



Community Engagement GUIDE





What is community engagement?

Community engagement is the opportunity, capacity, and willingness to co-create solutions in partnership with the community. Effective community engagement is an intentional process that brings people together to achieve shared goals. Community engagement is an essential part of any project, as our initiatives can only succeed if they include the real lived experience, expectations, and commitment of the community members we serve.

Content Experts are professionals, staff, service providers, and leaders with formal power who have the knowledge, tools, and resources to address the issue.

Context Experts are community members who experientially know about the issue and feel its impact in their everyday lives. These are individuals who know the community best and experience it day to day.

In the world of community engagement, community members are considered context experts whereas professionals with technical and programming expertise are the content experts. Both forms of expertise are important. A project that only

addresses the technical content without considering the context will not have community buy-in and accountability. A project that addresses community context without fully accounting for technical and programming requirements will not result in an effective and technically sound solution. This shared responsibility is why community engagement is refocusing “working for” the community into “working with” the community.

The purpose of this guide:

This document is intended to help you move towards your goals with the community. Many Town projects require community support. With an effective community engagement strategy, you can move toward community buy-in and beyond—to the community sharing ownership over the success of your projects along with you and your team. This Community Engagement Guide will provide a high-level summary of the why, when, who, and how to effective community engagement.

Tools and resources to take on this work can be made available to you through the Communications and Community Engagement (CCE) department.

Community Engagement and the Town of Innisfil

Community engagement is a foundational pillar of the Town of Innisfil's Strategic Plan 2030. One of the priorities for this plan is Connect, to build connections at all levels and support the overall well-being and vitality of our community. This plan moves us away from a top-down approach and brings Community First as a guiding value in how we move forward.

To achieve our strategic goals, we must ensure a sustainable and authentic partnership with our community. Moving forward, we must prioritize continued engagement, nurture relationships, and build capacity among our community members.

We engage with the community when:

- ◆ The matter will affect community members, particularly in the case of underrepresented groups
- ◆ Community members can provide meaningful influence through their context expertise to the specific matter
- ◆ It is required by law

We will not engage when:

- ◆ The specific matter pertains to immediate public safety
- ◆ The specific matter is legislated by other levels of government

We may choose not to engage when the specific matter is of little public interest.

Who makes up the Innisfil community?

Innisfil is home to residents from different communities with diverse backgrounds, opinions, and lived experiences. Beyond that, Innisfil is also a growing community with a thriving business and tourism sector. From residents and community leaders to schools and business owners, everyone who lives, works, or plays here is a part of the Innisfil community. Who you engage with will depend on your type of project and your engagement goals.



Community Engagement at Every Step

When should you include Community Engagement? At every step!

Effective community engagement should be interwoven as an interrelated aspect of your project planning and execution.

1

Determine the need for community engagement

During the planning stage of your project, identify if you need community engagement. Refer to our section on when we engage (page 3) and CCE for more information.

2

Develop a Community Engagement Plan

Identify your project's community engagement goals, timelines, budget, and other needs through a Community Engagement (CE) Plan before you begin project implementation. CCE is here to help you with this.

3

Implement, engage, and communicate

Congratulations, your project is underway! Refer back to your CE Plan for how and when you will engage with the community. As the project moves forward and updates occur, remember to share the news with the community.

4

Report back and evaluate

Upon completing your project, it's important to evaluate what went well and what could be improved. We always report back to the community at the end of a project.

When done properly, community engagement is a resource to elevate and improve upon your project planning and execution—and the good news is that you're not alone! No matter how your project is being completed, in-house by TOI staff or through hired consultants, CCE is your internal resource to best understand the Innisfil community and how to approach them in a way that is appropriate, effective, and within the scope of your project.



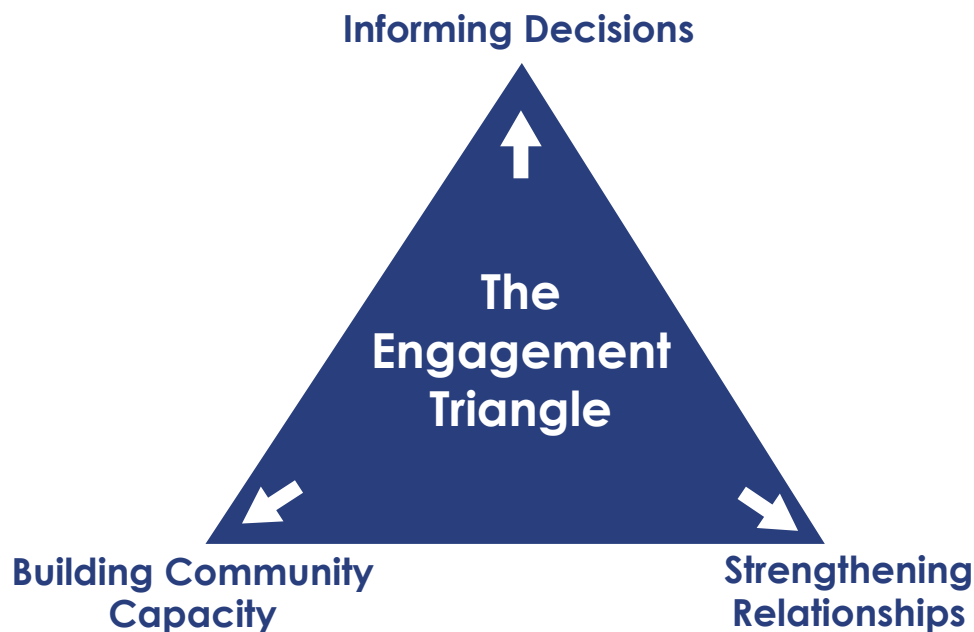
Community Engagement Goals

As municipal employees, we carry the responsibility to use municipal resources appropriately. We are often balancing desired outcomes against available resources and capacity. Establishing community engagement goals at the start of your project will help guide your priorities by bringing a strategic mindset to your work, informing your decisions, and keeping you accountable.



Know Your Why

The first step is to understand the purpose for your work, or why you're engaging with the community. Typically, there are three possible purposes for community engagement: informing Town decisions, building the community's capacity or knowledge on a topic, and/or strengthening Town-community relationships. When we envision each purpose as the corner of a triangle we create the Engagement Triangle.



This tool helps to identify if, and how much, each purpose drives your community engagement. Where does your project lie in the Engagement Triangle? Is it closer to the centre so all three purposes are equally important or is it skewed more toward one side? Answering these questions will help determine your primary and secondary purposes(s).

Community Engagement Levels

Next, determine your community engagement level based on your purpose(s). Which level you choose will guide the style of engagement and the rest of your community engagement planning. Keep in mind that the levels on the chart go from placing community members in a listening role on the left to a leadership role on the right.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Purpose	Strengthen Relationships Build Capacity	Inform Decisions	Inform Decisions Strengthen Relationships	Inform Decisions Strengthen Relationships Build Capacity	Inform Decisions Strengthen Relationships Build Capacity
Aim	Provide interest holders with balanced and objective information	Obtain interest holder feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions	Work with interest holders throughout the process to ensure that their concerns/aspirations are consistently understood	Partner with interest holders in each aspect of the decision from the development to the solution	Share leadership of community-led projects with final decision-making at the community level
Style	"Here's what's happening."	"Here are some options, what do you think?"	"Here's the problem, what ideas do you have?"	"Let's work together to solve this problem."	"You care about this issue and are leading an initiative; how can we support you?"
Complexity	Simple	Simple Complicated	Complicated	Complicated Complex	Complex



Set Your Goals

Empowered with the purpose and level of your community engagement, you can identify your community engagement goals. Remember:

Be SMART:

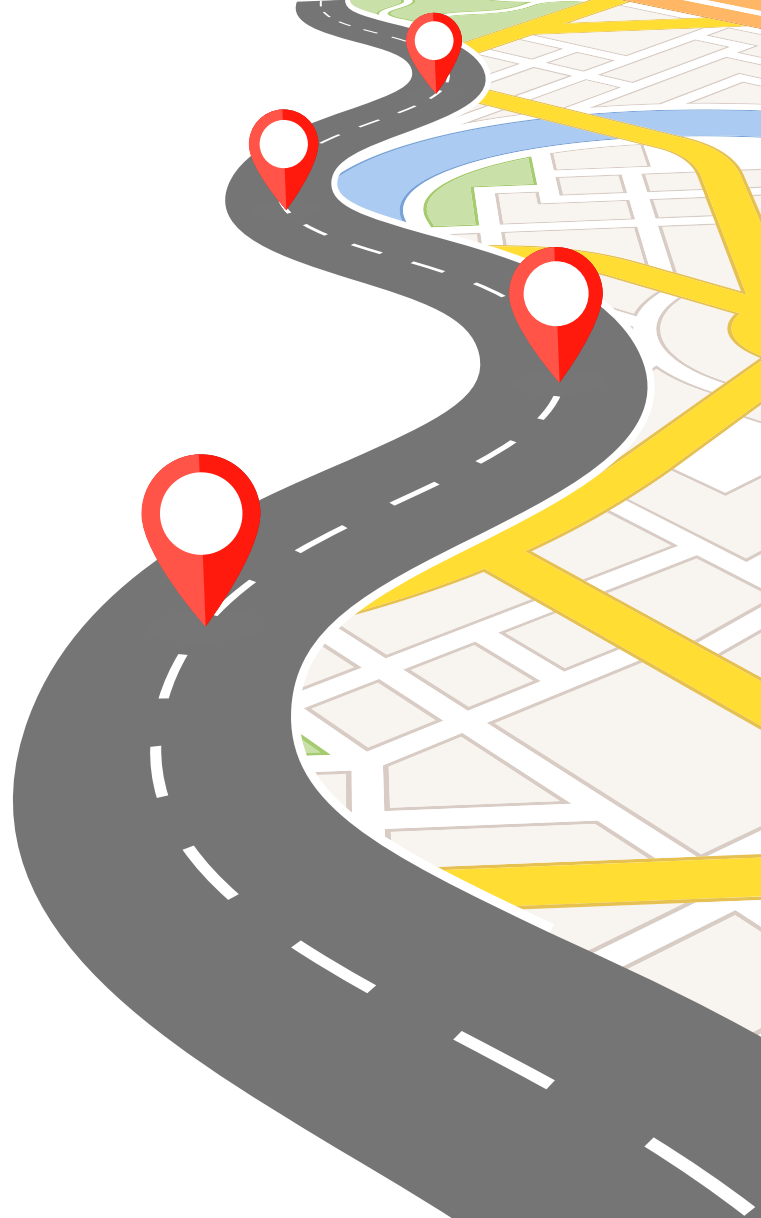
The best goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

Less is more:

Choose two or three community engagement goals that correctly reflect your purpose(s) and level of engagement.

It takes two:

Whenever possible, goals should address desired outcomes for the Town and for the participating community members.



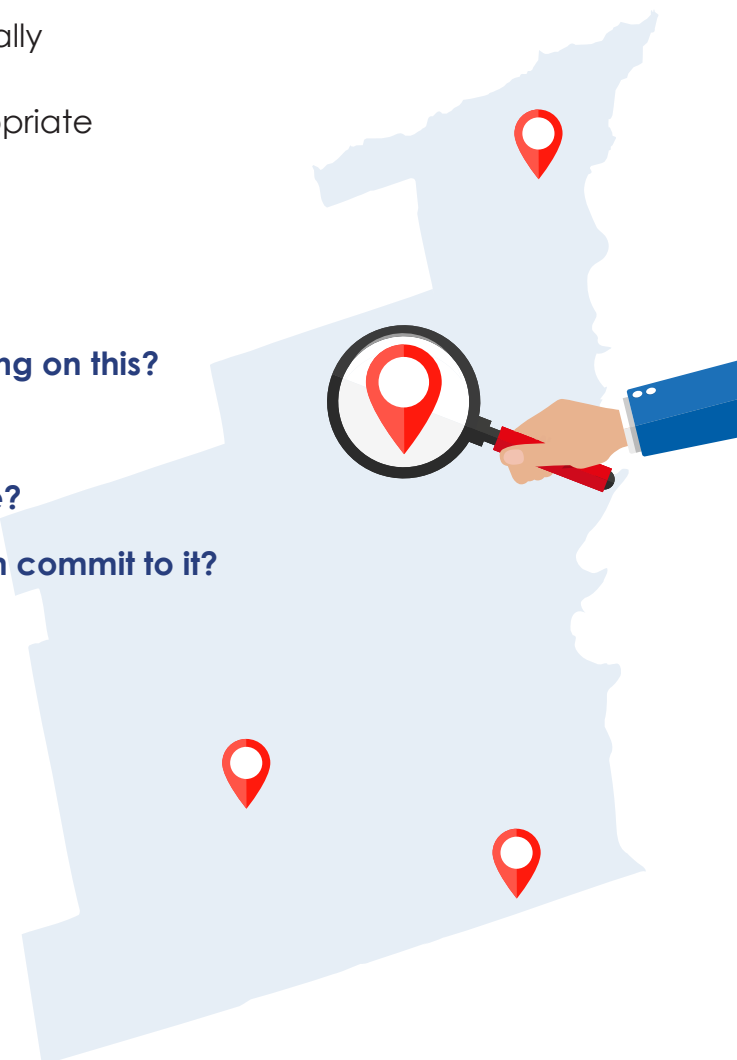


Who to Engage

A community can be determined geographically (i.e., “resident of Innisfil”), but there are many other ways to identify the best and most appropriate interest holders in a project.

When thinking about who to engage, consider:

- ✦ Who will be directly and indirectly affected?
- ✦ Are there existing community networks working on this?
- ✦ Who has unique insights to offer the project?
- ✦ Who may “spoil” the process for other people?
- ✦ If it is a longer engagement process, who can commit to it?



Community Engagement Methods

Once you've established your why, what, and who, it's time to identify your how and when. Below are the most common community engagement methods by level. Keep in mind that the use of these methods is cumulative. For example, a project at the Involve level should employ methods from the Involve, Consult, and Inform levels throughout its lifecycle.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Example Projects	Announcement of new funding, by-laws, or other decisions of Council that impact citizens.	Seeking input on our strategic plan, budget, program(s), a new policy, or a change in by-laws.	Generating ideas from the community on how to tackle a problem, like reducing speeding in neighbourhoods.	Working with a neighbourhood to develop a new community centre or determine amenities for a local park.	Members of a local service club take the lead in developing a community trail.
Popular Methods	Social Media Website Presentations Tours Press Releases Displays	Polls Surveys Interviews Focus Group Open Houses	Working Group Community Mapping Round-table Discussions Scenario Testing	Workshops Committees Participatory Budgeting	Community-led, Town-funded programs Citizen Committees/ Public Advisory Committees
Timeframe	1+ month	3+ months	4+ months	6+ months	6+ months
Evaluation Methods	Number of visitors Attendants Social media engagement	Number of respondents Submissions Participants	Number of participants Representation from key groups Unknowns answered	Depth of understanding Number of participants Change in opinion before/after	Depth of engagement Participant retention Change in opinion before/after



Guiding Principles

Include Everyone and Embrace All Ideas

Encouraging a diverse mix of ideas and hearing from a widespread audience allows for expanded visions, diverse possibilities, and comprehensive decision-making. Working with the community rather than simply for them helps residents take ownership of their future.

Be Supportive and Respectful

Creating change requires citizens and Town leaders to see past the structures that separate society and look toward a common goal. Considering all sides to a story and adopting another's lens will reduce apathy, encourage equity, and move us toward becoming a united community.

Communicate Often

Sharing information early and keeping the community in the know strengthens a deeper understanding and allows others to make meaningful contributions. Always educating the community on relevant legislative, strategic, and local contexts will allow them to make informed decisions.

Demonstrate Integrity, Trust, and Transparency

Remain clear about the level of engagement required, the role of residents, and how their input will be used. All engagement activities must be genuine, purposeful, and sincere. Having an accepting mindset and providing equal opportunities to participate will help establish authentic partnerships.

Measure Outcomes and Share Successes

Following up with participants and sharing outcomes will allow them to recognize the value of their contribution and, as a result, extend their interest to engage. Closing the loop and evaluating engagement methods solidifies our projects and strengthens our commitment to the community.

Commit to Continual Improvement

Taking risks and pursuing new ways to work is what will lead us toward new opportunities and successful outcomes. Constant evaluation and a desire to improve is what drives us to challenge ourselves and continue to grow.

