



CONSERVATION DISTRICTS
OF WASHINGTON STATE
your window to healthy lands



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Tools to Advance Engagement in Conservation

Compiled by the Washington State Conservation Commission. Adopted March 20, 2025.

INTRODUCTION

This Community Engagement Plan is intended as a guide to help support the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC), conservation districts (CDs), and other partners' commitment to public participation in decision making, particularly for any programs and projects that may affect communities.

SCC is required by *RCW 70A.65.030*¹ to adopt a Community Engagement Plan for grants and programs funded by the Climate Investment Account. Rather than focus exclusively on Climate Commitment Act (CCA) funds, we are taking a more holistic approach toward improving and expanding community engagement for all of the work we fund. Our goal is for this plan to be effective across a wide range of programs, projects and other activities. We also hope for this plan to be durable, to support appropriate, successful community engagement now and into the future. Therefore, rather than prescribe a specific engagement method for each of today's programs and projects, we offer this guide to support decisions about when, where, how, and by whom community engagement should be done. This flexibility is especially key given the unique way in which the work we fund is implemented.

While work funded by SCC is implemented through a range of partnerships including with counties, land trusts, and others, the vast majority of our work is done through and in partnership with the state's 45 locally-led conservation districts. Together, SCC, conservation districts, and other partners provide voluntary, incentive-based programs that empower people to practice conservation and ensure healthy natural resources for all. SCC is unique among funding agencies and in most cases, conservation districts are in a much better position to engage with communities than SCC.

This document is designed to build on the strength of the conservation district system and to improve and expand on the thousands of existing partnerships and community relationships already in place. Beginning with this foundation, this document offers information, resources and practical how-to guidance to help support, expand and improve community engagement by SCC where appropriate, by conservation districts, and by other partners integral to how SCC delivers services. While each conservation district is unique, many are entirely grant dependent and lack the staff and financial resources to engage with community at the level they aspire to. The approach to engagement may sometimes be shaped by this financial and capacity reality.

As you will see in this document, community engagement is not a one-size-fits-all undertaking. The engagement approach used in one situation may not be appropriate in another. Also, each organization will have its own overarching goals and priorities for community engagement, and program or project-specific outreach should be designed with those goals in mind. This document is designed to help support and prompt careful reflection around those decisions. This guide can help support development of engagement goals and priorities, but unless something specific is required by a funder, the decision will be made by each organization when and how to engage.

This document provides tools and strategies to optimize communication with communities across Washington. Some broad examples of when it can be used and how it can benefit an organization include:

- Establishing district priorities (strategic planning, etc.)
- Supporting community-driven projects that advance conservation
- Building trusting relationships and partnerships
- Responding to funder requirements
- Improving community understanding of and support for the work we do
- Improving cross-sector collaboration to advance conservation
- Demonstrating respect for differences in background and perspectives
- Recognizing and supporting community resources and assets that can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of our work
- Engaging communities more holistically and intentionally
- Recruiting staff and supervisors
- Gaining feedback to improve the relevance and effectiveness of conservation services
- Better meeting the needs and desires of Washingtonians through conservation

We intend our Community Engagement Plan to be a living document. As we and our partners work with the contents of this plan and learn from that experience we intend to revisit, update and refine it going forward. We look forward to adding additional examples and lessons learned from districts as they continue to pursue this work.

Acknowledgement

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|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| • Paul Andersson | • Elizabeth Jackson | • Laura Rivera |
| • Alexander Birk | • Mary Kinney | • Kiana Sinner |
| • Nora Carman-White | • Alicia Leacox | • Jen Thurman-Williams |
| • Julie Curtis | • Natalie Nelson | • Kathryn Wells |
| • Aneesha Dieu | • Carolyn Rice | • Maddie Wilcox |
| • Kenna Fosnacht | • Allison Rinard | |

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SETTING THE STAGE

Community Participation in Conservation

What do we mean by “community?”

Many different organizations, individuals, and groups of individuals make up a community. Below you will see some examples of community members and partners. Please note that these lists are not exhaustive and will vary regionally. Individuals may be members of multiple communities.

Community Members

Individuals or groups of individuals who have something in common.

- Residents generally or of particular neighborhoods or towns
- Landowners
- Members of a specific religious or cultural background
- Farmers, ranchers, foresters, producers and other land managers
- Commodity groups
- Pet and livestock owners
- English language learners
- Non-English speakers
- Youth and children
- Caregivers
- Community gardeners
- Hunters and fishers
- Renters
- People experiencing food insecurity
- Unhoused individuals

Community Partners

Organizations, associations, or community groups.

- Nonprofit Organizations
 - National and regional nonprofits
 - Local grassroots organizations
 - Community-based advocacy groups
 - Social service agencies
- Public Land Trust Organizations
 - Regional and state land trusts
 - Watershed protection groups
- Business and Industry Associations
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Agricultural cooperatives
- Farming and Forestry Associations
 - Restoration consultants
 - Realtors and homeowner associations
 - Markets and service industry
 - Animal health and farrier professionals
- Conservation and Wildlife Organizations
- Tribal and Indigenous Organizations
 - Indigenous-led conservation organizations
- Service and Civic Organizations
- Educational and Research Institutions
 - Colleges and universities
 - Higher educational institutions
 - Vocational and technical training centers
 - K-12 institutions and educational programs
 - Parent-teacher associations
 - School-based organizations
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Community Development and Housing Organizations
- Recreational and Outreach Enthusiast Groups

Government

Local, state, or federal government.

- Government and Public Agencies
 - Counties and municipalities
 - Conservation districts
 - Other special purpose districts (ie. irrigation, drainage, fire, libraries, transportation, utilities, parks and recreation)
 - State and Federal agencies
- United States Department of Agriculture Service Centers
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Farm Service Agency
- Higher educational institutions
- K-12 institutions

Tribes and Tribal Partners

Building a relationship with Tribes and Tribal Communities in your area can greatly benefit and inform your work. Many conservation districts have long-standing close and collaborative relationships with Tribes in their area. This sometimes includes joint projects and other collaborative work, data gathering and identification of priorities and projects. Building these relationships takes time and commitment along with respect for their unique status as sovereign entities.

Engagement with Tribes, and Tribal Communities should not just be included in the same process with other community engagement. Sharing information is great, but keep in mind that Tribes are sovereign entities with treaty rights and should not be treated as stakeholders. An approach to a Tribe should generally be stand-alone and tailored to them. It may also be appropriate to reach out to staff at Tribes, especially where a staff-to-staff relationship is established. Likewise, once a relationship with a Tribe is established, communication might become more informal, depending on the Tribe. Sometimes it works to invite Tribes to participate in a general engagement process while also inviting them to engage in a separate process specifically for Tribes.

When approaching political leadership at Tribes, especially initially, a formal government-to-government consultation framework will often be the appropriate way to engage. The right way to consult may vary based on topic, context, and by Tribe. Information about consultation and how to engage Tribal governments and leaders is outside the scope of this guide. Resources to learn more about government-to-government tribal relations are available from the *Governor's Office of Indian Affairs* ². There is also a free training many districts have found helpful— it is available via the *Whitener Group* ³.

CASE STUDY - Coast Salish Guardians

The San Juan Islands Conservation District (SJICD) collaborates with Northwest Indian College to establish the Coast Salish Guardians Program on the Lummi Reservation. This initiative is part of a broader movement of Guardian programs across the U.S. and Canada, supporting over 200 tribal programs aimed at providing education and job opportunities for indigenous youth in conservation. The SJICD's Islands Conservation Corps has also received funding for training in forest restoration and cultural resource assessments, fostering knowledge sharing and supporting non-indigenous professionals in understanding indigenous stewardship.



What is Community Engagement, and Why Do It?

Community engagement is the process of intentionally working with and through communities to identify and address issues and solutions important to members of those communities. Community engagement can include various forms of activities, formal and informal in nature. Some are led by conservation districts or more rarely, SCC, and some are led by communities themselves.

While SCC-funded projects are designed to improve environmental quality, habitat, climate resiliency and agricultural viability, negative offsite impacts are possible. In cases where these negative impacts to communities occur, those pressures should be a driver of community engagement to help facilitate discussions and to potentially minimize the negative factors and impacts to communities.

The reasons to undertake community engagement are as diverse as the districts and the communities they serve. It might be a program or project-specific reason, issue-based, or may be part of a larger effort to better understand, be more well-recognized by and connected with people throughout the district.

The enabling statute of Washington conservation districts and SCC, *RCW 89.08.10*⁴ includes the language: "Whereas, there is a pressing need for the conservation of renewable resources in all areas of the state, whether urban, suburban, or rural, and that the benefits of resource practices, programs, and projects, as carried out by the State Conservation Commission and by the conservation districts, should be available to all such areas; so the need to engage broadly is part of who we are as organizations."

Each organization will be in the best position to decide specifically when and how it makes sense to engage with community.

What is Community Engagement, and Why Do It? (Cont.)

Some specific examples of when to consider engaging include when working on:

- Changes to internal policy such as: bill analysis, legislative agenda, budget requests, revisions to the Washington Administrative Code, changes in partner funding and rulemaking.
- Strategic planning.
- Developing new programs or reviewing existing ones.
- Communicating information or changing communication tools.
- Preparing or considering pursuit of rates and charges or other local or county funding.
- Developing policies, guidance documents, or procedures.
- Recruiting supervisors or associate supervisors.
- Preparing to advertise job openings or developing job descriptions.
- Hiring key positions (recruitment, community input on selection).
- Developing a budget.
- Understanding potential negative impacts of our work and where that may occur.
- Making changes to internal systems or structures.
- Applying for or posting funding opportunities.
- Creating outreach materials or publications.
- Project planning.
- Grant writing.

Key Principles

Be transparent and reliable

- Be honest and forthcoming about the purpose of the project, how decisions will be made, and how the input will be used.
- Only make promises that will be kept and make sure to follow through on commitments. Not following through can erode the trust you and your coworkers have worked hard to build.
- Be clear about what is being asked and what is being offered in return. Use plain talk appropriate for the community you are engaging and avoid government or agency-specific jargon or acronyms.

Protect confidentiality

- For many landowners and other cooperators, information about their operation may be sensitive for business reasons or there may be concerns about possible regulatory use of the information.
- If it is possible under the law and your organization's policies to protect landowner confidentiality, be careful to do so. If some information cannot be protected from disclosure (for example because of the funding source) be transparent with the cooperator about this before information is collected or provided.
- If a landowner or cooperator's information is shared without their permission, the breach of trust can be difficult or impossible to overcome and can greatly damage your organization's reputation in the community.

Meet people where they are (physically)

- Be flexible in your approach. Go to the community—where members gather—and work to build relationships and trust. Look for opportunities to immerse yourself in the community you are trying to reach by attending community events and meeting with community groups.
- When meeting with community members, ask them what events are happening, and which ones will be appropriate to attend as a guest.
- Work to fit into the community's culture rather than make them fit into yours.

Do your research about the community

- It is important to understand each community's culture, norms, values, power and political structures, economic conditions, social networks, demographic trends, and history. It is also important to pay attention to how community members identify, define, and speak about their community. This may be the block where people live, it may be where they worship, or it may be their circle of friends. Additionally, become aware of the community's history of collaborating with other programs at the agency, with other agencies, and with partners, including the barriers they have faced when engaging with these different organizations.
- Once the communities and/or populations have been identified, seek out information about history, context, current events, etc. Start with a search engine. Read local articles and blogs. Seek out websites for community organizations, faith-based organizations, advocacy organizations, etc.
- Connect with local government and/or Tribal government partners in the area that may already have a relationship with the agency and ask them about their knowledge of and relationship with the community/population. Find out who else may have worked with this same group(s) and ask them about trusted leaders to reach out to.
- Reach out to colleagues to ask about their past or current work with the community or population you're working with.
- Connect with trusted leaders in the community. Ask them about their community and its pressing concerns. Learn about additional resources that will help gain a better understanding of the community.

Key Principles (Cont.)

Learn about your organization and yourself

Before engaging with a community or potential partner, be aware of your organization's history and your own perceptions:

- What do you know about this organization/partner/community?
- What assumptions—positive or negative—might you hold about this community?
- How could any assumptions negatively impact your interactions or efforts?
- How do your cultural norms and values align with or differ from those of the community or partner?
- Are you the most effective person to be leading this engagement effort?
- What is the history of how the agency or district interacted with the identified communities?
- Did the community or partner ask for changes that were not adopted or acted upon?
- Is your organization the most effective to lead this engagement effort or should you work with or through partners?

Be proactive

When working on a specific project or trying to address certain issues, reach out to potential partners and community members as early as possible.

Encourage and respect full community participation

- Welcome and treat everyone with respect. Respect involves recognizing the inherent dignity and value of all persons and seeks to understand the perspectives of others. This may be especially important for groups who are often excluded or devalued. As the convener, host, or facilitator, individuals may unconsciously look to you to set the tone. Demonstrate respect and warm welcome.
- Ask “who’s not at the table?” and proactively seek out those individuals or communities.
- At a community meeting or when communicating with these individuals ask them what agencies or organizations they are familiar with. From there you can choose the ones that are a best fit for the project, but they could all possibly be important sources for communication, resource sharing, and information hubs.
- Avoid labeling individuals or groups and don’t make assumptions.
- Prioritize unheard perspectives by setting up a wide variety of ways for people to engage with you such as through written comments, emails, in person meetings, to name a few. Everyone has a preferred way of sharing input, so it’s important to give people as many different avenues as possible.
- Ensure the greatest accessibility possible for people with disabilities.
- Give space and recognition to the perspectives of those whose voices are least heard.
- Recognize that all individuals have different perspectives, and no perspective should be valued more than another.
- Ask directly how people prefer to engage and accommodate needs and preferences as much as possible. For example, elderly immigrants have insights to share but may not feel comfortable attending a town hall or meeting in a community space. Reach out individually.
- Listen to the needs different groups express and take clear, detailed, and diligent notes to refer to.

Value others' time

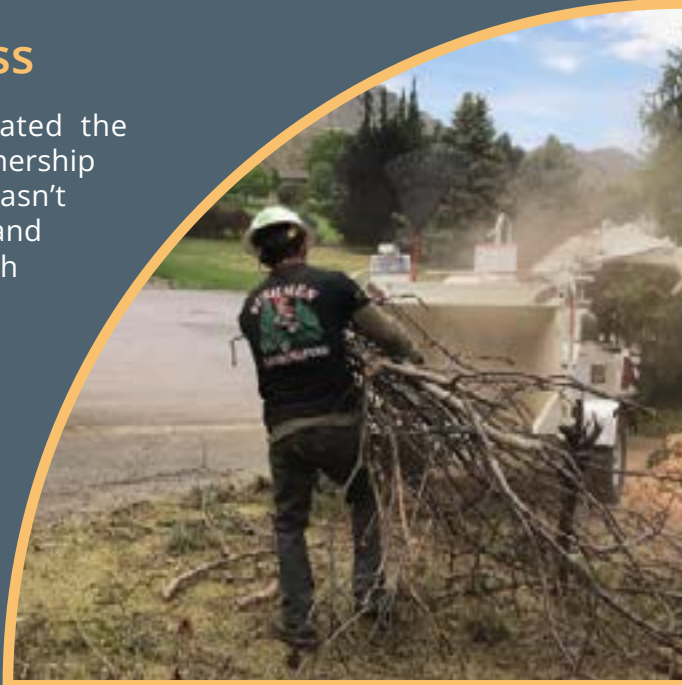
- Never expect community members to volunteer their time or expertise to advance your goals.
- Value what community members bring to the project through compensation, reimbursement, or support for their priorities. Check the funding source(s) for limitations and be sure your organization has a policy to guide this.
- Ensure that adequate funds are available to compensate or reimburse community members (for example: travel, childcare, meeting time, lodging expenses or partnering to let people know what resources are available). If outside funding is to be used, be sure you know if the funding source has any restrictions on use of funds for this purpose. Ensure that everything is in order to make this a smooth and quick process for community members involved.
- When community members share community priorities that may be outside of the project's scope, try to find resources or individuals to connect them with. Seek additional resources in the conservation district, state agencies, nonprofits, local governments, etc. that might be able to address the needs and directly connect them to the community member(s) who expressed the need. One possible way to do this is through community compensation. Get more information on the *Community Compensation Guidelines* ⁵.
- Communities are diverse and will often have a different understanding, or differing cultural and social approaches to time, timeliness, and urgency from other communities, and from the district or agency's understanding of time. Be sure to have flexibility and work closely with the community to clearly set and communicate any commitment to deadlines and government processes.
- Some partners have more availability than others during different periods of the project, ask what their year looks like and busy seasons. Identify strengths and delegate them when they are more available.

Avoid tokenism

- Individuals should never be expected to speak on behalf of, or represent, an entire community. Nor should an individual or a community group be invited to participate solely because they "check the box" of an identity or perspective.
- No community is a monolith, and no single person (or even multiple people) can speak for an entire community. Engage with as many different people in different settings as possible to get a more holistic, diverse, and nuanced understanding of the issue being explored.
- Honor the perspective and believe the experiences that the individual or small group shares. What they share may resonate with many whom they consider part of their community but recognize that they are only speaking on their own behalf.
- Learning from different, but similar perspectives can expand understanding of a broader community experience. This may happen through reading media written by people who share similar identities.

CASE STUDY - Wildfire Preparedness

When a local Washington conservation district evaluated the launch plan for a wildfire preparedness program in partnership with a federal agency, they discovered the program wasn't reaching the intended audience. By working as a team and engaging the community, they realized that their outreach efforts were missing key groups. Revisiting the program, they incorporated underserved communities early on, asking what they needed (in their preferred language) and informing them about the district's upcoming offerings. By building relationships first, the program grew significantly, becoming more impactful.



Key Principles (Cont.)

Recognize strengths and assets

- Even communities that experience the greatest inequities have strengths, assets, and resources that should be acknowledged and engaged.
- Seek to identify and understand these assets. Ask community members what their assets are (from their perspective) and highlight and amplify these as much as possible.
- Ensure communication is ongoing— collaboration requires continual opportunities for conversation and sharing.
- Use two-way communication methods that partners or community members are familiar with using. Avoid making assumptions—if you aren't sure, ask.
- Ask community partners how frequently and in what formats they would like to communicate and what information is a priority for them.

Be realistic and avoid using communities for your own purposes

- People are busy and have many competing priorities. Well-meaning agencies and organizations seeking input from underserved and/or overburdened communities can inadvertently create additional pressures on people's time in ways that do not ultimately benefit the community making the sacrifice and can be almost exploitative in themselves.
- This consideration must be balanced by not assuming that we at an agency can decide on behalf of a community what is in their interest.
- Asking community members their needs and goals for their community may well naturally align with programs and resources in the county and we can direct as needed. Look at objectives and outline what is tangible.
- Ask yourself how realistically your organization can provide meaningful ongoing opportunities for involvement with and/or benefit from your work. If it feels inauthentic or selfish, investigate that.

Choosing How to Engage

Community Participation Continuum

The continuum below, adapted from the Washington Department of Health Community Engagement Guide, p. 4, provides an overview of these different methods. On the left-hand side of the table are typical engagement methods used in most day-to-day situations. As you move to the right, the engagement activities become increasingly community led. This means communities take the lead in identifying priorities, overall direction, and decision making. Community-driven engagement has the advantages of helping to develop long-term partnerships and community ownership of projects and priorities. This may be highly desirable in some situations. If selected, be sure your organization is comfortable with a model that provides less control over both process and outcome.

The language in the following table may not exactly fit any given situation but is intended to demonstrate a wide range of possibilities and spark ideas.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led by CD or agency CD or agency holds power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led by CD or agency CD or agency holds power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led by CD or agency CD or agency holds power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-led Power is shared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led by community Community holds power
Purpose	Provide information	Get and incorporate feedback	Ensure needs and interests are considered	Partner and share decision-making power	Support and follow the community's lead
	One-way communication	One-way communication	Two-way communication	Two-way communication	Two-way communication
	Address immediate needs or issues	Inform the development of programs	Advanced solutions to complex problems	Advanced solutions to complex problems	Problems and solutions are defined by the community
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community meetings Media Social media Materials Web 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups Interviews Surveys Stakeholder groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audience & user testing Advisory groups Steering committees Community conversations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective impact Coalition building Partnership building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community immersion Community mobilization
Promise	We will keep you informed	We will listen to you and incorporate your feedback	We will ensure your concerns and needs are reflected in our work	We will work with you in planning all aspects of this work	We will implement the project you come up with
When to use	There is no alternative because of urgency, regulatory reasons, or legal boundaries	You want to improve an existing service or program, but the options of change are limited	You need community perspective and buy-in to successfully implement the project	Community members have a strong desire to participate, and you have the time to develop a partnership	Community members want to own the project, and you are committed to a long-term relationship
Increasing community-driven engagement					

Adapted from the *Washington Department of Health Community Engagement Guide* ⁶.

Methods of Engagement

There are many different methods to engage and collaborate with different communities. Meeting with communities in-person is often best for establishing and building trusting relationships, especially if you are forming a new connection. However, technology has increased options for connecting with communities and partners virtually, and may help increase your reach for some types of engagement activities.

Working with a community partner, such as a community-based organization, informal group, or community-identified leader, can help with conducting community engagement that is accessible, inclusive, and respectful of the community's priorities and culture. Ideally, a community partner is an organization or individual who is part of the community you're hoping to engage with, or who works closely with members of that community. That partner can provide an invaluable perspective and a richer understanding of what types of engagement work well or don't work well with that community.

Identifying and working with more than one community partner can offer more depth and breadth to the perspectives and understanding of best engagement practices, while avoiding tokenism or the assumption of a monolithic community.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
	See page 16	See page 18	See page 21	See page 23	See page 25
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Community meetingsMediaSocial mediaMaterialsWeb	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Focus groupsInterviewsSurveysStakeholder groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Audience & user testingAdvisory groupsSteering committeesCommunity conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Collective impactCoalition buildingPartnership building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Community immersionCommunity mobilization

Best Practices for All Methods of Engagement

- Assess the community's preferred methods of engagement. Whether planning for in-person engagement, online engagement, or a combination of both, make sure to choose a method that is accessible and appropriate for the community you are trying to reach. If appropriate, use an existing community meeting.
- Establish a schedule and stick to it. Ask for everyone's availability and preferred meeting time and stick to that schedule. Example, meeting at the public library every Thursday at 5pm. Establish a schedule where eventually no text reminders will need to be sent or they can be a quick "see you all tonight". Meetings can continue led by the community if empowerment and leadership are fostered by the community.
- Plan on using multiple channels or providing multiple opportunities. Consider a mix of traditional and non-traditional communication channels for getting the word out about your community engagement opportunity. You may also choose a variety methods along the continuum.
- Make sure your methods are accessible. There are many different aspects of accessibility that you need to consider, including physical accessibility, language, culture, and location. Identify and address other barriers for participation, like childcare, food, transportation.

- Ask questions that are open-ended, not leading, and non-biased. Asking open-ended questions gives you the chance to learn something you were not expecting and provides space for discussion. Base your questions off of what you would like to learn. Ask a member of the community to review your questions ahead of time to ensure you are not framing your questions in a way that perpetuates stereotypes, introduces biases, or stigmatizes members of the community.
- Get active consent. You will need at least verbal consent for most methods of engagement. There are additional written consent forms participants will need to complete if you plan to use audio recordings, video recordings, take photos, or engage minors. If working with minors, a protocol needs to be in place. CD personnel need to have completed the background check process and interact with a minor when a trust adult is present.

CASE STUDY - Community Garden Coalition

Whidbey Island Conservation District, in collaboration with Island County Public Health, Washington State University Extension, and the Opportunity Council, is leading a community-driven effort to explore urban agriculture on Whidbey Island. Through outreach, listening sessions, and surveys—engaging over 60 residents and multiple local agencies—the coalition is assessing community interest and laying the groundwork for projects like school gardens, community gardens, and urban farms. These efforts aim to address food insecurity, support public health, and strengthen local resilience through hands-on gardening, nutrition education, and increased access to fresh produce.

As part of this work, the coalition envisions offering workshops, partnering with libraries and hunger relief organizations, and supporting existing gardens like the Imagine Food Forest and school gardens across the island. Plans include launching an island-wide School Garden Coalition and applying for grants to ensure that any future programs are built with sustainable leadership, paid staff, and long-term funding. With strong community backing and continued collaboration, Whidbey Island is planting the seeds for a more food-secure and connected future.



Methods to INFORM

Town Halls and Community Meetings

Starting Point

- Identify your primary audience and vision for the meeting or event.
- You will get the highest turnout if you host the meeting in a place where the community naturally and regularly meets on their own or combine it with an existing meeting.
- Especially for the first meeting, make sure that the location is within their space to help them feel more comfortable in their surroundings.
- Set a clear agenda with a designated moderator and speakers.
- If appropriate, engage local media to help publicize your event.

Technology Options

- Facebook Live, YouTube Live, Zoom, Google Meet, and video conference can be used to allow remote participation, feedback, and testimony.
- Host a town hall online using Twitter Town Hall. This can increase the geographic reach.

More Information

- *How to Organize a Town Hall Meeting*⁷
- *How to Organize a Virtual Town Hall*⁸

External Communications: Media, Social Media, Materials, Web

Starting Point

- Begin by developing a communications plan.
- Identify communications channels that will best reach your primary audience.
- Ensure messages are tailored to your audience.
- Use media relevant to the communities and partners you would like to engage with.
- Be sure not to invite partners or agencies that would create discomfort or silence communities from speaking up.
- Common channels include the web, social media, print materials, press releases, TV, and radio.

Inform	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led by CD or agency • CD or agency holds power 	
Purpose	Provide information
	One-way communication
	Address immediate needs or issues
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community meetings • Media • Social media • Materials • Web
Promise	We will keep you informed
When to use	There is no alternative because of urgency, regulatory reasons, or legal boundaries

Technology Options

- Use social media and live stream options to spread the reach of your announcement and offer some opportunity for engagement.

More Information

- *The TELE Engagement Guide* ⁹
- *USDA Social Marketing Resources* ¹⁰

CASE STUDY - Bilingual Education

Cascadia Conservation District supported residents at the Housing Authority of Chelan County and the City of Wenatchee with bilingual gardening and nutrition education courses. They also identified and linked communities in need of mobile food bank delivery and overcoming language and/or transportation barriers. This work not only provided essential resources but also fostered a sense of community and empowerment among residents. Participants learned valuable skills in sustainable gardening, enabling them to grow their own fresh produce and make healthier food choices. The nutrition education courses were tailored to meet the diverse cultural backgrounds of the community, ensuring that everyone could benefit.



Methods to CONSULT

Focus Groups

Starting Point

- Identify a trained facilitator and note-taker.
- Carefully plan how you will organize and recruit for the focus groups. Bring individuals together with a common characteristic, and structure the conversation to ensure all participants are able to express their honest opinions.
- If possible (check funding source rules on this), provide incentives to thank participants for their time.
- If partnering with other organizations (especially non-governmental), explore what resources or incentives they could offer.
- Prepare your questions so you can benefit from group dialogue. Questions should be open and elicit group discussion.
- Recording the focus group may be beneficial for note-taking and facilitation purposes but should be carefully considered because it may inhibit participation from some people.

Technology Options

- Host a focus group online using Facebook Groups or Zoom. This can help you host focus groups with Washingtonians in other parts of the state.

More Information

- *Conducting focus groups* ¹¹
- *Designing and conducting focus group interviews* ¹²

Interviews

Starting Point

- Interviews let you explore a particular subject more in depth and allow you to learn something you might not get from a survey. They can also be used to build and strengthen partnerships.
- Use as a starting point to help you plan other community engagement efforts. The insight and perspective you can gain from community leaders can help you plan more effective and culturally appropriate community meetings, focus groups, and community mobilization efforts.

Consult	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Led by CD or agency• CD or agency holds power	
Purpose	Get and incorporate feedback
	One-way communication
	Inform the development of programs
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus groups• Interviews• Surveys• Stakeholder groups
Promise	We will listen to you and incorporate your feedback
When to use	You want to improve an existing service or program, but the options of change are limited

- Carefully plan your interview script and approach. If you choose to conduct key informant interviews, identify community leaders who know their community and the specific topic or issue well.
- If you choose to conduct intercept interviews with community members, choose a location and time that will maximize your opportunities for connecting with members of your target population.

Technology Options

- Interviews are best done in person to help build relationships but can also be conducted over the phone or Zoom.
- Be sure to meet folks where they are when it comes to technology. You may have to teach them how to access zoom, mute and unmute etc.

More Information

- *Key Informant Interviews, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research* ¹³
- *Public Partnership Guide: Situation Assessments* ¹⁴

Surveys

Starting Point

- Surveys can be used to collect information about attitudes, beliefs, opinions, needs, assets, and behaviors of the community you wish to engage.
- They are a quick way of getting information from a larger number of people and may be more convenient for the participant and lower cost.
- Surveys can gain informal community feedback about a specific project.

Technology Options

- Paper-based and mail surveys may be effective in specific circumstances. You can broaden your reach by using online or electronic surveys through Opinio, SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics or online polls.

More Information

- *Conducting Surveys, Community Tool Box* ¹⁵
- *Public Participation Guide: Tools to Generate and Obtain Public Input* ¹⁶

Stakeholder Groups

Starting Point

- Identify your primary, secondary, and key stakeholders. Primary stakeholders are those who will be directly affected by your project. Secondary stakeholders include those who are directly involved with the primary audience/population of your project, or whose lives may be affected indirectly. Key stakeholders are those who have the greatest influence including policymakers, the media, and community leaders.

Starting Point (Cont.)

- At a community meeting or when communicating with these individuals ask them what agencies or organizations they are familiar with, what community leaders inspire them, empowered them or advocated for them. From there you can choose the ones that are a best fit for the project, but they could all possibly be important sources for communication, resource sharing, and information hubs.
- Plan to engage stakeholder groups early in the pre-planning stages. This helps ensure transparency throughout your project.
- Conduct a stakeholder analysis or stakeholder mapping to understand their concerns and interests.

Technology Options

- Video conference may allow stakeholders who live remotely to participate and stay engaged in ongoing project planning and meeting.

More Information

- *Identifying and Analyzing Stakeholders and Their Interests, Community Tool Box* ¹⁷
- *Stakeholder Engagement Best Practice Guide* ¹⁸
- *5 Ways to Engage Stakeholders and Get Your Community Behind a Project* ¹⁹

CASE STUDY - Farm and Garden Libraries

Several conservation districts support further development and expansion of their various seed, farm tool and garden tool libraries. These libraries provide free/low-cost access to seeds and specialty tools for small or aspiring farmers and gardeners. Improving access to gardening and farming supplies supports farm operations, improves viability, promotes conservation practices, and improves food security throughout the community. This community-driven approach not only enhances agricultural skills but also strengthens social bonds, creating a supportive network for both seasoned and novice gardeners alike. As more people participate, the impact of these initiatives grows, contributing to a resilient and self-sufficient community.



Methods to INVOLVE

Audience Testing, User Testing

Starting Point

- Audience and user testing are ideal for helping you understand how your primary audience may respond to your messages, materials, or information. The goal is to understand their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, barriers, and cues to act.
- Clearly define your primary audience and think about what you want them to know or do.
- Ask individuals in your field, a partnering CD or local partner who may have worked with the community previously.
- For both audience and user testing, make sure to pilot your questions and test ahead of time.

Technology Options

- Can be done in-person, over the phone, over email, and through online platforms.

More Information

- *Tips for analyzing your audience, University of Pittsburgh*²⁰

Advisory Groups, Steering Committees

Starting Point

- Advisory boards and steering committees are ideal for keeping larger projects or ongoing work connected to the big picture. Many groups meet on a quarterly basis to provide strategic direction, but some meet more frequently for more hands-on work. There may already be an existing group or committee that you can engage with. If the group is empowered to make decisions or take action (vs advising) be aware of possible public meeting law requirements.
- The effectiveness of these groups depends on the structure that is put in place at the beginning including choosing the right members, thoughtfully planning and facilitating meetings, and setting clear expectations.
- Advisory boards or similar groups can be created to bring voices to the table who are often not well represented in decision-making, for example: youth.
- Plan a formal onboarding for your committee, council, or board members to ensure they have a similar foundation related to your project and equity overall.

Involve	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Led by CD or agency• CD or agency holds power	
Purpose	Ensure needs and interests are considered
	Two-way communication
	Advanced solutions to complex problems
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audience & user testing• Advisory groups• Steering committees• Community conversations
Promise	We will ensure your concerns and needs are reflected in our work
When to use	You need community perspective and buy-in to successfully implement the project

Technology Options

- Video conferencing may increase participation in council, advisory, or committee meetings.

More Information

- *Game Changers: Establishing a Youth Advisory Council* ²¹
- *8 Steps to Establishing a Thriving Youth Advisory Council* ²²

Community Conversations

Starting Point

- Build a team to determine the goals for the conversation and host the event. Your team should include members of the community to ensure their own goals, interests, and issues are well represented.
- Choose a facilitator that is experienced and can create a trusting environment with the participants. Sometimes it is best to choose someone from within the community - like local nonprofit leaders or even a radio host the community listens to regularly, and sometimes it is more appropriate to choose someone who is neutral and outside of the community.
- Create an inviting environment and structure the room for dialogue. Tables in a semi-circle format or in circles are ideal for small group conversations. Make sure the environment is inclusive and culturally relevant.

Technology Options

- Some online platforms, including GoToWebinar, may be used to facilitate a virtual community conversation. Careful planning is needed to ensure everyone has equal access to participate and that conversation can flow naturally.

More Information

- *Leading a community dialogue on building a healthy community (different subject area but contains useful tools)* ²³

CASE STUDY - Reaching Homeschoolers

The Thurston Conservation District's K-12 program has actively engaged with homeschooling groups over the past year, creating events for students within these communities. This partnership has broadened access to enriching experiences, with participants providing positive feedback on interactive learning and nature exploration. These initiatives promote inclusive education and encourage environmentally conscious individuals committed to making a positive impact.



Methods to COLLABORATE

Collective Impact

Starting Point

- A 'Collective Impact' model brings organizations together to work toward a common goal through a structured framework.
- The five core conditions of the collective impact framework are:
 - Develop a common agenda
 - Use shared measurement
 - Build on mutually reinforcing activities
 - Engage in continuous communications
 - Provide a backbone to move the work forward

Technology Options

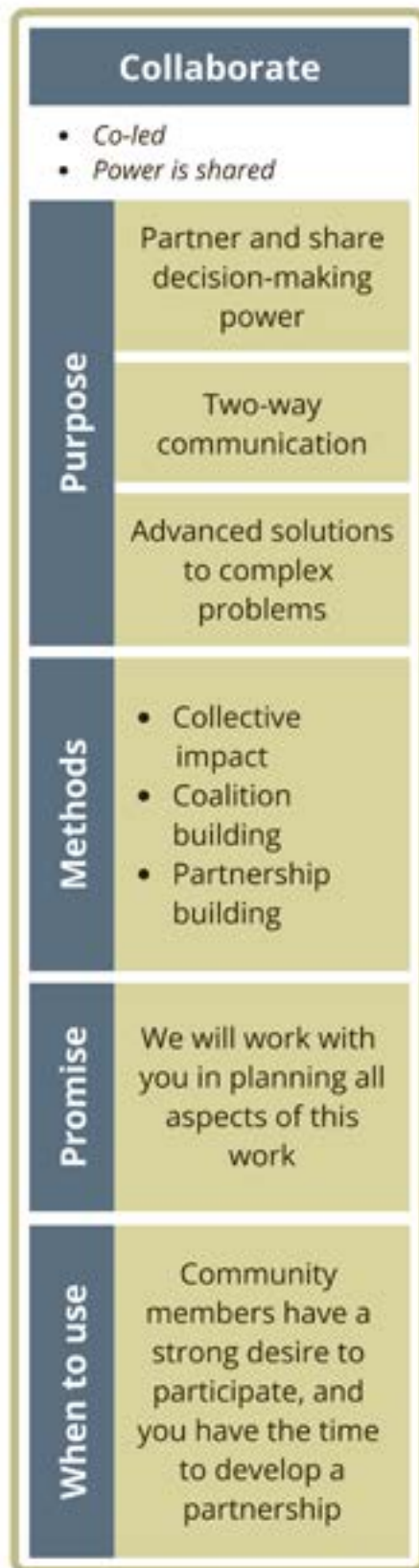
- Collective Impact initiatives are best started by bringing people physically together in a shared space.
- Video conference may allow representatives who live remotely to participate and stay engaged in meetings they can't physically attend.

More Information

- *Tackling complex problems through collective impact* ²⁴
- *Evaluating Collective Impact: Five Simple Rules* ²⁵

Coalition Building Starting Point

- Coalitions can be used to influence public policy, promote behavior change in communities, and support programs and projects.
- Some of the drivers for building coalitions include:
 - To respond to negative events in the community (e.g. flooding or wildfires)
 - New information becomes available (e.g. new research about a species or river)
 - Circumstances or rules change (e.g. a new law)
 - New funding is available (e.g. a federal grant that requires a coalition)
 - There's a threat to the community (e.g. wildfire or flood risk)
- Coalitions include a core group of stakeholders, community opinion leaders, and policy makers.



Technology Options

- Coalitions are best started by bringing people physically together in a shared space.
- Video conference may allow members who live remotely to participate and stay engaged in meetings they can't physically attend.

More Information (public health focused examples but potentially adaptable)

- *Coalition Building I: Starting a Coalition, Community Toolbox*²⁶
- *Coalition Building II: Maintaining a Coalition*²⁷
- *Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide, Prevention Institute*²⁸

Partnership Building

Starting Point

- Partnerships can be formal collaborations just between two organizations, or can result in the formation of a committee, coalition, council or other group of partners with representatives from various organizations and therefore be more strategic in nature.
- Partnerships can also be informal agreements or collaborations that are short-term and project specific.
- Determine which partners and what type of partnership is appropriate for your specific project or problem you are trying to address.

Technology Options

- Technology can be used to assist with ongoing collaboration of existing partners.

More Information

- *Creating and maintaining partnerships, Community Toolbox*²⁹
- *Engaging Your Community: A Toolkit for Partnership, Collaboration, and Action*³⁰

CASE STUDY - CoolCanopy Program

The Spokane Conservation District has a CoolCanopy Program, a new initiative dedicated to increasing tree canopy coverage in Spokane County's low canopy and underserved neighborhoods, including Airway Heights and Spokane Valley. The goal is to significantly increase the canopy coverage in these areas by 2030, addressing environmental justice and promoting healthier communities. Business' in the area can receive assistance with tree planning, planting, and maintenance. This program contributes to the beautification and sustainability of the community and helps community member take a proactive steps towards environmental stewardship and climate resilience.



Methods to EMPOWER

Community Immersion

Starting Point

- Consider supporting initiatives and projects that are important to the community, even if it is not a CD priority.
- Attend community events and gatherings with the intent of listening and learning.

Technology Options

- Some communities, like youth, may prefer to come together online. Use relevant social media platforms to immerse yourself.
- Immerse yourself into what is convenient and most comfortable for the communities you are hoping to empower.

More Information

- Information about community celebrations and religious holidays: *Community Calendar*³¹ and the *Interfaith Calendar*³².

Community Mobilization

Starting Point

- Ensure you have strong leaders and provide them the support they need.
- Establish a formal structure, which may include a steering committee and sub-committees. Ensure the six essential functions of community mobilization efforts are covered:
 - Providing overall strategic direction
 - Facilitating dialogue between partners
 - Managing data collection and analysis
 - Planning communications
 - Coordinating outreach
 - Fundraising
- Develop guiding documents such as organizational charts, rules of operation or bylaws, policy statements, and formal letters of agreement.
- Engage community partners who share priorities and interests. Consider service organizations, business owners, policy makers, media representatives, faith leaders, and others who have significant influence in their community.



Technology Options

- Community mobilization efforts are best started by bringing people physically together in a shared space.

More Information (public health context)

- *Strategies Guided by Best Practice for Community Mobilization* ³³
- *Centers for Disease Community Mobilization Guide* ³⁴

CASE STUDY - Bucoda Community Garden

Thurston Conservation District is embarking on a community garden/ education/food access project in the City of Bucoda, which is the most rural and low-income community in the county. It is also an area of higher crime, and has a large population of folks that are elderly and/or disabled. This project will provide resources to bring together community, turn an empty city lot into a food producing garden, bring students and residents together for education, events and fresh food. Led by enthusiastic residents within the community, this garden will have accessible beds for those with disabilities, and will grow the types of food the community wants to have access to.



Engage

Identify Common Barriers and Potential Solutions

This list of common barriers and potential solutions was adopted from the Department of Health Community Engagement Guide. Successful community engagement requires addressing barriers faced by community members and partners.

Common Barrier	Potential Solutions
Language Community members who prefer to communicate in a language other than English or have unique vision or hearing needs, will need language assistance services to participate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify the linguistic needs of a community by talking to community leaders and key informants, and by reviewing language data. (<i>OFM Language Statistics by county</i> ³⁵ or the <i>Limited English Proficiency Map</i> ³⁶)• Translate all meeting materials and announcements into the top languages spoken within the area or community.• Let people know ahead of time that interpretation services will be available for the event or meeting.• Arrange for interpretation services, including sign language and real-time interpretation services. (Example: <i>WSU Translation and Interpretive Services</i> ³⁷ or <i>Washington State DES Language Access Contracts</i> ³⁸)• If a language other than English is predominant among the community members, the meeting should be run in that language and the English speakers are offered interpretation services.• Know where to secure assistive listening devices when needed and seek to hold in-person events in spaces that have hearing loop technology (<i>List of Hearing Loop Devices available to use in Washington</i> ³⁹). Use closed captioning at online events.• Use Plain Talk in all communications; Executive Order 05-03 requires all state agencies to use simple and clear language when communicating with community members and businesses.

Important notes about interpretation services:

- Not all interpretation is free. You may have access to this service under a statewide contract under the Department of Enterprise Services (DES). *DES Language Access Contracts* ⁴⁰
- Simultaneous and consecutive interpretation have different cost points and are not always covered by master contracts.
- Simultaneous interpretation (where the interpreter translates at the same time as the speaker, in a separate audio feed) is ideal for larger events, while consecutive interpretation can work for small group conversations.
- Close captioning and American Sign Language (ASL) simultaneous interpretation is available via two separate master contracts. Different contractors offer virtual vs. in-person services.
- Simultaneous spoken language interpretation is not available via the master contract. How to procure these services is being determined.

Common Barrier	Potential Solutions
<p>Non-local Engagement Activities</p> <p>It may be difficult for some communities that are further removed from large city centers or accessible public transportation, or folks who live in rural communities to attend in person engagement activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold the event at a location where the community regularly meets or gathers. • Choose a location accessible by public transportation that has free and ample parking. • Offer travel reimbursement and lodging if funding source allows this. • For multiple events or meetings, consider holding them in different locations. • Hold the meeting virtually (but ensure that folks have access to the internet and the virtual meeting platform being used).
<p>Intercommunity Dynamics</p> <p>It may be inappropriate to bring all the members of one community together in a shared space because of inter-community relationships, power structures, or other norms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research about any potential intercommunity dynamics that may create barriers for some members to engage. • Talk with community leaders and other partners to get their perspectives. • Consider what part of the community is disempowered within status-quo power structure. • Learn from other organizations and agency programs who have worked with the same community.
<p>Embrace Self-Awareness and Community Understanding</p> <p>Our position within our communities can affect how someone decides on their level engagement and could impact the dynamics of our relationships with community members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do research before engaging with any community you are not a member of. • Be humble, respectful, and honest. Admit mistakes when you make them. • Consider who may be the best person to engage with a community. It may not be someone within your organization. Establish partnerships to do engagement when appropriate for interacting with the community.
<p>Immigration Status</p> <p>Not all community members you meet with will be U.S. citizens. Some may be undocumented, have Temporary Protective Status as refugees, hold Green Cards, or have other immigration statuses. It is important to acknowledge fear or uncertainty these community members may feel, be sensitive and cognizant of the larger immigration dynamics at play, and work to create trust and safety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask community partners for guidance on how to make their community members feel safe and included in your activity. • Do not collect personal information from attendees. • Consider co-facilitating the event or meeting with a trusted community leader or partner.
<p>Government Jargon and Process</p> <p>Government has its own language and way of doing things that may create unintentional barriers for people outside our agency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use simple, clear language in all communications, and avoid overusing acronyms. • Check assumptions about what aspects of the way we do our work are common knowledge and take care to explain things clearly.

Common Barrier	Potential Solutions
<p>Time</p> <p>It may be difficult for some communities that are further removed from large city centers or accessible public transportation, or folks who live in rural communities to attend in person engagement activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about the daily schedules of the people you are trying to engage. • If you will be hiring a vendor for your project, allow three months for the contracting process. • If your project qualifies as research, allow two months to seek approval from the institutional review board.
<p>Competing Priorities</p> <p>Community members have full lives with many responsibilities and commitments that may take priority over your agency's project. You may be able to mitigate some of these competing priorities through thoughtful planning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family: When engaging with parents or caregivers in person, consider needs for childcare or adult care, and provide options for remote engagement. Provide activities for children and caregivers. • Food: The sharing of food to bring people together is common across cultures. If possible, bring healthy and culturally appropriate snacks or meals when holding community meetings or focus groups. Consider using a restaurant frequented by community members to provide food. Ask community members about dietary restrictions and preferences ahead of time and check that this expense is allowable under your funding source. • Work: Often, community members are not reimbursed for their time whereas partners who work for other agencies and organizations may be able to participate during work time. Look into options for providing incentives and travel reimbursement to decrease barriers to participation. Additionally, people who work full-time may prefer evenings or weekends. • School: If engaging with students or people within the academic community, consider the time of year and school schedules. It may be difficult to engage during school hours, the start of the school session, exam times, or school breaks.

CASE STUDY - SNAP at Farmers Markets



Several conservation districts have helped to coordinate, attend, and promote Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) sign-up events, gardening and seed-sharing workshops, and produce bilingual signage and outreach materials. Districts partner with many different groups but some include the Shelton Farmers Market, farmers, Washington's Department of Social and Health Services, and WSU Extension.



Evaluating Your Community Engagement Efforts

Routine evaluation of community engagement efforts is crucial for understanding and enhancing the effectiveness of your engagement efforts. Collaborate with your partners and community members to develop a tailored evaluation plan or use this an opportunity for self-evaluation and adaptive management.

Assessment Phases

- **Before:** Involve diverse voices and define needs.
- **During:** Monitor inclusivity, support, and decision-making.
- **After:** Measure impact, collect feedback, and plan improvements and share next steps and improvement plans with community. Share other local resources that may help with other needs that need to be addressed that we may not be able to help with. Consider a resource fair for example.

Objective

Use these tools to gather data that informs continuous improvement in community engagement, ensuring it is effective, inclusive, and impactful.

The following are some important concepts to keep in mind throughout the community engagement process:

- Get feedback from community leaders on your method, questions, and approach.
- Identify potential barriers and make a plan to mitigate them to ensure equal opportunity for participation.
- Intentionally listen, give value to all voices and perspectives, and provide space for those impacted by past negative governmental actions.
- Only make promises you can keep. Be honest and forthcoming about what you can do with the feedback you receive.

Evaluate the effectiveness of your partnership or community engagement effort during the project and make adjustments as needed to structure, membership, and processes.

Continue to the next page for a checklist to help you plan for and evaluate your engagement efforts.

Community Engagement Checklist

Below are key evaluation questions to guide your assessment and tools that can help you get there.

Review the Key Principles of community engagement. Learn about the community and reflect on you and your organization's position within the community and how that can impact engagement. This guide should help!

Before

Identifying needs and involvement:

Identify the community partners, members, or stakeholders you wish to engage, and reach out as early as possible and ask yourself the following questions to create a plan:

- ☐ **Community Needs:** Are the project goals aligned with the community's expressed needs? How does your organizations position within the community impact engagement?
- ☐ **Representation:** Are all community demographics, especially historically underserved groups, included and current?
- ☐ **Communication Channels:** How do communities you want to work with prefer to receive information and consume media? How do they like to be reminded of upcoming meetings, events too. (Example: A reminder 3 hours before the event, or a reminder text the day before and the morning of the event). Would they like a group chat? Which platform do they already feel comfortable with?

Inclusivity and accessibility:

Choose a method, place, date, and time of engagement that are culturally and linguistically appropriate and ask yourself the following questions:

- ☐ **Voice:** Will the process allow all voices to be heard, how can we ensure all of the community partners, members, and stakeholders are engaged?
- ☐ **Access:** Is the process accessible to everyone (e.g., multiple languages, accommodations for disabilities) and was outreach conducted in a timely manner?
- ☐ **Support:** Are adequate resources provided to ensure meaningful participation? What training, information or resources will they need?

Measuring success:

Create an evaluation plan with the community or partners based on how they would measure or define success using the questions below as guides.

- ☐ **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):** What measurable indicators (e.g., participation rates, satisfaction scores) reflect success? Consider creating an evaluation plan with communities or partners to ensure a shared definition of success.
- ☐ **Decision-Making:** How will you intentionally provide space for those impacted by injustices to have their voices heard and addressed?

During

Leadership and engagement:

- **Leadership Influence:** What type of leadership approach do we want to foster for the process? How do leaders affect the engagement process? How can you include community leaders on the methods and approach?
- **Community Involvement:** How involved are community members in shaping the project? Who has a voice and who doesn't? Have you identified how to mitigate potential barriers to ensure equal opportunity for participation?
- **Expectation Setting:** Only make promises you can keep. Be honest and forthcoming to communities and partner organizations about what you can do with the feedback you receive.

Cultural and linguistic appropriateness:

- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Does the engagement respect and incorporate cultural norms and languages?
- **Conflict Resolution:** How are conflicts or disagreements handled? (*Resource: Conflict Resolution in Public Participation | US EPA*)⁴¹

After

Evaluating impact and improvement:

Gather feedback from the community or partners about how the project went and use their perspectives to inform your evaluation.

- **Impact Measurement:** What measurable outcomes demonstrate the project's impact?
- **Stakeholder involvement:** Did stakeholder involvement improve the work, increase effectiveness, or increase political and community support of the effort?

Feedback and learning:

Share the results and next steps with the community and partners and reflect on what can be improved for your future community engagement efforts, meet with your team to debrief on different takeaways.

- **Goals and Participation:** Who came up with the project goals and plan? What could you have done better to identify and involve community partners and representative?
- **Addressing concerns:** What strategies did you use to ensure all voices were heard? When participants, especially those with less power or with whom the organization has not traditionally engaged raised issues, how were those addressed?
- **Acknowledgements:** How did you acknowledge the community's contributions and communicate the impact of their involvement?
- **Process Improvement:** What steps can be taken to enhance future engagement efforts?

Continued engagement:

Stay connected in order to maintain a long-term relationship.

- **Communication:** How will you share the results and next steps with the community and partners?
- **Connections:** How will you continue to engage, connect, and maintain long-term relationships with the community?

Tools and methods for assessing engagement efforts and adaptively managing your work:

- **Surveys and Questionnaires:** For both quantitative and qualitative data collection.
- **Social Media Analytics:** To measure engagement metrics.
- **Stakeholder Analysis and Network Analysis:** To assess stakeholder influence and community networks.
- **Outcome Harvesting and Most Significant Change:** To gather evidence of impact and significant stories.
- **Participatory Action Research and Feedback Mechanisms:** Involve the community in research and continuous feedback loops.

CASE STUDY - Vets on the Farm

Vets on the Farm is a program through the Spokane Conservation District that is designed for Veterans seeking a new mission and a way to transition back into civilian life through careers in agriculture, farming, ranching, or other conservation-based industries. The mission is to provide resources and opportunities for education, partnership, and employment to help reach that goal. Vets on the Farm also encourages exploration of agricultural and conservation-based education by offering programs and curriculum in partnership with WSU Extension and Spokane Community Colleges.



Closing

Thank you for using this plan. We hope to enhance and improve this document over time, please contact SCC if you have ideas for how to improve and make it more useful for your work. More resources to follow. Find the digital copy of the Community Engagement Plan at www.scc.wa.gov/files/comm-community-engagement-plan.⁵² For more information on conservation districts' work, visit SCC's website at www.scc.wa.gov.

CASE STUDY - Camp Sagebrush

Camp Sagebrush is a unique, three-day overnight camp developed by Foster Creek Conservation District (FCCD) to teach youth how to live in and support "Fire Adapted Communities." Held each July, this immersive experience brings together about 40 fifth to seventh graders to explore wildfire mitigation, land stewardship, and the shrub steppe ecosystem of Douglas County. Through hands-on activities and expert-led sessions, campers learn how to identify wildfire risks, take action to protect their communities, and consider future careers in land and fire management—all while building friendships and unforgettable memories.

Supported by Post-Fire Mitigation funds, Camp Sagebrush is part of a larger, multi-year strategy to promote wildfire education throughout Douglas County. Alongside the camp, FCCD has developed educational materials and created defensible space plans for landowners. With backing from organizations like FEMA Region 10, the Washington Emergency Management Division, and others, Camp Sagebrush not only helps young people understand the environment they live in—it empowers them to help shape a safer, more resilient future.



Addendum - Resources

Appendix A: Worksheet to Help Identify Overburdened Communities and Vulnerable Populations.

Geography	
Questions / Prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which areas of the state will the proposed action (e.g., project, program, policy, etc.) touch?• Are there areas that rank highly for environmental health disparities (9 or 10 EHD Map ranking)?
Resources / Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Washington Tracking Network (WTN) Environmental Health Disparities (EHD) Map</i> ⁴² – within the EHD map you can view census tracts by aggregate environmental health disparity ranking; disaggregate by environmental effects, environmental exposures, socioeconomic factors, or sensitive populations; or by specific measures within each of these categories.• Please note: This should be tailored to your specific program or service area – for example, if you are interested in air quality impacts from wildfire smoke, you would look at EHD rankings, then compare them with rankings for PM2.5 and overlay wildfire boundary information. It may be helpful to use additional data specific to your program to inform this step.

Health Disparities	
Questions / Prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify existing health inequities addressed by the proposed action (e.g., project, program, policy, etc.).
Resources / Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>WTN</i> ⁴³ – available at multiple geographic scales and health disparity measures• <i>EHD Map</i> – multiple layers for different health disparity concerns available

Race	
Questions / Prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the percentage of people of color impacted and/or benefitted by the proposed action (e.g., project, program, policy, etc.)? • How does that compare to the demographics of the service area? • Which specific racial groups are represented? <i>Racial and ethnic minorities are included in the definition of vulnerable populations</i>
Resources / Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>EHD Map</i> – available by clicking on census tract and toggling to ‘Race’ in pop-up window • <i>Race and Ethnicity in the United States (US Census)</i> ⁴⁴ – available at multiple levels, including state, county, census tract, etc. • <i>2020 American Community Survey (ACS) Demographic and Housing Estimates</i> ⁴⁵ – available at multiple levels, including state, county, census tract, etc. • <i>City of Seattle Racial Equity Toolkit</i> ⁴⁶ – worksheet format

Tribes and Tribal Communities	
Questions / Prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tribes need to be treated like a formal nation. “How much time would they allot for an engagement process with a country like Germany or France?” • It’s important to think in this frame of mind when reaching out to tribal governments, You could also ask, “How long might it take the President of France to respond to a message from you?” • Which Tribes might be interested in and/or impacted or benefitted by this work (e.g., project, program, policy, etc.)? • How might Tribes be impacted?
Resources / Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>WA Government Office of Indian Affairs Map of Reservations</i> ⁴⁷ and Draft Treaty Ceded Land • <i>EHD Map Tribal Boundaries Layer</i> – in association with most data layers, you can select “Tribal Land Boundaries” by clicking “Map Features” • For engagement with Tribal nations, you should review your agencies Tribal Engagement and Consultation Plan. • https://www.whitenergroun.biz/indiancountry101 <p><i>* These resources are incomplete on their own and are intended to serve as a reference point for further research. Agencies and Districts should follow existing protocol on Tribal consultation and/or collaboration.</i></p>

Poverty and Unemployment

Questions / Prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the percent of the population living in poverty who might be impacted and/or benefitted by your agency's action (e.g., project, program, policy, etc.)? • What is the percent unemployed in the area? <i>* Low-income populations are included in the definition of Vulnerable populations</i>
Resources / Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>WTN</i> – available at multiple geographic scales and poverty/unemployment measures • <i>Overburdened Communities of Washington State</i> ⁴⁸ • <i>EHD Map</i> – available at census tract level by selecting “Socioeconomic Factors” and “Population Living in Poverty <=185% of Federal Poverty Level” or “Unemployed” • <i>2020 ACS Selected Economic Characteristics</i> ⁴⁹ – includes poverty and employment information available at multiple levels, including state, county, census tract, etc.

Language Access

Questions / Prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the percent of Limited English Proficient population that might be impacted and/or benefitted by your agency's action (e.g., project, program, policy, etc.) • Which languages are spoken by these populations?
Resources / Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Washington State MIL Language Mapping Tool</i> ⁵⁰ – available at county, sub-county, and census tract levels; includes information on widely spoken languages • <i>People That Speak English Less Than “Very Well” in the United States (US Census)</i> ⁵¹ – visualization at census tract level using 2018 ACS 5-year estimates • <i>EHD Map</i> – available at census tract level via “Socioeconomic Factors” and “ACS: Limited English (LEP)”

Environmental Justice Concerns

Questions / Prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What community concerns are relevant to the proposed action (e.g., project, program, policy, etc.)? • How do these concerns overlap with some of the demographic information identified earlier in this worksheet? <p><i>* The definition of vulnerable populations includes (iii) Populations disproportionately impacted by environmental harms; and (iv) Populations of workers experiencing environmental harms.</i></p>
Resources / Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>EHD Map</i> – multiple layers for different EJ concerns available <p><i>* These data resources are incomplete on their own and should serve as a starting place for identifying EJ concerns. Additional research, including local EJ history and concerns, Civil Rights complaints, news/media articles, and local government and community organization websites, should continue to inform this section.</i></p>

Financial Impact

Questions / Prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the potential financial benefits and/or impacts to communities given the proposed action (e.g., project, program, policy, etc.)? • Consider the downstream effects of environmental harms. For example: How might the action impact low-income households in both the short and long-term?
Resources / Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>EHD Map</i> has indicators for federal poverty guidelines that can help individuals map out a geographical area's income range.

Appendix B: Definitions

Community engagement - The process of intentionally working with and through communities to address issues important to these individuals. Community engagement can include various forms of activities, formal and informal in nature. In the context of this document, some are led by conservation districts or more rarely, the State Conservation Commission, and some are led by local organizations or communities themselves.

Cooperator - Individual or entity engaged by the conservation district or entity to plan and implement best management practices. The cooperator may not necessarily be the legal landowner of the property and must secure permission from the legal owner for conservation district or contract activities.

Overburdened (communities) - Minority, low-income, tribal, or indigenous populations or geographic locations in the United States that often experience disproportionate environmental harms and risks. This disproportionality can be the result of greater vulnerability to environmental hazards, lack of opportunity for public participation, or other factors. Increased vulnerability may be attributable to an accumulation of negative or lack of positive environmental, health, economic, or social conditions within these populations or places. The term describes situations where multiple factors, including both environmental and socio-economic stressors, may act cumulatively to affect health and the environment and contribute to persistent environmental health disparities.

Overburdened community (per the Climate Commitment Act - in part) - A geographic area where vulnerable populations face combined, multiple environmental harms and health impacts or risks due to exposure to environmental pollutants or contaminants through multiple pathways, which may result in significant disparate adverse health outcomes or effects.

Tokenism - The practice of doing something (such as hiring a person who belongs to a minority group) only to prevent criticism and give the appearance that people are being treated fairly.

Underserved communities - Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as defined by the list in the preceding definition of "equity." (*USDA* ⁶⁴, *NRCS* ⁶⁵)

Vulnerable populations (Per the HEAL Act and Climate Commitment Act) - Includes, but is not limited to: (i) Racial or ethnic minorities; (ii) Low-income populations; (iii) Populations disproportionately impacted by environmental harms; and (iv) Populations of workers experiencing environmental harms.

Appendix C: Online Resources

- Community Based-Social Marketing: cbsm.com/
- Friends with Benefits: Practitioner Publishing as a Pathway to Collaboration in Social Marketing: tinyurl.com/Collaboration-Pathway
- Global Climate Assessment: tinyurl.com/Fourth-National
- Indian Country 101: tinyurl.com/IndianCountry101
- Olympia Urban Agriculture Analysis: This is Thurston County-specific but could be built in other areas. It is a tool the district created comparing food access with socioeconomic data for the City of Olympia. It looks at the accessibility of these resources to city residents in relation to key socioeconomic metrics and investigates opportunities for expanding urban agriculture. tinyurl.com/Urban-Ag-Analysis
- Sum of Us - Style Guide: tinyurl.com/Progressives-Style-Guide
- The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Social Marketing: tinyurl.com/Palgrave-Encyclopedia
- University of Maryland Office of Inclusion and Equity: Inclusive Language: tinyurl.com/Inclusive-Language-BP
- USDA's County Level Data Sets (Poverty and Unemployment): tinyurl.com/County-Data-Sets
- USDA's Food Access Research Atlas: A map that compares food access and low-income residents by census tract. tinyurl.com/Food-Atlas

Appendix D: References

1. RCW 70A.65.030: tinyurl.com/RCW-70A65030
2. Governor's Office of Indian Affairs: goia.wa.gov/
3. Whitener Group: www.whitenergroup.biz/ic101resources
4. RCW 89.08.010: tinyurl.com/RCW8908010
5. Community Compensation Guidelines: tinyurl.com/Comp-Guidelines
6. Washington Department of Health Community Engagement Guide: tinyurl.com/Dept-Health-Engagement-Guide
7. How to Organize a Town Hall Meeting: tinyurl.com/Org-Town-Hall
8. How to Organize a Virtual Town Hall: tinyurl.com/Virt-Town-Hall
9. The TELE Engagement Guide: www.engaginglandowners.org/guide
10. USDA Social Marketing Resources: tinyurl.com/SNAP-Ed-Social
11. Conduction Focus Groups: tinyurl.com/Com-Tool-Box
12. Designing and Conduction Focus Group Interviews: tinyurl.com/Krueger-Focus-Groups
13. Key Informant Interviews, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research: tinyurl.com/Key-Informant
14. Public Partnership Guide: Situation Assessments: tinyurl.com/Part-Guide
15. Conducting Surveys, Community Tool Box: tinyurl.com/Conduct-Survey
16. Public Participation Guide: Tools to Generate and Obtain Public Input: tinyurl.com/Public-Part-Guide
17. Identifying and Analyzing Stakeholders and Their Interests, Community Tool Box: tinyurl.com/Stakeholder-Interests
18. Stakeholder Engagement Best Practice Guide: tinyurl.com/BP-Guide
19. 5 Ways to Engage Stakeholders: tinyurl.com/SEHinc
20. Tips for analyzing your audience, University of Pittsburgh: www.comm.pitt.edu/tips-analyzing-audience

21. Game Changers: Establishing a Youth Advisory Council: tinyurl.com/Youth-Power-Toolkit
22. 8 Steps to Establishing a Thriving Youth Advisory Council: tinyurl.com/Youth-Advisory-Council
23. Leading a community dialogue on building a healthy community: tinyurl.com/Community-Dialogue
24. Tackling complex problems through collective impact: tinyurl.com/Tackling-Problems
25. Evaluating Collective Impact: [Five Simple Rules: tinyurl.com/Eval-Impact](https://tinyurl.com/Eval-Impact)
26. Coalition Building I: Starting a Coalition, Community Toolbox: tinyurl.com/Coalition-Bldg
27. Coalition Building II: Maintaining a Coalition: tinyurl.com/Coalition-Maint
28. Developing Effective Coalitions: An Eight Step Guide, Prevention Institute: tinyurl.com/Coalition-Dev
29. Creating and maintaining partnerships, Community Toolbox: tinyurl.com/Coalition-Create
30. Engaging Your Community: A Toolkit for Partnership, Collaboration, and Action: tinyurl.com/Community-Toolkit
31. Community Calendar: ethnomed.org/calendar/
32. Interfaith Calendar: www.interfaith-calendar.org/
33. Strategies Guided by Best Practice for Community Mobilization: tinyurl.com/Community-Mobil
34. Centers for Disease Community Mobilization Guide: tinyurl.com/CDC-Mobilizations
35. OFM Language Statistics by county: tinyurl.com/OFM-Languages
36. Limited English Proficiency Map: tinyurl.com/Proficiency-Map
37. WSU Translation and Interpretive Services: slcr.wsu.edu/translation-services/
38. DES Language Access Contracts: tinyurl.com/DES-Contracts
39. List of Hearing Loop Devices available to use in Washington: tinyurl.com/Seattle-Loops
40. DES Language Access Contracts: tinyurl.com/Access-Contract
41. Resource: Conflict Resolution in Public Participation | US EPA: tinyurl.com/Public-Conflict
42. Washington Tracking Network (WTN) Environmental Health Disparities (EHD) Map: tinyurl.com/WTN-EHD
43. Resource: Conflict Resolution in Public Participation | US EPA: tinyurl.com/WTN-Portal
44. Race and Ethnicity in the United States (US Census): tinyurl.com/Race-Ethnicity-Census
45. 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) Demographic and Housing Estimates: tinyurl.com/ACS-Housing-20
46. City of Seattle Racial Equity Toolkit: tinyurl.com/COS-Toolkit
47. WA Government Office of Indian Affairs Map of Reservations: tinyurl.com/GOIA-Map
48. Overburdened Communities of Washington State: tinyurl.com/WA-map
49. 2020 ACS Selected Economic Characteristics: tinyurl.com/Selected-Econ
50. Washington State MIL Language Mapping Tool: tinyurl.com/MIL-Mapping
51. People That Speak English Less Than “Very Well” in the United States (US Census): tinyurl.com/Census-Library
52. Community Engagement Plan: www.scc.wa.gov/files/comm-community-engagement-plan.

Appendix C: Climate Commitment Act

The Climate Commitment Act (CCA) (RCW 70A.65.030ci) requires:

If the agency is not a covered agency subject to the requirements of chapter 70A.02 RCW (the HEAL act) create and adopt a community engagement plan to describe how it will engage with overburdened communities and vulnerable populations in allocating funds or administering grants or programs from the climate investment account. (ii) The plan must include methods for outreach and communication with those who face barriers, language or otherwise, to participation.

While compliance with the CCA prompted the Washington State Conservation Commission to develop our Community Engagement Plan, the intent is for the plan to be used more broadly. For that reason, it may not be clear from the plan language specifically how SCC will comply with the requirement. This document is intended to address this.

SCC will engage with overburdened communities and vulnerable populations in allocating funds or administering grants or programs from the climate investment account in several complementary ways. These are designed to maximize the likelihood of meaningful engagement, minimize burdens to vulnerable populations and overburdened communities through the engagement itself, and ensure that programs we administer using CCA dollars are directed to a greater degree toward producing meaningful and direct benefits to vulnerable populations and overburdened communities and that members of these populations have real and expanding opportunities to inform and guide these investments.

The CCA language can be read to suggest an assumption that an agency will primarily or exclusively engage directly with overburdened communities and vulnerable populations (rather than by engaging with or through partners). For many agencies this may be a sensible approach. For SCC though, while situations may arise where it would be appropriate for us to engage with communities directly, in most cases a partnership approach will be more effective and forms the basis of this plan.

First, it is important to convey some context about SCC. The agency is almost never the implementer of projects in communities; SCC functions mostly as a funder of projects proposed by local proponents from all across the State and as the coordinating agency for conservation districts. The vast majority of projects we fund, especially with CCA funding, are developed and implemented by conservation districts. SCC and conservation districts are created in the same statute and our work is intertwined in many ways. Conservation districts are where most of the work funded by SCC interacts with communities, and so most of the ways in which SCC plans to engage with communities around CCA-funded work is with and through the 45 local conservation districts and other local implementing partners. We at SCC lack the relationships and local knowledge this network has spent decades building. Trying to replicate this statewide would be unlikely to serve communities as well. Instead, SCC staff are working to bolster and harness the power of the existing network and bring it to bear specifically around CCA-funded projects.

The Conservation Commission has developed a Community Engagement Plan, in collaboration with community engagement practitioners from conservation district staff, to better support, inform and inspire deeper and more extensive community engagement by conservation districts, SCC and any partner implementing projects using SCC funding.

It is designed to guide users through considering the many possible ways in which one might engage with communities, choose how best to engage in a given situation, then provide resources to support that work, evaluate success, adaptively manage and plan for improvement in the future. This aspect to the answer of “how” SCC will engage (using what approach and methods) is answered by bulk of the plan’s content.

Another part of how engagement occurs is built into how conservation districts function- with SCC support. The first community engagement in project development typically occurs before individual projects are identified. Conservation districts go through both a 5-year strategic planning process and a more tactical annual planning process. Both encourage community input, are discussed in public meetings and are approved by a locally elected and appointed board of supervisors. These plans identify local environmental and community needs, seek funding to pursue those needs and ultimately lead to developing project proposals. In some cases, potential projects emerge early on in this process, in other cases more general community priorities are identified and specific projects are developed later to pursue those priorities. SCC is the coordinating agency of conservation districts and SCC staff frequently help facilitate and otherwise support these planning processes.

The current level of community engagement varies by district but continues to advance overall. In addition to this plan, another way SCC is working to expand and deepen this work in districts is through a one-time small grants program. These grants are being used by districts to advance local community engagement priorities in a variety of ways including training for staff and Board members on this work, developing community engagement plans tailored to the local area and improving the inclusivity of district events and programs. SCC will continue to seek ways to support advancing this work in conservation districts across the state.

Another way in which SCC will – again in partnership with conservation districts - engage with vulnerable populations and overburdened communities in the use of CCA funding is programmatically through the grant application and ranking process. Beginning in 2025 SCC plans for applications for CCA funding to include questions to determine whether a project was developed in response to an identified community need, provides direct and meaningful benefits to vulnerable populations and overburdened communities, and/or is supported by a Tribal resolution. Projects showing more responsiveness and benefit to overburdened communities and vulnerable populations will then be awarded additional ranking points. This drives greater engagement levels on projects chosen for funding by the CCA.

Finally, the specific requirement that the plan must include methods for outreach and communication with those who face barriers, language or otherwise, to participation is addressed primarily in the sections entitled “Engage” and “Evaluating Your Community Engagement Efforts” though some resources and examples occur elsewhere.

SCC is committed to ongoing improvement in our own community engagement work and our support of community engagement by our local project implementing partners around the state. SCC staff welcome feedback on the contents of this compliance addendum and on the entire Community Engagement Plan.