

## **Introduction: Fostering Public Engagement**

Often, when people think about planning, they focus on the things – the buildings, the streets, the green space, the roads, the transit. But planning is really about people – these are the communities we call home. Where we go to work every day. Where our families will grow, and hopefully, where they'll prosper. And where we'll connect with one another.

As a result, the planning process must also be grounded in the needs of people, the locales where they live and work, and the broader community. It's where what we can do connects with how we live, work, travel, and grow. And in order to understand the values and aspirations of a broader community or specific neighborhood, city, or locale, we need to engage the people from that context in that discussion.

The Twin Cities region is a vibrant and diverse place – a collection of many different communities that together form one of the nation's largest metropolitan areas. And the region's collective success is built on a civic tradition of shared action by government, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, community groups and business leaders, aiming to enhance our communities and region as a whole. That shared tradition requires an acknowledgment of how each person and organization in our region is an asset and reflects a valid and important point of view.

Together, we create shared values and aspirations. Our broader community should reflect these shared values and aspirations. The only way to achieve that outcome is through inclusive public engagement.

### **From Outreach to Engagement**

Planning requires collaboration to create shared values and outcomes. To truly foster that collaboration equitably, the Metropolitan Council has asserted the need to engage the diverse range of community interests in the planning process. Our region needs the full range of voices at the table to understand issues, explore alternatives, and create a shared action plan to address issues.

At the very least, this requires a shift from traditional outreach and participation processes to an engagement model that fosters shared problem solving, supportive partnerships and reciprocal relationships. Though one entity may have the authority or budget to complete a project, success requires coordinated collaboration of a range of partners, which bring the range of perspectives and expertise to strengthen the process.

While public outreach and public participation processes encourage people to be involved in public decision-making, engagement – the process that recognizes the value of creating ongoing, long-term relationships for the benefit of the greater community – brings the interactive, collective problem-solving element into the process that capitalizes on the collective strengths of various stakeholders.

People are experts in assessing the long-term needs of their personal experiences and interactions with the places they live and work. This public engagement plan recognizes people as full and equal partners in the region's decision-making processes at all levels. Specifically, it outlines the responsibilities and commitments of the Metropolitan Council to engage the public and key constituencies in regional planning, and provides guidance for communities in the region to help establish some consistency in best practices for engagement.

**Engaging Equitably**

The *Thrive MSP 2040* plan places new emphasis on the importance of engaging communities equitably, to intentionally engage both historically underrepresented and underresourced communities – such as communities of color, individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and youth – in a way that more directly addresses existing social inequalities.

Equitable outcomes are shared outcomes – they reflect the values and needs of the community collectively – including the neighborhood, city, county, or broader community – as it relates to planning, whether broadly or on a specific project. These outcomes specifically address communities traditionally left out of the decision-making process. Engaging equitably means approaches to problem-solving need to be flexible and accessible to people and recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach may be equal, but does not equip participants to be successful.

In public decision-making processes, community engagement is an intentional, strategic, purposeful process to connect and empower individuals and communities. It is multi-dimensional and flexible to meet residents of a locale or members of a broader community where they are and engage diverse and historically underrepresented communities to achieve equitable outcomes. An accessible, respectful community engagement process is proactive, culturally appropriate, inclusive, and ongoing, with both short-term and long-term impact.

True community engagement goes beyond consultation to authentically facilitate community involvement in decision-making. It recognizes the value of building relationships and leadership capacity among agencies, community organizations, and residents. It provides ongoing relevance and awareness, and helps leverage community momentum and interest.

True community engagement results from intentionally organizing individuals and communities to understand issues, identify concerns and considerations, and engage in problem-solving. It cannot strictly begin and end with one or more self-contained projects, but needs to build upon each effort by deepening community connections and understanding. While enriched by participation by individuals, it must not strictly rely on volunteer efforts or people with means and time to participate, but must be structured with the understanding that accommodations and financial support are required to deepen involvement.

**Principles for Engagement**

The Metropolitan Council places a high priority on outreach and engagement work for regional planning and infrastructure projects. Successful outreach results in public engagement. Our region’s community organizations, and the historically underrepresented and underresourced communities they work for, are important resources and assets to our region that also deserve greater recognition. Collaborations between the Council and community organizations are a model practice for public engagement in our region.

Successful engagement efforts will reflect the following principles and values:

- Engagement efforts provide information for Metropolitan Council decision-making. Efforts should be timed to provide an opportunity for people to influence the policies and plan content.

- Participants should understand when and how their efforts will influence and change planning efforts and project development.
- The experience should reflect shared learning and multi-directional problem-solving. Engagement should address issues that a locale or broader community has identified as, not merely the project-specific needs of the Metropolitan Council.
- The time and investment of all participants is valuable.
- Discussions and problem-solving should occur early in a project process and on an ongoing basis to solidify long-term relationships.
- Meetings, problem-solving sessions, and other in-person interactions should be planned with advance notice to participants, a clear understanding of what to expect at the meeting, opportunities to participate at other times, in other ways, promoted widely and via multiple means (web, email, newspapers, radio and television stations, community organizations, posting flyers in public places, etc.), at times and places where people naturally convene, with an opportunity to enhance community connections. Accommodations should be made for transportation, childcare, food, etc.
- Engagement efforts involve residents and communities as full and equitable partners in public decision-making. Some residents and communities may require different approaches to ensure participation.
  - Opportunities for participation should be flexible, appropriate to the scale of the project or planning effort, and responsive to the needs of participants.
  - Community members should understand the tangible benefits for their participation in a project. Whenever possible and appropriate, funds should be made available to community organizations (primarily non-profit organizations) to participate and engage their constituencies.
- Planning for engagement efforts should include input and direction from directly affected communities.
  - Each project and planning effort will require different approaches. Effective engagement involves preliminary consultation about the community's values related to an issue, the appropriate method and venue for engagement, and establishing expectations for ongoing communication and engagement.
  - Each project and planning effort should include an assessment of the affected communities and appropriate measures of success, inclusion, and culturally appropriate approaches and communication techniques.
- Engagement efforts should work to mitigate existing racial, ethnic, cultural or linguistic barriers and include diverse races, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, and socio-economic and disability statuses. Engagement efforts should be culturally competent, in that they reflect and respond effectively to racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic experiences of people and communities.
- Engagement efforts will be coordinated to provide sufficient context about how all the policy and systems plans work together. Materials will be presented in plain language, and with detail appropriate to the audiences. Translation of materials and interpretation services will be provided when necessary. Among the items participants should clearly learn:
  - Timeline for decision-making and current status of the process.
  - Who has the power to make decisions?
  - When will decisions be made?
  - How will my input be used? How will I be able to track and watch my input affect the process?

- How can I directly interact with decision-makers?
- The Council will periodically report back to constituencies and communities regarding outreach and engagement efforts to communicate progress.
- Whenever possible, community organizations will serve as experts for planning and implementing outreach strategies and be compensated/reimbursed for expenses.

## About the Twin Cities Region

The Twin Cities metropolitan area is a thriving region of nearly 3 million people. The seven-county region – including Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington counties – includes 186 local cities, as well as several unincorporated townships in the more rural parts of the area.

The region is noted for its strong natural and cultural assets – three great rivers, lakes, wide expanses of green space, a vibrant arts community, and rich cultural action – as well as a civic tradition of shared action. The region also has a resilient economy with a range of businesses and organizations that has nimbly weathered the ups and downs of national trends.

Over the next several years, our region will grow and become older and more diverse – by 2040, 40% of the region’s population will be people of color, compared to 24% in 2010, and the region’s population of residents age 65 and older will double.

## About the Metropolitan Council

The Metropolitan Council is the designated planning entity for the Twin Cities seven-county metropolitan region, and in that role facilitates creation of a long-range development guide for the region. That guide, *Thrive MSP 2040*, is updated once every 10 years, and provides the vision for development in the Twin Cities region. Several policy and systems plans result from the larger regional plan, including the *Transportation Policy Plan*, *Regional Parks Policy Plan*, *Water Resources Policy Plan*, and *Housing Policy Plan*.

The Metropolitan Council was created by the Minnesota Legislature and Gov. Harold LeVander in 1967, who suggested the Council’s key role was anticipating the challenges that will not limit themselves to municipal boundaries but will affect many local communities and the region as a whole. Bringing a regional perspective to these challenges provides the opportunity to address issues that meet the following concepts:

- Are bigger than any one community can address alone;
- Cross community boundaries to affect multiple communities;
- Could benefit from an opportunity to share best practices; or
- Require resources that are most effectively used at a regional scale.

For nearly 50 years the Metropolitan Council has played a key role in coordinating regional growth and planning—providing essential services such as transportation and wastewater treatment, and convening partners to accomplish ambitious goals unrealistic for a single community but possible as a region. Thinking ahead—and working together—helps the region achieve a high quality of life, economies of scale, high-quality regional services, and a competitive edge envied by other metropolitan areas.

There are 17 members of the Council – 16 members that are appointed to represent geographic districts and a chair appointed at-large. The members are appointed by the governor and serve terms of up to four years that align with the term of the governor.

The Council provides the following services for the seven-county region:

- Operate Metro Transit, serving 81 million bus and rail passengers in 2012 with award-winning, energy-efficient fleets. Our strategic investments support a growing network of bus and rail transitways, and transit-oriented development.
- Collect and treat wastewater at rates 40% lower than peer regions, while winning national awards for excellence.
- Work to ensure adequate clean water for the future, through our water supply planning and lake and river monitoring programs.
- Plan for future growth in partnership with communities and the public.
- Plan, acquire and develop a world-class regional parks and trails system.
- Provide affordable housing for qualifying low-income residents.

### ***Thrive MSP 2040 and Regional Policy Planning***

Under state law, the Council is responsible for preparing a comprehensive development guide for the seven-county metropolitan area. *Thrive MSP 2040* provides a framework for a shared vision for the future of our region over the next 30 years. The Council is responsible for developing *Thrive* and the plans for the three statutory regional systems—wastewater, transportation, and regional parks. These three systems plans provide specific information for local governments as they prepare their comprehensive planning documents, which outline the long-range plans for development in any one community. These local plans must be consistent with the regional plans. In addition, the Housing Policy Plan sets the policy direction for the Council’s housing program, identifies regional needs and priorities, and includes guidance for housing planning in local communities.

In addition, the Transportation Policy Plan complies with federal requirements for planning and to be eligible for and obtain federal funding. It is updated at least every four years to reflect emerging trends and add information to reflect changing needs in the Twin Cities region.

As a regional plan, *Thrive MSP 2040* addresses issues greater than any one neighborhood, city or single county can tackle alone to build and maintain a thriving metropolitan region. At the same time, the future’s increasingly complex challenges demand innovative strategies and greater collaboration. Protecting our resources and investments, *Thrive* provides the foundation for a prosperous, equitable, and livable region for today and generations to come.

*Thrive MSP 2040* calls for greater attention to fostering equity both in policies and in engaging residents of the region. It recommends this Council-wide public engagement strategy to assure policies are reflective of all the region’s residents and supports prosperity for all, but particularly historically underrepresented populations (people of color, people with disabilities), people of all ages, and other traditionally marginalized groups.

The Council is also committed to collaborating with partners in local governments, communities of faith, communities of color, service providers, schools, and other advocates to better coordinate goals and desired

outcomes and engage a cross-section of the region’s population in decision making. When appropriate, the Council will convene multiple partners to create shared plans and strategies – particularly in addressing concentrated areas of poverty and related disparities that Council investments might influence.

To move toward equity, our region needs the full range of voices at the table so all affected parties understand the issues, explore alternative approaches and proceed with action. This will require new approaches for the Council. Beyond convening regional stakeholders, the Council will use the public engagement plan to work toward greater collaboration and problem-solving with members of the broader Twin Cities community, and work toward the principle of making decisions with people, rather than for people.

In addition, the *Thrive MSP 2040* plan identifies five key outcomes and for the Twin Cities region over the next 30 years, as well as three principles that will govern Council operations:

### Outcomes

**Stewardship** advances the Council’s longstanding mission of orderly and economical development by both responsibly managing the region’s natural and financial resources and making strategic investments in our region’s future.

**Prosperity** is fostered by investments in infrastructure and amenities that create regional economic competitiveness, thereby attracting and retaining successful businesses, a talented workforce, and consequently, wealth.

**Equity** connects all residents to opportunity and creates viable housing and transportation options for people of all races, ethnicities, incomes and abilities so that all communities share the opportunities and challenges of growth and change.

**Livability** focuses on the quality of our residents’ lives and experiences in our region, and how places and infrastructure create and enhance the quality of life that makes our region a great place to live.

**Sustainability** protects our regional vitality for generations to come by preserving our capacity to maintain and support our region’s well-being and productivity over the long-term.

### Principles

**Integration** is the intentional combining of related activities to achieve more effective, greater results, and leveraging multiple policy tools to address complex regional challenges and opportunities.

**Collaboration** recognizes that shared efforts advance our region most effectively toward shared outcomes.

**Accountability** represents a commitment to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of our policies and practices toward achieving shared outcomes, and a willingness to adjust course to improve performance.

## Opportunities for Public Engagement

Public engagement efforts strengthen planning processes. The Metropolitan Council supports robust public engagement efforts because they create better results. They also recognize the value of long-term relationships between the Council, local governments, and the community at-large.

Public engagement provides valuable opportunities for planners, policymakers, and the public to interact and discuss key issues of public policy. Together, they connect the day-to-day experiences of the region’s residents, the technical knowledge and expertise of planners and engineers, and the understanding of region-wide needs.

### **Assuring inclusion**

The metropolitan planning process will be a proactive public engagement process that provides public access to key decisions. The public engagement process should provide timely information about issues and processes to the region’s residents, affected agencies, other interested parties and segments of the broader community affected by plans, program and projects, including city, county and township concerns.

In addition, the Council will collaborate directly with the public and traditionally underrepresented populations (people of color, immigrants, low-income populations, people with disabilities, the elderly, youth), as well as community advocates, and partners in regional public engagement. The Council’s Public Engagement Plan\* acknowledges the importance of flexibility when planning engagement to meet the specific needs of Twin Cities communities. Staff will build relationships with community organizations to effectively plan for inclusive engagement opportunities.

Engagement opportunities will be structured to meet the needs of audiences, to assure participation is meaningful both to participants and decision-makers.

The Council’s engagement process will be iterative, with periodic evaluation and adjustment to assure expected outcomes will be achieved.

The Council also provides information and opportunities to comment in multiple formats.

- To ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Council’s Public meeting notices and comment opportunities include TTY information and provide multiple input methods. Public meetings are held at ADA-accessible locations, and notices and information are published on the Council’s ADA-compliant website.
- Public hearing notices are published at least 30 days in advance to provide needed planning time for people who rely on public transit, Metro Mobility or special arrangements to get to Council events.
- Larger type materials, Braille or raised-print notices, recorded material, and other formats are available upon request.
- Material displayed on a Council website is accessible for people with visual or hearing impairments. Printed material is available in electronic formats for participants to use on personal equipment.
- Materials are written in plain language, allowing for easier understanding and translation into languages other than English.

- Materials may be translated into languages other than English, based on needs of participants (as detailed in the Council’s plan to accommodate individuals whose primary language is not English). Interpreters will be made available when necessary at public events (includes sign language interpreters).
- Amplification systems will be used at public events, whenever possible.
- Public notices contain statements in languages other than English to encourage participation and provide instruction on requesting an interpreter at a public event.

### **Strategies**

This plan identifies engagement strategies that reflect commonly used practices in regional planning efforts, as well as communications and engagement practices commonly used by the Metropolitan Council and other government agencies and organizations in the Twin Cities region.

Engagement strategies should embody two overriding principles: engagement is about building long-term, lasting relationships, and it’s important to be present in and connected to communities in order to build long-term relationships. This means participating in other community conversations, events, and activities, even when the Council might not have a specific role in an event or conversation.

A specific engagement plan will be created for each Council planning effort to detail activities, timelines, outcomes, and evaluation processes for engagement opportunities. These activities will be planned collaboratively with stakeholders and will be widely promoted.

### **General strategies for outreach**

- Leverage partnerships and feedback from *Thrive MSP 2040* to guide policy development.
- Collaborate directly with the public and traditionally underrepresented populations (people of color, immigrants, low-income populations, people with disabilities, the elderly, youth), as well as community advocates, and partners in regional public engagement. Collaboratively set goals and outcomes for engagement efforts.
- Appoint policymaker and technical groups to advise the updates to Council policy plans, as well as other major Council initiatives, both at the policy level and in operational divisions, as appropriate (refer to the engagement guidance in the table below). When necessary, include business and community interests on these advisory boards or create specific groups to address the needs and engage these interests. These boards should have a specific role in directing the activity they are advising, and setting meeting agendas. Each meeting agenda should include a progress report on the project.
- Create opportunities for the general public to engage in similar conversations and decision-making as advisory groups. Whenever possible, create opportunities for all these stakeholders to interact and discuss relevant issues together to advise the process and decision-making.
- Coordinate with Metropolitan Council and community-based engagement efforts in cities, counties, and other areas on related topics and major initiatives, to the extent possible. Ongoing studies should include engagement efforts that will eventually relate to Council policy and systems plans.



- Sponsor periodic listening sessions and workshops to feature policies, key topics, and other content from Council planning efforts.
- Use online interactive spaces, including social media platforms, to gather feedback and foster discussion about Council planning activities and policy plans content.
- Plan informal activities to provide members of the community with information and an opportunity to inform and influence planning processes. Informal activities would include reaching out to bus and transit riders, being present at community events, and coordinating with other transportation-related surveys.

### **Communications strategies**

- Assess desired methods for updating audiences and constituencies specifically affected by an effort. Build this regular reporting into the communications and outreach plan for each effort.
- Develop and implement a promotional campaign (includes web pages, social media content, news releases, newsletter articles, background for presentations, working with partners to disseminate content).
  - Create editorial calendar to highlight topics in various Council products – including traditional and social media.
  - Develop and host content for the Metropolitan Council web site
  - Create content on the Council’s website to describe the planning efforts and key policy topics. Make it prominent on the site. Update content regularly via editorial calendar. Highlight aspects that are timely.
  - Use the Council’s web newsletter to highlight content and illustrate concepts and discussion, and summarize progress and feedback.
- Create topic for electronic mailing system that stakeholders and the public can sign up for or be subscribed to.
- Work with project staff to assign a point of contact for questions from the public and stakeholders. Communicate updates periodically through the Council’s website, newsletters, etc.
- Send updates and summaries regularly to local government agencies and external groups, as necessary.

### **Additional opportunities for ongoing public engagement in planning**

#### **Advisory Bodies**

The Council’s advisory bodies provide key opportunities for stakeholder participation. They allow members, representing a cross-section of key stakeholder groups in the region, to help shape regional transportation plans and policies. The Council appoints members of the general public, local elected officials, professionals with technical knowledge and experience, or representatives of statute-identified groups, according to the responsibilities of particular advisory bodies. Advisory bodies may conduct studies, recommend action to the Council’s standing committees, and/or provide expert advice. For more information about meetings of these groups, visit [www.metrocouncil.org](http://www.metrocouncil.org).

#### ***Transportation***

- **Transportation Advisory Board (TAB):** Advises the Council on transportation matters involving the regional highway, public transit and airport systems; helps the Council, MnDOT, counties and cities carry out transportation planning and programming for the region as designated in state and federal laws; participates in drafting the Transportation Policy Plan, and reviews and adopts the region’s three-year Transportation Improvement Program. Its 33 members include 10 municipal elected officials; seven county commissioners; four state and regional agency representatives (MnDOT, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Metropolitan Airports Commission, Metropolitan Council); eight citizen representatives; and four transportation mode representatives (one represents freight providers, two represent transit providers, and one represents non-motorized transportation users of bicycle and pedestrian facilities).
- **Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee (TAAC):** The TAAC advises the Metropolitan Council on short- and long-range management plans and policies for special transportation services. Composed of transit riders and advocates for the disability community, it includes two Senior Federation representatives, two from the Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, and one American Association of Retired Persons representative.
- **Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TAC):** provides expert advice about plans and programs to the TAB. It includes staff from the Council including Metro Transit; representatives from suburban transit providers; MnDOT; Metropolitan Airports Commission; Minnesota Pollution Control Agency; the Federal Highway Administration; the seven counties; the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul; and eight representatives from the Association of Metropolitan Municipalities. Members of the TAC may also serve on one or more subcommittees. One subset, the Funding and Programming subcommittee, includes representatives from the state Department of Natural Resources and state Bicycle Advisory Committee.

### ***Land Use***

The Council's Land Use Advisory Committee (LUAC) provides advice and assistance to the Council in the areas of land use and comprehensive planning, and in matters of metropolitan significance. It’s 17 members include 16 members appointed to geographic districts that reflect the same area as the Metropolitan Council members. It is chaired by a Metropolitan Council member, as appointed by the Council chair. At least half the members must be elected officials.

### ***Water Supply***

The Metropolitan Area Water Supply Advisory Committee provides advice and assistance to the Council in its water supply planning activities. Created by the Minnesota Legislature, the committee plays a lead role in developing the Metropolitan Area Master Water Supply Plan and continues to guide its implementation. The Committee meets regularly as needed to discuss updates on the plan implementation and discuss any other relevant water supply topics.

### ***Parks and Open Space***

The Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission (MPOSC) helps the Council develop a long-range plan and an acquisition and development program that includes funding priorities for regional parks. MPOSC works in coordination with ten regional park implementing agencies (counties, cities and special park districts). The

commission has eight members, reflecting districts that combine two Metropolitan Council districts into one. A chair is appointed at-large.

### Ongoing Metropolitan Council Engagement and Technical Support

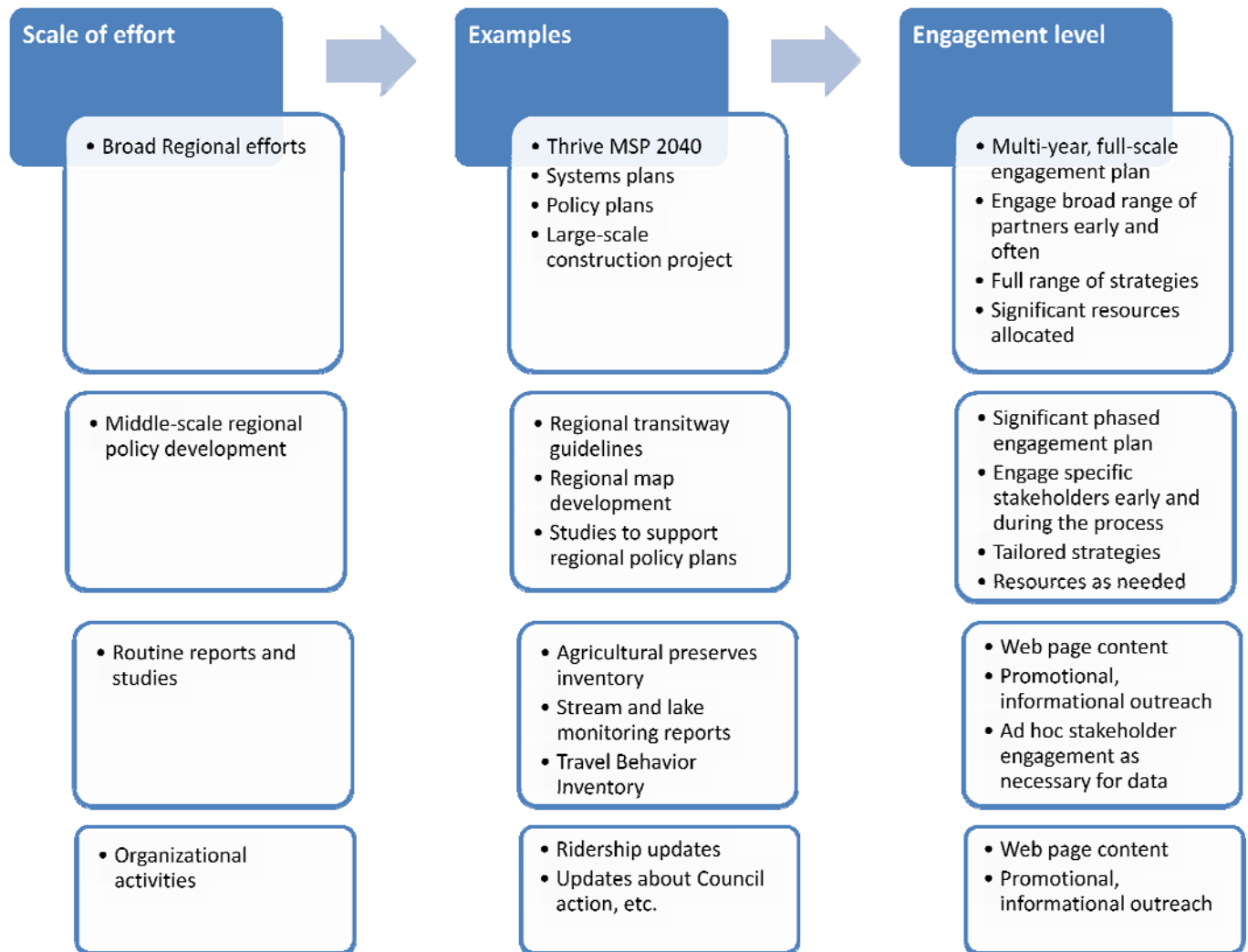
- **Local Government Meetings:** Council members and staff may attend city, county or township meetings to inform local officials about Council activities, listen to local concerns, or solicit participation in public activities.
- **Staff Assistance:** To assist local governments with land use, facilities and service planning related to regional issues and Council activities, the Council provides designated staff experts and periodic technical assistance opportunities to local governments. Council Sector Representatives act as first contacts for assigned communities and meet regularly with local officials and staff members. Staff assistance develops relationships with local governments throughout the region, enhancing the Council’s ability to identify and address local issues in its regional decisions.
- **Formal Public Meetings:** The Council accepts testimony from stakeholders and the general public in multiple formats, including testimony, postal mail, email, voice mail, fax, and on forms provided for written or website comments. The following considerations will be made when planning public events:
  - Locations easily accessed by transit riders and Metro Mobility clients
  - Holding meetings in different areas of the region
  - Holding meetings at nontraditional locations such as schools, religious facilities or cultural centers
  - Partnering with community or service organizations to promote/host participation events
  - Holding meetings outside of traditional business hours
  - Holding multiple meetings on different days of the week and/or at different times of the day
  - Avoiding potential conflicts with participation opportunities hosted by other units of government in the region
- **Council Business and Committee Meetings** – are always open to the public as required by Minnesota’s Open Meeting Law and allow the Council’s stakeholders to provide public comments and observe the way it conducts its business. Business and committee meetings are listed in the Council’s master calendar, posted online and publicized through Metro Meetings. They typically are held at Council headquarters, located at 390 Robert Street North, St. Paul, MN 55101 or Metro Transit headquarters, 560 Sixth Avenue North, Minneapolis, MN 55411. Both buildings are ADA-compliant and accessible via several major transit routes.
- **Public Hearings** – provide formal public input on issues and business of regional interest. In accordance with state law, the Council adds public hearings for matters that do not pertain to Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Updates to its master calendar and publishes, at least 30 days prior to the meeting, paid legal notices in local newspapers. The Council may also issue news releases and highlight hearings on its homepage to promote participation at public hearings and meetings. Public hearing notices will include the following information:

- Name of activity/type of event
  - Sponsoring organization
  - Subject of meeting
  - Action to be taken and by whom
  - Day, date, time and location of meeting
  - Brief summary of the proposed action or plan and geographic scope
  - Start and end dates for public comments
  - Where to obtain copies of the plan or materials, and how to provide formal comments
  - A designated contact for more information (name, telephone, email, TTY)
  - Offer to provide accommodations for people whose primary language is not English (published in the native languages for identified subject threshold groups)
  - Offer to provide accommodations for people with disabilities
- **Council Newsletters** – The Council’s Communications team includes professional editors, writers and designers who are available to assist program staff developing public engagement materials in English and other languages, as appropriate. The Communications Department publishes periodical updates and distributes an extensive array of fact sheets, policy summaries, brochures, audio-visual materials and topical print and electronic publications. The Council distributes several periodicals to stakeholders and interested parties. Many of these newsletters are available electronically or by subscription. For more information and to subscribe, visit [www.metrocouncil.org](http://www.metrocouncil.org) or contact the Public Information staff at 651-602-1400 or [public.info@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:public.info@metc.state.mn.us).
  - **Council Website** – The Council also uses its ADA-compliant website ([www.metrocouncil.org](http://www.metrocouncil.org)) to provide information about public engagement opportunities, to publish information about the different studies and activities that support and shape Council planning efforts, and to summarize and publish comments and feedback from the public and community stakeholders.
  - **Public comment summaries** – The Council values feedback and comments from the public, local officials, and community leaders to help shape regional decisions. To inform participants how their ideas, comments and suggestions influence key regional decisions, the Council considers summaries of public comments at regular business meetings. The Council’s designated project managers prepare and present the summaries following each major initiative or project engagement process, and provide copies to the Communications Department for publication on the Council’s ADA-compliant website.
  - **Information services** – The Council’s public information staff, library, and outreach team provide assistance to the public, community leaders, and local government officials. Council publications are available on its website at [www.metrocouncil.org](http://www.metrocouncil.org), or in person at Metropolitan Council offices. Regional reports, maps, and data are also available through the Council’s library. For more information, contact the Council’s public information staff:
    - Public Comment Line: 651-602-1500
    - TTY: 651-291-0904
    - Email: [public.info@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:public.info@metc.state.mn.us)
    - Address: 390 Robert Street North, St. Paul, MN 55101

- Library: 651-602-1310
- Outreach Team: 651-602-1545 or info@metc.state.mn.us

**Recommended Engagement Levels**

The process flowchart below identifies recommended engagement levels for different types of Council planning and implementation activities. This information is intended to be a guideline for decision-making, but not an exhaustive list. In addition, there may be issues that the Council chooses to address more significantly on an ad-hoc basis. As noted above, each planning effort should have an identified engagement plan, created in consultation with the Communications department whenever possible.



**Roles**

The Council’s Director of Communications (651-602-1518) and Outreach Team Manager (651-602-1545) are responsible for managing this Public Engagement Plan and will respond to inquiries regarding Council public engagement activities and implementation of this engagement plan. The Council’s Regional Administrator will review any issues that remain if cooperative efforts between the Communications Department and program staff responsible for the subject participation processes have not resolved the issues.

## Measuring Success

At the beginning of each project-related planning effort, Council staff will perform an assessment of groups that will be directly affected or may have an interest. For Council-wide planning efforts, that will always include a broad array of regional stakeholders. Audience assessments will specifically address groups that are historically underrepresented in planning efforts.

Following this initial assessment, staff will consult with community organizations, and other stakeholders to confirm the audience needs and to begin planning for engagement related to the effort. This will include discussion about goals for engagement and desired outcomes.

Once goals have been established, a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures will be used to evaluate the success of the public engagement activities. Evaluations will take place on an ongoing basis throughout the project. Periodic evaluations will be followed by mid-project assessment to assure strategies will result in expected outcomes and staff will make necessary adjustments.

At the conclusion of a project, staff will first survey participants to assess the following qualitative elements:

- Were the methods and structure of the outreach effort engaging?
- Did they feel their time and opinions were valued?
- Did they understand the goal of the outreach effort and their role?
- Was their contribution reflected in the final product?
- Would they participate in another Council outreach activity?
- Did they hear regular updates about progress on the project?
- Their opinions regarding the overall quality of their experience with the Council and the engagement effort.

Staff will also call together partner agencies for a meeting to debrief on the outreach efforts, including what worked, what didn't, lessons learned and what could be improved for future efforts. In addition, staff will survey partners who were involved in setting goals and expectations for the effort to assess whether expected outcomes were achieved.

A number of quantitative measures will also be collected:

- Number of people participating in public engagement activities
- Number and diversity of organizations participating in planning efforts
- Number of individuals who participate in related discussions on the Council's website, social media platforms, and online information-gathering sites
- Percentage of county, city and township governments whose staff and/or policymakers participated in planning efforts
- Earned media related to planning efforts (and comparisons, as available)

In addition, on an ongoing basis, outreach and engagement staff will work with residents of the region and representatives from different segments of the broader Twin Cities community to assess needs and measure the level of engagement in Council operations. This may include, but is not limited to, convening focus groups, conducting surveys, convening independent review boards, and one-on-one interviews. These assessments will

be presented to the full Metropolitan Council during quarterly outreach and engagement updates that are established to measure progress toward Council engagement goals.

## Guidance for Local Communities

This Public Engagement Plan provides guidance for engagement on Metropolitan Council efforts, as well as collaborative efforts with federal, state, and local organizations. The Council's Outreach unit, within the Communications Department, will also be tracking best practices and highlighting community engagement work that supports the principles in this plan and expands the region's understanding of successful community engagement.

As identified in *Thrive MSP 2040*, the Council will provide technical assistance and information resources to support local governments in advancing regional outcomes and addressing our region's complex challenges. Specifically, the Council is poised to support local governments in community engagement efforts related to its comprehensive planning processes, as well as any other community efforts that affect the broader community and would benefit from engagement of the broader community.

When planning for engagement efforts, local governments should create an inclusive list of all aspects of the community that may be affected or have a role in fulfilling the goals of the project. At the beginning of this process, local governments should engage members of affected groups and collaborate on planning engagement efforts that will facilitate broad involvement and result in better, more equitable outcomes.

Local governments should also identify key staff resources to serve as points of contact for the public, as well as funds to support creating an appropriate environment for engagement. People need to feel welcome, that their participation is valued, and that their time is respected in order to engage fully.

In addition, as noted earlier in this plan, engagement efforts should follow these principles:

- *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.

## Best Practices for Engagement

The principles, examples, and information included in this Public Engagement Plan are the result of collaboration and shared learning with partners both within the Twin Cities region and from the good work of communities around the country. Specifically, the work of the Corridors of Opportunity effort, and the work supported by grants from the Community Engagement Team showed innovation and commitment to engaging all communities, but particularly those historically under-represented and under-resourced in the region. This work also helped build leadership capacity in communities throughout our region.

The Council will maintain a webpage highlighting best practices for engagement, and providing links to key information and resources on engagement. This will be a growing, living resource.

## Engagement Planning Worksheet

This worksheet should be used by planning and program staff to assist in assessing your process, purpose, audiences, potential barriers, impacts and strategies to inform the overall approach to creating an engagement plan for your project. Fill out the worksheet as completely as you can. You'll note several places, identified with an asterisk (\*) where it will be appropriate to consult with Council outreach staff prior to finalizing any engagement plans. Once you have completed this worksheet, you should contact the outreach staff to finalize your outreach plan and identify specific way to achieve your engagement outcomes and reach the appropriate audiences. Outreach staff will also be able to help you identify existing community partnerships that may benefit your effort.

### 1. Project Name and Objective(s)

*Briefly describe your project and what the project will accomplish. Include a timeline and any other process-related information that may affect engagement decisions. In your timeline, indicate opportunities to conduct mid-project evaluations of engagement efforts.*

### 2. What is the purpose of engagement on your project? What engagement goals does your project hope to achieve?\*



**3. Who will specifically be affected by your project (both potential positive and negative impacts)? Specify how they will be affected.**

*Examples include: cities, counties, neighborhoods, specific populations. Use data when available to identify populations affected.*

**4. Will your project directly or indirectly address any of the following groups or regional issues?**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communities of color                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Other racial/ethnic groups                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> People with disabilities                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Institutional racism or other racial disparity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> People who speak a language other than English |   |

Describe specifically how:

**5. What do you know about public and stakeholder perspectives on the issues involving this project? What information will they need? How can we otherwise address any concerns?\***

**6. What specific outcomes are anticipated with this project? What decisions will result from this project?**

**7. How can stakeholders be involved in the decision-making process?**

**8. Are there specific opportunities with this project to promote inclusion, reduce disparities, or otherwise address equity considerations?\***

**9. Are there specific opportunities with this project to build leadership capacity in the community?\***

**10. What resources will you need for engagement?\***

- Internal project management:
- Lead outreach/engagement staffer:
- Other staff:
- Community resources:
- Funding:

**11. Will you be using contracted services for this project? Are there opportunities to support local or community-based professionals or organizations to do any work on this project?**

**12. As part of the planning process, staff will likely meet with external stakeholders to discuss goals for engagement. Do you have recommended community stakeholders we should interview or meet with?**