking the community for feedback before issues have been framed and decisions made, posting verbatim feedback and summaries on website, providing significant advance notice of meetings, offering online opportunities to participate and review, using members of the community as facilitators, and offering Spanish interpretation and childcare at meetings.

The City of Alexandria team involved in *What's Next Alexandria* spanned multiple departments, including the City Attorney's Office, the City Manager's Office, Communications and Public Information, the Department of Community and Human Services, the Virginia Health Department, Information Technology Services, Recreation Parks, and Cultural Activities, Planning and Zoning, and Transportation and Environmental Services, as well as ACTion Alexandria, the Alexandria Economic and Development Partnership, and a city resident/Civic Engagement practitioner to provide subject matter expertise.

Opportunities for engagement:
September 2012-June 2013

Online poll (Sept. 18 – Oct. 25) on ACTion Alexandria in English and Spanish

- Topic: health of civic engagement in City, community preferences for getting information/providing feedback on public decision making processes.
- Received 1,614 responses, some in Spanish, most in English

Community Dialogue #1, November 15, 2012, First Baptist Church

- 165 participants defined optimal civic engagement and City/community roles

Online poll (January 4-14, 2013) on ACTion Alexandria

- Topic: Confirm the categories for Principles of Civic Engagement.
- 130 people responded, majority confirmed the 8 principle categories.

Community Dialogue #2, January 29, 2013, First Baptist Church

- 120 participants crafted principle statements, planning process framework.
- City piloted live streaming video and online chat – allowing remote participation in same activities as those attending the meeting.

Online poll (March 19-April-9) on ACTion Alexandria

- Topic: Review/affirm synthesized principle statements.
- 160 people responded.

Community Dialogue #3, April 30, 2013, First Baptist Church

- 120 participants heard feedback on final draft principle statements and process framework and discussed concrete steps for applying the principles/framework.
- City offered live streaming video and online chat

Online Comment Board (May 9-May 23) on What's Next Alexandria webpage

- Community had the opportunity to review and comment on the civic engagement process framework.

Community Dialogue #4, June 24, 2013, First Baptist Church

- 90 participants reviewed community achievements to date and outline of content that will be included in the Civic Engagement Handbook as well as the process for developing the final draft and community review of the document; Participants also collaborated to expanding the City's partnerships and outreach capacity and citizen participation in engaging the broader community.
- City offered live streaming video and online chat.

Online Comment Board (June 26-July 30) on What's Next Alexandria webpage

- Community had the opportunity to review and comment on the preliminary draft outline of the civic engagement handbook.
- 5 people provided comments

Note: All materials collected during the What's Next Alexandria Process, including small group work from the community dialogues, meeting evaluations, and responses to online polls, can be found in summary and verbatim form on the project website: alexandriava.gov/whatsnext.

Narrative Summary

a. Community Poll Launches *What's Next Alexandria* Process

In September 2012, the community participated in an online poll on the future of civic engagement in Alexandria, addressing community preferences for getting information and providing feedback on public decision-making processes. The poll was the first step in the *What's Next Alexandria* initiative to collect input on the community's thoughts about civic engagement, both in terms of personal experience and suggestions for improvement.

The poll was available online on the ACTion Alexandria website and on paper at various locations throughout the community including recreation centers, libraries and through community organizations. It consisted of 10 questions about civic engagement and planning for the City's future. In order to reach as many residents as possible, news of the survey was distributed via the City's eNews service, City website, media advisories, by email to City Boards and Commission members, community and civic organizations, past participants in planning processes, ACTion Alexandria email list, and to several neighborhood listservs.

Poll results were shared at the first Community Dialogue on November 15 and on the *What's Next Alexandria* website.

b. Development of the Principles of Civic Engagement

Alexandria's Principles of Civic Engagement were developed by the community to guide public participation in the City. The process for developing the principles began in the first Community Dialogue in November 2012, and continued through the succeeding dialogues as well as online engagement opportunities supplementing the work completed in those meetings.

At the first Community Dialogue, participants answered the following three questions individually and with their tables:

- What does ideal engagement feel like?
- What is expected of you as an engaged community member?
- What do you expect in return for your effort?

All responses were catalogued and synthesized following the meeting and brought back during the Second Community Dialogue for participants to review and craft principle statements, which were then further distilled by community facilitators collaborating with City staff. Finally, the draft principles were presented online for the community to affirm. Once confirmed, the Final Principles of Civic Engagement were official.

c. Development of the Framework for Civic Engagement

The Framework for the civic engagement process was initiated in response to concern that there was a lack of consistency in how the City engages the community in different projects. During the second Community Dialogue on January 29th, participants began developing the Framework to establish a shared understanding of what to expect in every process for how, when, and where the community should be engaged. Staff consolidated feedback received from dialogue participants and posted it for public comment on the website. No comments were posted, and so the Framework was further explained at the third Community Dialogue to serve as a basis for a discussion about how it will be implemented.

Following feedback received from the third dialogue, the community was again given the opportunity to provide online comments on the Revised Draft Civic Engagement Framework from May 9th through May 23rd. No comments were received. There were a number of suggestions from the volunteer facilitators to simplify the language in the framework. Staff collaborated with the facilitators to make the framework easier to understand for people who are not experience in civic engagement. These changes were presented to the community at the fourth community dialogue and the revised Framework is incorporated in this handbook.

The Framework will be used by City staff at the outset of all City projects that require and benefit from public participation.

(See Appendix D for Framework Template)

d. Live Internet Video Engagement

During the second Community Dialogue, the City of Alexandria tested and evaluated live Internet video engagement. This online option served as a Virtual Table, allowing community members who could not attend in person to watch it unfold in real time, participate with other viewers in group exercises through a moderated live chat, and tell us what they thought of this tool for future use. The community again had the opportunity to participate in the City's Virtual Table during the 3rd and 4th Community Dialogues. The Virtual Tables were met with positive response from the community and opened a door to another avenue for public participation. While this tool may not be cost effective for all City meetings, it provides a great opportunity for people who cannot attend meetings.

(See Appendix F, Communication and Engagement Toolbox)

e. Community Facilitators and Communicators

In response to participant feedback from the first Community Dialogue, the City asked community members to serve as facilitators during the subsequent dialogues. *What's Next Alexandria* facilitators attended training sessions and invested as volunteers in the community to expand and improve civic participation in Alexandria. A core group of community facilitators grew and were well received by participants, illustrating the effectiveness of community volunteers in the civic engagement process.
Over the course of the *What's Next Alexandria* process, many participants indicated a willingness to volunteer in some

capacity – whether as a facilitator or communicator – to help the City expand civic engagement. Community members and staff advocate building on the foundation established in *What's Next Alexandria* by forming an informal network community volunteers that will result in a growing community capacity for pursuing shared goals and the empowerment of individuals to influence decision-making, strengthening contact between residents and City government.

f. Communication

Throughout the *What's Next Alexandria* process, participants made many suggestions for improved communication between the community and the City, as evidenced by the initial community poll and subsequent engagement opportunities. During the fourth Community Dialogue, participants assessed the value of various methods of communication and how they could be used to support community networks.
People consistently stressed the importance of early and clear communication, delivered through as many channels as feasible.

Many *What's Next Alexandria* participants mentioned that they heard about the dialogues via email from groups they are connected with or individuals they know who forwarded a City eNews. Others indicated they wouldn't have known about the meetings unless they saw the flyers posted around their community. What became clear based on all feedback is that people get their information in many different ways, and in order to reach the broadest possible audience, the City needs to communicate information in many ways.

(See Appendix E, Communication and Engagement Toolbox)

g. Draft Civic Engagement Handbook

The culmination of the community's efforts is the completion of this Handbook for Civic Engagement in Alexandria, which pulls together all of the community's work developing the following:

- Principles of Civic Engagement, including concrete action steps and indicators of success
- General framework for public decision-making processes
- Recommendations for implementation and evaluation.
- Strategies and toolbox for communication/engagement.
- Documentation of *What's Next Alexandria* process.

During the fourth Community Dialogue, participants reviewed the draft elements of the Handbook. Following the dialogue, community members had an opportunity to review and comment on the preliminary draft outline on the City's online comment board.

The complete draft Handbook will be posted online and circulated in hardcopy for community review in mid-August through September 2013. Printed copies will be distributed to community/rec centers and libraries across the city. Staff will brief Commissions in September, and City Council will consider the Handbook at their October public hearing.

Appendix B: Resources

Below are resources and background information staff has collected, referred to and shared with the community. Links to all of these references can be found by visiting the What's Next Alexandria Resource webpage: www.alexandriava.gov/67950.

National organizations

- Alliance for Innovation
  - White paper: Connected Communities: Local Governments As a Partner in Citizen Engagement and Community Building
- America Speaks
- Consensus Building Institute
- Deliberative Democracy Consortium - Model Public Participation Ordinance
- Everyday Democracy
- Harvard Kennedy School, Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement
- Institute for Local Government
- International Association for Public Participation
- National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation
- National League of Cities -- City Examples of Civic Engagement
- National League of Cities: Planning for Stronger Local Democracy Toolkit
- Pepperdine School of Public Policy – Davenport Institute for Civic Engagement
- Sustainable Cities Institute

Jurisdictions with notable civic engagement programs or reports:

- Arlington County, Virginia
- Norfolk, Virginia
- Boston – Community Engagement Strategy
- Dialogue and Deliberation for Civic Engagement in Chicago: Building a Community of Practice
- Decatur, Georgia
- Denver, Colorado: South Lincoln Housing Redevelopment
- Eau Claire, Wisconsin: Clear Vision Eau Claire
- Illinois Department of Transportation, Circle Interchange Stakeholder Involvement Plan (SIP): A blueprint for defining methods and tools to educate and engage stakeholders in the decision-making process for this project.
- King County, WA: Countywide Community Forums, Public Engagement Program Evaluation
- New Hampshire: New Hampshire Listens
- New York Regional Planning
- Philadelphia, PA: Budget Planning
- Portland, Oregon Office of Neighborhood Involvement

  - City of Portland Public Involvement Principles
- Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Portsmouth Listens
- Salem Sustainable Cities Initiative: Civic Engagement Strategies
- San Francisco, California
  - San Francisco Planning Department: Public Outreach, Engagement Effectiveness Initiative
- Toronto: Review and Reflection on Current Practices and Future Approaches
- Ventura, California Civic Engagement Division
- Utah: Envision Utah
- Vancouver, Canada: Greenest City Initiative

Examples of Online Engagement Platforms

- Action Alexandria – brings together neighbors and local nonprofit organizations to exchange ideas, coordinate efforts, and solve problems in our community.
- Civic Commons – collaborative catalog of civic apps to help cities engage
- Code for America - working to change the way cities work through technology and public service
- Crowdsourcing - obtains ideas by soliciting contributions from a large group of undefined people from the online community
- IdeaScale – online civic engagement platform
- Mindmixer – online civic engagement platform
- Neighborland – online civic engagement platform
- OpenPlans – non-profit focused on open government and transportation
- Open Town Hall – online civic engagement platform
- The Project for Public Spaces -- Digital Placemaking
- UserVoice – online civic engagement platform

Articles about Civic Engagement

- Learning to Listen in Portsmouth New Hampshire

Appendix C: Civic Engagement Meeting Ground rules

In response to community feedback received in the first community poll, and consistent with the civic engagement principles established through *What's Next Alexandria*, the following ground rules should be shared with participants at the outset of all meetings.

- √ Treat each other with respect.
- √ Only one person speaks at a time.
- √ Give everyone a chance to participate equally; avoid dominating.
- √ Listen as an ally, not an adversary. Everyone should feel comfortable expressing their opinion regardless of differences.
- √ Ask for clarification, don't assume you know what someone means.
- √ Do not characterize other people's views in or outside a group's meetings.
- √ Turn off or silence all cell phones and mobile devices.

Appendix D: Civic Engagement Framework Worksheet

See the following two pages for printable Civic Engagement Framework worksheets.

Civic Engagement Framework

City Department: **Project:** **Goal :** **Overall project timeline:**

Phase 1 Information *(Gathering, Organizing, Understanding)*

Key Principles:
Meaningful Engagement
Mutual Accountability
Early Involvement
Easy Participation
Inclusiveness and Equity

Engagement Activities:
- ☐ Hold public meetings that are well-organized and include group work to hear community opinions
- ☐ Collect research and identify community concerns
- ☐ Educate community on important issues about the project (online and in person)
- ☐ Reach out to the community to encourage participation (phone calls, door knocks, flyers, online)
- ☐ Visit a project location as a group

Tools:
- ☐ Offer online participation (surveys, forums, social media)
- ☐ Use graphics, maps, 3D models, & pictures to explain project

Products:
- ☐ Community engagement plan
  A preliminary report that describes the project, schedule, tasks, and budget
- ☐ Clear goals for each step of the process that must be met before moving to the next step
- ☐ Community's list of issues to address and their view of what we should be working toward
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2 Options *(Discuss and Evaluate Options)*

Key Principles:
Sustained Collaboration
Easy Participation
Transparency
Inclusiveness and Equity

Engagement Activities:
- ☐ Hold public meetings that are well-organized and include group work to hear community opinions
- ☐ Provide information about options, including what has worked well in other places
- ☐ Research possible options and potential impacts

Tools:
- ☐ Offer online participation (surveys, forums, social media)
- ☐ Hold group meetings with people who are affected by project
  Use graphics, maps, 3D models, & pictures to explain project

Products:
- ☐ Short term report with realistic options for achieving the shared view
  Provide tools to help the community
- ☐ choose between the options
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

3 Recommendations

Key Principles:
Transparency
Easy Participation
Sustained Collaboration
Mutual Accountability
Meaningful Engagement

Engagement Activities:
- ☐ Hold public meetings that are well-organized and include group work to hear community opinions
- ☐ Present final options and how/why they were selected
- ☐ Hold public hearings where community members can make statements for City officials to consider, revise, and/or approve

Tools:
- ☐ Offer online participation (surveys, forums, social media)
- ☐ Hold group meetings with people affected by project
- ☐ Hold meetings open to the public for elected officials to hear comments and make decisions

Products:
- ☐ Report with options that have been reviewed and chosen; Report will show how community ideas guided the final recommendation, and will include the proposed plan and schedule to complete the work
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

4 Implementation and Maintenance

Key Principles:
Transparency
Meaningful Engagement
Sustained Collaboration
Mutual Accountability
Evaluation

Engagement Activities:
- ☐ Offer visits to project sites as needed
- ☐ Evaluate how well the plan is being carried out
- ☐ Identify someone from the City who is responsible for the work and who citizens can call
- ☐ Involve the community in carrying out the plan in each phase of the process

Tools:
- ☐ Provide a schedule of project activities to carry out the plan
- ☐ Notify community about public meetings

Products:
- ☐ Use objective measurements to determine if the community engagement in the decision-making process was successful
- ☐ Provide regular progress reports
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Civic Engagement Framework

City Department: **Project:** **Goal :** **Overall project timeline:**

Phase 1 **Information** *(Gathering, Organizing, Understanding)*	2 **Options** *(Discuss and Evaluate Options)*	3 **Recommendations**	4 **Implementation and maintenance**

Appendix E: Communications and Engagement Toolbox

The Communications and Engagement Toolbox are on the following pages. The tools are grouped into 7 major categories.

A-14 Engagement in Non-Traditional Places

A-15 Traditional Forms of Communications

A-17 Online Tools for community input and interaction

- A-19 Virtual "Town Halls"
- A-20 Online Communication Options

A-21 Media

A-22 Social Media

A-23 Partnerships

A-24 Visual Aids

- A-25 Informative Videos
- A-26 GIS

#	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
1	Engagement in Non-Traditional Places	Holding meetings in places other than formal public facilities can be more inviting, more engaging, and more convenient for many stakeholders. It's an excellent way to get people initially engaged in a project who might not otherwise know about it. Going to where people are takes into consideration that some people don't feel comfortable coming into a "government" realm. Provide translation services for all meetings to the extent possible.		
1a	Bus Tours	Non-meeting opportunity to discuss issues and view regional examples of built development alternatives, develop a shared experience and knowledge base. Effective for facilitating more engaged, civil discussion and feedback outside of the typical meeting environment and inspiring/informing community and advisory group members with real-life examples rather than PowerPoint images. Waterfront, Beauregard and Landmark each featured bus tours. Labor-intensive to produce.	Financial Resources - Varies	In-person engagement and information sharing
1b	Host meetings and charrettes in third places such as art galleries, public plazas, vacant storefronts	Utilize private places that are active public spaces. The use of galleries (such as the Torpedo Factory), public plazas (such as Market Square or Four Mile Run Park Expansion), and vacant storefronts can both energize those sites and meeting attendees.	Financial Resources - Moderate	Community Meetings/outreach
1c	Host Tables at existing events	Use existing events to reach out to the public. For example, Farmers' Markets, outdoor community events; city holiday celebrations, etc.	Staff Time - Moderate Upfront	In-Person Outreach Efforts
1d	Onsite visits/meetings	Inviting members of the public on project site visits or hosting community meetings/events on the site is a great way to help people understand and visualize the project/process (pre- or post-construction).	Staff Time - Varies	Community Meetings/outreach
1e	Coffee shop talks	Many members of the public are too busy to attend community meetings at City Hall but have their daily cup of coffee or tea. Coffee shops have become wonderful third places for social interactions. Staff can use these places as opportunities to engage people informally and provide specific project information.	Staff Time - Moderate Upfront	In-Person Outreach Efforts

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
2	Traditional Forms of Communications	Traditional outreach practices continue to be an effective means of engaging community members who don't have computer/internet access, as well as those who may have access, but have not connected with the City (ie, we don't have their email address or they haven't signed up for enews).		
2a	Canvass Door–to-door	Door-to-Door campaigns are time intensive, but effective. They are useful when trying to engage non-English speakers, persons with disabilities, or the elderly. Volunteers, including high school students interested in civic engagement or earning volunteer hours, should be utilized for the task.	Staff Time - Large Upfront	In-Person Outreach Efforts
2b	Partnering with existing groups to provide information. (Civic/homeowner associations, places of worship, PTA meetings, etc.) (see also Partnerships)	Communicators can play a vital role in this effort. Hold a group discussion after a religious/school/community organization meeting or gathering to reach those residents who are normally unable to attend meetings during the week or evenings. In addition, while not all community members are represented by civic associations, they are one good point of contact in the community. Piggy-backing on school functions puts the city in contact with parents and educators, as well as providing a platform to encourage youth involvement in their city's issues. (Some teens have expressed interest in being youth ambassadors). Attending other organizations' meetings is a good way to provide information, answer questions, and most importantly, encourage participation in the larger project process. Keep in mind that a single community-wide meeting process is most productive - use other small group meetings as a tool for bringing outside groups or hesitant organizations into the larger meeting process.	Staff Time - Moderate Upfront	In-Person Outreach Efforts
2c	Comment/Evaluation Forms	Provide staff an additional opportunity to obtain community feedback on various issues. Information collected can be made public via the project website.	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
2d	Direct mailings	Direct mailings can ensure that every resident within a planning area receives information on key project milestones including points for community engagement. Mailings should include QR codes directing residents to specific project information (website) and appropriate branding to ensure project/city recognition. These are especially helpful before a process begins.	Financial Resources - Moderate	Passive Outreach Efforts
2e	E-Newsletters	E-newsletters can be used for regular project updates, keeping the lines of communication open and ensuring the community is informed about the timeline and progress to date.	Staff Time - Moderate Upfront	Passive Outreach Efforts

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
2f	FAQ documents, issue papers	Provide answers to common questions, brief explanations of complex planning concepts or aspects of Plans. Direct community members to more specific information / project website. These documents can be made available online, or at various city and community meetings.	Staff Time - Moderate Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
2g	Post/Distribute flyers and posters	This strategy should be used to publicize meetings and events. Add QR codes to flyers to direct community members to relevant project information and include appropriate branding to ensure project/city recognition. Flyers can be posted/distributed at libraries, rec and community centers, places of worship, schools, civic associations, places of business, sporting events - or distributed via other services, e.g., Meals on Wheels. It is also important to translate flyers in multiple languages to the extent possible.	Staff Time - Large Upfront	Passive Outreach Efforts
2h	Telephone	There are limited situations in which the telephone is particularly suited - short timelines, connecting with individuals who don't have computer access, when a personal contact is needed in order to engage people in a project. Robo-calls can be an effective way of delivering information to an entire area, as demonstrated by ACPS. The City has experimented internally with telephone town halls - one option for engaging a large group without holding an in person meeting..	Staff Time - Varies	Outreach Efforts
2i	Write Op-Ed or blog updates in local newspapers (online/print)	The media is a great source of information for the community, and a tool that the City might take better advantage of to share timely project information with a broad audience. Newspapers, community blogs, professional blogs are opportunities for planning agencies to communicate to a large audience and possibly pre-empt misconceptions.	Staff Time - Varies	Passive Outreach Efforts
2j	Giveaways	In certain projects, it might be appropriate to encourage participation with small rewards, such as small gift items/gift cards/other locally donated merchandise. Utilized in the Census initiative, this was an effective way of getting students informed and hard-to-reach populations involved.	Staff time - varies	Outreach Efforts

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
3	Online tools for community input and interaction	Interacting with people electronically is an effective and cost-efficient way to reach many people quickly. A variety of interactive technological tools can facilitate community discussion and collect feedback - while saving costs on both the public and private sides by decreasing the number of public meetings needed. In addition, the format provides an opportunity for people who are unable to attend meetings for a variety of reasons to provide input.		
3a	Online comment board on project web page	Online outlet for community input and concerns during plan/project development process. Provides an effective opportunity for the community to see public comments and for online dialogue. Comment boards tend to work best when used to invite feedback on a specific topic – not a general feedback venue for airing grievances. Comment boards have the potential to be nonproductive if the dialogue devolves into something unconstructive or if the community does not have confidence that their input is being responded to and incorporated into the topic at hand.	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
3b	Polling	Public input can be gathered through traditional and new polling techniques. Surveys can be web-based (such as survey questions posted on websites or via the City's polling software, Survey Gizmo), and distributed via email blasts, phone (Textizen, platform for text-message surveys) or mail, or taken during community meetings using real-time “clickers”. Printed copies of polls can also be distributed via city/community meetings, rec and community centers, libraries, schools, places of worship, civic associations, etc. The completed polls can then be mailed in to the appropriate contact.	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets, Community Meetings
3c	Virtual Meetings (Web + Television + Computer+ Smart Phone + Traditional Phone)	Allows people to participate in community meetings without having to physically attend them. Additionally, staff can facilitate input from the online-meeting attendees in a number of ways.	Staff Time - Moderate	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
3c.i	Virtual Tables, Live Stream viewing	During the What's Next Alexandria Community Dialogues, the City tested and evaluated live Internet video engagement. This online option served as a Virtual Table, allowing community members who could not attend in person watch the meeting in real time, participate with other viewers in group exercises through a moderated live chat, and provide a review of the tool for future use. While this tool may not be cost effective for all City meetings, it provides a great opportunity for people who cannot attend meetings to participate. Other forms of live stream viewing can be utilized - Community meetings, live staff presentations, and panel discussions can be broadcast live on Channel 70 and the web, and viewed on computers, mobile phones or tablets. People who watch the live event, or virtual attendees, can provide comments and questions via email, live chat, twitter, or phone. This invites people to the process who may not ordinarily participate because physically attending community meetings is not feasible or desirable.	Staff Time - Moderate Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
3c.ii	Dial-in for meetings	If video is not an option, consider coordinating a dial-in system for community members to listen in on meetings.	Staff Time - Small Upfront	Community Meetings
3c.iii	Post-Meeting Stream via web and viewed on computers, mobile phones, and tablets	Community meetings, staff presentations, and panel discussions can be recorded and rebroadcast on Channel 70 and the web. People can watch the event and provide comments and questions to staff via email or phone. (The City currently records meetings and broadcasts them on project webpages.)	Staff Time - Small Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
3c.iv	Webinar (GoToMeeting -http://www.gotomeeting.com); Cisco WebEx Meetings - http://www.webex.com)	A webinar is another virtual meeting technique that allows virtual attendees to hear and see presentations via a personal computer. Webinars, in many cases, allow attendees to submit questions and comments via live chat.	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
3d	Virtual "Town Halls"	Virtual "town halls' are web-based engagement platforms that can collect input from stakeholders. Staff can submit questions/challenges/issues/projects to the public and the public can provide input. There are many products on the market with different offerings. Some of the leading vendors are shown below.		
3d.i	Vendors such as Peak Democracy or Mindmixer	These discussion platforms collect feedback related to public decision-making and often employ monitoring software to ensure discussions are free of profanity, personal attacks, and impertinent comments. Peak Democracy authenticates participants and prohibits them from dominating discussions. In addition, services comply with free speech rights, requirements for public records retention and requests, and sunshine ordinances. Mindmixer facilitates discussions related to "idea germination", interactive budgeting, goal prioritization, and more.	Financial Resources - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
3d.ii	ACTion Alexandria http://www.actionalexandria.org/organization	A local civic engagement website, supported in part by the City, that provides interactive tools making it easier for residents to take a more active role in addressing community problems. They offer Idea Challenges that invite Alexandria's population to an online community discussion.	Staff Time - Moderate Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
3d.iii	Wikiplanning - http://www.wikiplanning.org	Wikiplanning was developed by a landscape architect/urban design firm that wanted to get away from the traditional charrette model and pitfalls associated with hosting community meetings (such as scheduling, costs, non-representative attendees). This on-line tool allows more people to participate in the process via surveys and forums. The firm also provides direct mailer services, coordination with local media, and interviews with key stakeholders.	Financial Resources - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
3d.iv	Crowdbrite - http://www.crowdbrite.com/	Crowdbrite provides on-line meeting participation for projects ranging from physical design to policy. It has the capability to conduct a live discussion on alternative designs during charrettes. Crowdbrite has been used for civic engagement, design review and competitions, mobile asset mapping, place-based visual preference surveys, action planning & capital improvement programs, and statewide economic development.	Financial Resources - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
3e	Online Communication Options	There are a variety of platforms by which community members can receive information and provide feedback to staff. The method used is dependent on the type/size of project and desired outcome.		
3e.i	eNews	The City's eNews updates are a great resource for sharing information. This service should continue to be promoted widely as some community members are still unaware of it - consider including an eNews request in all email/eNews communications, and during community meetings distribute the Office of Communications' Tools Cards to participants.	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
3e.ii	Email distribution lists from sign in sheets	Using email addresses/phone numbers from meeting sign-in sheets is a great way to communicate with residents who are interested in specific projects. Detailed project information can be shared with community members on a regular basis as well as upcoming meeting/event notifications.		
3e.iii	City Blog	The city can host a blog for the community to post opinions, receive information, be directed to appropriate city contacts, etc. on a regular basis. This venue is more informal and would need to be monitored for appropriateness; however, it can be a good tool for outreach and 'customer service.'	Staff Time - Large Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
3e.iv	City Web page improvements	The community provided many suggestions for making improvements to the City website during the What's Next Alexandria process. One option: Consolidate all projects, plans, and planning efforts for onr neighborhood to be presented on one webpage (with tabs and other organizational formats). This will make it easier for the public to access existing plans, development projects, and initiatives as it will be presented on a neighborhood basis. For example, one webpage can be dedicated to the Braddock Road Metro Small Area and on that page there will be information related to all current development projects, implementation efforts, approved plans, approved SUPs, etc. Each project webpage should be inclusive, up-to-date, informative; well organized and easy to understand; clear with regard to current project status; have a calendar that shows important dates, e.g., meetings/forums; have feedback area/comment board – monitor and respond to comments in a timely manner; show how decision making occurs – how community input is incorporated; include surveys and results; orient to citizen point of view; format should be consistent thru all departments. For IT: update city website search capability to make more user friendly - e.g., Smart-type; keywords that populate.	Staff Time - Large Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
3e.v	Community listservs	Community listservs are a great way to notify the community of upcoming meetings and events in Alexandria. And there is the added benefit that people will forward the notices to their networks.	Staff Time - Small Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
3e.vi	Google+ (Hangout)/Skype	Group video chat - allows for a direct connection with the audience. Only accommodates up to 10 people - but may be suitable for some smaller online meetings, focus groups for example.	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
3e.vii	Polling software like SurveyGizmo (http://www.surveygizmo.com)	SurveyGizmo (the City's service) is an easy online survey service that allows customers to create surveys specific to the need. Staff has used this service for Arlandria Implementation efforts.	Staff Time - Moderate Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
4	Media	While online media is often more cost effective and reaches a broader audience, there is still a very real need to utilize print media to communicate with the community. While taking into consideration budgetary concerns, local radio and television channels can be used to reach particular segments of the city's population.		
4a	News media (online and print) - Patch; Alexandria Times; Alexandria Gazette Packet; Old Town Crier; The Washington Post; El Tiempo Latino, etc.	It is important to consider timing with regard to weekly print media – if using print media, make sure the issue being communicated will coincide with the printing date. Using online news can be less time constrained and can reach a broader audience, since not all Alexandria residents receive the weekly print papers. Some online sources will send out a daily digest to subscribers.	Staff Time - Varies	News Media
4b	Local television and radio stations.	Public announcements can be made via local radio stations (AM/FM) and local access cable channels. It is important to also consider non-English speaking and religious stations. (Local access channels on cable - e.g., Government Access (71), ACPS (70), WDCA Mundofox (264), Ethiopian (40-45)etc.)	Financial Resources - Varies	News Media

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
5	Social Media	The City currently uses social media to inform and update the public. However, these media can be used more strategically to solicit feedback and input, post meeting notices, and share project milestones - and can be done in multiple languages.		
5a	Twitter/Twitter Town Hall	Twitter can be used to push information to users, i.e., in the case of an upcoming meeting or event. Additionally, a Twitter town hall, or Twitter chat, is an event where departments can invite public engagement for a scheduled time period during which users can ask questions or find out more information about a topic, much like a webinar. The questions are tagged with a pre-designated hashtag, and the agency responds to questions using the hashtag, follows-up via a blog post, or uses another digital means of meaningfully responding to the engagements. The use of the hashtag feature for the relevant neighborhood or projects should be employed. Ex. #braddock #waterfront #outdoordining	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
5b	Facebook	The City's Facebook page helps to build a connection to the community by providing quick updates and notices. It can also be used for advertising upcoming meetings/events.	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
5c	Tumblr	A microblogging platform and social networking website, which allows users to post multimedia and other content to a short-form blog. Users can follow other users' blogs, as well as make their blogs private.	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
5d	Flikr: Invite residents to submit photos to a Flikr pool	Flikr is an online photo-sharing service. Communities have used it to invite the public in planning processes by requesting the public to submit relevant pictures. For example, Chicago's "Go to 2040" Comprehensive Plan process has a Flikr page and invited members of the public to submit pictures: http://www.flickr.com/photos/go_to_2040/ ; Arlington CPHD: http://www.flickr.com/photos/54701791@N08/	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
5e	Pinterest	A pinboard-style photo-sharing website that allows users to create and manage theme-based image collections such as events, interests, and hobbies. Users can browse other pinboards for images, "re-pin" images to their own pinboards, or "like" photos.	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
6	Partnerships	In many cases, City staff does not have adequate social capital within some communities and therefore has difficulty effectively engaging those communities alone. Engaging appropriate partners who are trusted by various communities is an effective way of reaching out to solicit participation.		
6a	Social Service Providers (ex. Community Lodgings, ANHSI, etc.)	Service providers have access to many hard-to-reach populations (minority, persons with disabilities, low-income, renters, parents). Utilizing their connections is good strategy.	Staff Time - Varies	In-Person Outreach Efforts
6b	Advocacy groups (ex. Tenants and Workers United, Ethiopian Community Development Corp, etc.)	Advocacy groups have access to many hard-to-reach populations (minority, persons with disabilities, low-income, renters, parents). Utilizing their connections is good strategy and helps create a sense of trust.	Staff Time - Varies	In-Person Outreach Efforts
6c	Boards and Commissions (ex. Commission for the Arts, Commission on Aging, etc.)	Commissions and Boards have access to networks of advocates, professionals, policy experts, and members of the hard-to-reach population (including Youth). Utilizing their connections is good strategy.	Staff Time - Varies	In-Person Outreach Efforts
6d	Civic and Homeowners Associations	Civic Organizations are purposed to improve the lives of their constituencies. Utilizing their connections is good strategy and provides an opportunity for them to serve their communities.	Staff Time - Varies	In-Person Outreach Efforts
6e	Educational Organizations (ex. PTAs, NOVA, ACPS, etc.)	Engaging parents, children, and youth in planning processes is very difficult. Establishing partnerships with ACPS and NOVA can broaden both outreach opportunities and mutually beneficial relationships. Educational organizations can often provide resources that can support planning processes (such as pro bono services from teachers, students, and technicians).	Staff Time - Varies	In-Person Outreach Efforts
6f	Faith Community (ex. Churches, Synagogues, Mosques, etc.)	The faith community can provide support in planning efforts as they are trusted within the community, they have access to large groups of people, and they tend to be large landholders. Engaging this community can be good strategy.	Staff Time - Varies	In-Person Outreach Efforts

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
7	Visual Aids - Art, Graphics, Maps, Videos			
7a	Public Engagement as Public Art: Public art can be used to allow people to express their opinions in the public realm without City interference	Public art can create opportunities for informal public engagement and input. Some examples are Candy Chang's public art as public engagement projects The process of expression provides an opportunity for the community to come together. It also becomes an intelligent piece of temporary public art. (http://candychang.com/category/projects) and the City of Charlottesville's Downtown Mall Community Chalkboard (http://www.brunerfoundation.org/rba/pdfs/2009/Chalkboard%20FINAL.pdf).	Financial Resources - Varies	Passive Outreach Efforts
7b	Visual Art techniques such as illustrative plans, models, graphic rendering, drawings, sculpting, painting, wooden blocks, legos, etc.	Visual arts provide an opportunity to illustrate planning concepts, development projects, document community input in an interactive format that is visually appealing. Also, it lessens the need for literacy and written language translations. (ex. Maps on Purpose project sponsored by Art on Purpose, a non-profit organization in Baltimore, MD)	Financial Resources - Varies	Passive Outreach Efforts
7c	Storytelling	Storytelling can be coupled with the use of visual arts to allow the community to provide input by sharing stories of the community and aspirations for its future. The storytelling can be used to inform the development of neighborhood and revitalization plans, and development projects. (ex. Braddock Plan and the Black History Museum, Nauck Community Heritage Project in Arlington County, Virginia and Stories for Change www. stories forchange.net)	Staff Time - Varies	Passive Outreach Efforts
7d	Art Projects at Community Events	Kids and adults alike can be engaged in small art/education projects - sometimes kids can be kept busy with an art project while parents have an opportunitiy to learn about or provide input on an issue.	Staff Time Only - Varies	Passive Outreach Efforts
7e	Sketching or Art Contests	In the event of a urban design opportunity (plazas, street furnitures, streetscape, pedestrian ways, staff can invite the public to provide design solutions via art submittals. This process can take the form of a contest to make it exciting and fun.	Staff Time - Varies	

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
7g	Informative Videos	Partner with Communications Department to create short informative videos on both basic planning principles AND current projects. Use staff and volunteers for actors. To maximize viewer rate, share video link with relevant neighborhood associations, blogs, listserves, churches and faith groups, non-profits. Email to relevant E-news groups. Also post survey link on project webpage.		
7g.i	Create an Alexandria Planning Youtube Channel	Youtube channels can be created specifically for Alexandria Planning efforts and projects. As an example, Greenbelt Alliance has a Youtube channel that hosts general planning- and project-related videos. Also, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning has a Youtube channel related to its 2040 Comp Plan.	Staff Time - Moderate Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
7g.ii	Videos for Alexandria-based websites	These videos can be created for general or specific planning-related topics and can be linked on project websites, local blogs, on-line newspapers, etc. The City currently has a "What's New Alexandria" video stream that has been used to publicize planning efforts in Arlandria.	Staff Time - Large Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
7g.iii	Project-specific videos using Cartoon Animation	Cartoon visualization, coupled with storytelling, can be used to educate the public on specific projects or general planning projects. The video consists of an illustrator's hand, a white board, markers, and a narrator. Vancouver used this tool and posted it as a Youtube video posted on the project webpage (http://talkgreenvancouver.ca/greenest-city-story).	Staff Time - Large Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets

	TOOL	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCE NEED (Staff time , cost, etc)	APPLICATION
7h	GIS	Partner with Geographic Information Systems to make the best use of these tools for a relevant project.		
7h.i	Interactive GIS Tools	Allows people to visualize data/impacts.	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart
7h.ii	GARI	GARI when public can communicate information about planning and develoment in the city.	Staff Time - Varies	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets
7h.iii	Geofencing	Geofencing is a feature in a software program that uses the global positioning system (GPS) or radio frequency identification (RFID) to define geographical boundaries. A geofence is a virtual barrier. Geofence programs allow an administrator to set up triggers so when a device crosses a geofence and enters (or exits) the boundaries defined by the administrator, an SMS or email alert is sent. People can register for updates when they are in an area of interest and they will receive text messages on their phones. This is another example of ways to push out information to residents who want to receive updates and it is relatively easy for the City of Alexandria to set up once the right protocols are in place. (Many geofencing applications incorporate Google Earth, allowing administrators to define boundaries on top of a satellite view of a specific geographical area. Other applications define boundaries by longitude and latitude or through user-created and Web-based maps.)	Staff Time - Large Upfront	Website, Govt Access Channel, Smart Phones, Smart Tablets

Appendix F: Printable: Meeting Evaluation

A printable sample meeting evaluation is on the following page.

MEETING EVALUATION

Date: _____ Event: _____

Please take a moment to answer the following questions in order to help us make the best use of your time, support each participant, learn from you, and facilitate the most productive outcome.

1. What are your concerns about this event/project?

2. Do you have suggestions for improvements?

3. What workd well during the meeting and why? What could have been done better during the meeting and why?

4. Other thoughts?

Appendix G: Printable: Sample Project Evaluation

A printable sample project evaluation is on the following two pages.

STAFF PROJECT EVALUATION

Date: _____ Event: _____

Using the Guidelines listed below, develop a brief summary/evaluation of this project's civic engagement process and outcomes:

1. Track and review data on participation, including demographic and geographic diversity, number of participants.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. Assess the organizing and communication process: Which outreach methods were used, how frequently were they used and how did they succeed in garnering participation?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Review and assess use of the Framework: How was the Framework used and were there any deviations from the Framework? If there were deviations, what were they and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. Review participant meeting evaluations for further insight into department success.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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STAFF PROJECT EVALUATION

5. Assess project accountability and transparency: Did departments make the Framework available prior to each project? How quickly were meeting results and summaries posted for the public?

6. Assess performance of each principle.

7. What improvements can be implemented in the future to ensure a productive outcome?