

Community-Centered Engagement

(60% draft – updated May 2024)

Purpose:

Community-Centered Engagement intentionally puts people first and centers community perspectives in the process of Met Council decision-making. It supports the Equity Framework by addressing the conditions of success in the following ways:

- **Leading with race:** Community-Centered Engagement intentionally prioritizes engagement with overburdened communities.
- **Action-oriented:** Community-Centered Engagement includes intentional actions to highlight and amplify best practices, to address systemic inequities, and to identify policy changes that either limit or inhibit community voices.
- **Address the historical context:** Community-Centered Engagement provides space to identify and address historic and ongoing injustice. It also partners effectively with community in structuring engagement that builds capacity and meaningfully involves community in ways that repair historical harms and combat extractive practices.
- **Share power:** Community-Centered Engagement prioritizes co-creation with community and intentionally integrates co-created solutions sustainably into decision-making and implementation processes.

Imagine 2050 progresses previous engagement policy in several specific ways:

- Centering community voices in regional processes
- Partnering with community as co-creators
- Committing to shared agenda setting
- Investing in community capacity building
- Focusing on assets in community and the value community voices bring to regional processes
- Prioritizing overburdened communities in engagement

Context:

Community voices shaped the Public Engagement Plan created in response to the equity commitments in Thrive MSP 2040. Since that time, community voices and the experience of our public processes have identified ways to more intentionally imbed principles of equity and inclusion into engagement and decision-making processes – namely recognizing historical patterns of injustice and exclusion, and the impact of unilateral decision-making.

Among the principles identified in the Public Engagement Plan:

- *Equity:* residents and communities are partners in decision-making.
- *Respect:* residents and communities should feel heard and their interests included in decisions.
- *Transparency:* residents and communities should be engaged in planning and decisions should be open and widely communicated.
- *Relevance:* engagement occurs early and often throughout a process to assure the work is relevant to residents and communities.

- *Accountability*: residents and communities can see how their participation affects the outcome; specific outcomes are measured and communicated.
- *Collaboration*: engagement involves developing relationships and understanding the value residents and communities bring to the process. Decisions should be made with people, not for people.
- *Inclusion*: Engagement should remove barriers to participation that have historically disengaged residents and communities.
- *Cultural Competence*: Engagement should reflect and respond effectively to racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic experiences of residents and communities.

Since the Thrive MSP 2040 process and creation of the Public Engagement Plan, the Metropolitan Council has established tribal relations policies – including both formal government-to-government consultation, staff involvement, and community engagement expertise. The Met Council has also updated its interpretation of the public purpose doctrine to include incentives and compensation for engagement and community expertise. These updated practices are more reflective of a community-centered approach to engagement and should be included and expanded upon in regional plans for 2050.

Community-Centered Engagement honors community expertise, addresses inequity by integrating and compensating the value of community expertise, and prioritizes processes that invite community participation and partnership. It recognizes a full spectrum of connection with community voices, from informing to co-creation. It ensures all people are represented in decision-making and that the weight of feedback from community is proportional to the impact a decision has on communities. Community-Centered Engagement represents a fundamental commitment to addressing equity in community engagement.

The illustration below, highlights an engagement spectrum that pairs elements of the spectrum championed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) with ways the Community-Centered Engagement Framework proposes to apply that spectrum. The spectrum identifies activities and roles with less impact to community members on the left and more impact to community members on the right.

Engagement Spectrum

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Co-create/Co-lead
Impact	One-way communication	Provide access	Provide access, respond	Partner, address inequity, build capacity	Share power, share agenda, change systems
Participation Goal	Inform, educate about problem and potential solutions	Gather feedback and reflect concerns and interests	Work directly with people throughout the process and include concerns, ideas	Partner with constituencies in defining problems, developing alternatives, choosing solutions	Community, constituents have final decision-making power
Promise to community	"We will keep you informed."	"We will keep you informed, listen to concerns and feedback, demonstrate how feedback influenced decision."	"We will work with you to ensure concerns and desires are reflected in the alternatives developed and demonstrate how feedback influenced the decision."	"We will seek your advice and innovation, include your advice, and recommendations in decisions to the greatest extent possible."	"We will set the agenda together and decide together. We will implement those shared decisions."
Sample activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Web sites • Email newsletters • Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Working/advisory groups • Deliberative polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shape strategies • Influence agenda setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct agenda setting • Direct decision-making • Establish expectations

Commitments:

- The Metropolitan Council will work to intentionally build trust with communities through Community-Centered Engagement.
- We will build and sustain relationships, even outside of discrete projects.
- We will co-create solutions and define clear roles for partnership and implementation.
- We will act with transparency in practice and implementation.
- We will dedicate financial resources, such as individual projects and division budgets, that support centering engagement across all of our work.
- We will measure effectiveness, coordinated with other regional indicators and based on standards defined by communities experiencing inequities.
- We will recruit for advisory committees (and other appointments) in a way that results in participants and members who are representative of the region's diverse population

Policy:

- The Metropolitan Council will compensate community members for offering their lived experiences and perspectives to inform Met Council decision-making.
- The Metropolitan Council will intentionally plan engagement efforts with communities affected by a decision. Engagement activities will meet communities where it is most convenient and effective for them to participate. Engagement activities will occur prior to a decision, to ensure communities have tangible impact on decisions.
- The Metropolitan Council will intentionally partner with communities to plan and execute engagement efforts. We will prioritize activities with and resources for overburdened communities. Partnership involves shared agenda-setting, shared expectations, shared outcomes, and compensation.
- Engagement activities will reflect the eight principles: equity, respect, transparency, relevance, accountability, collaboration, inclusion, and cultural competence.

Actions:

- Continue to advance legislative initiatives to remove prohibition of compensation for participation in Met Council committees.
- Highlight and implement best practices in government and non-profit engagement. Create case studies and convene conversations to lift up community examples and shift understandings of community expertise and power. Clarify relationships with and across levels of government to enhance coordination and reduce duplication and fatiguing community.
- Establish specific expectations related to project and program budgeting, to explicitly call out funds and resources for community engagement.
- Identify expectations for co-creation activities and create, in coordination with community experts, a framework for partnership and co-creation.
- Create a tool, in partnership with community experts, to assess and measure effectiveness of Community-Centered Engagement in including voices and addressing equity.
- Engage community voices in validating engagement principles, defining what it means to center voices in processes, and clarifying what transparency and accountability mean in community.

- Support, through technical assistance, local governments to create more community-centered engagement processes. Identify incentives for innovation in community-centered engagement practices.