



*Let's
Connect Cw*
YOUR IDEAS. OUR FUTURE.

Township of Centre Wellington

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
CHARTER AND STRATEGY**

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Territorial Acknowledgement

The lands we know today as the Township of Centre Wellington have been home to Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial. We acknowledge that we are on the treaty lands and traditional territory of the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee.

With increasing encroachment by non-Indigenous settlers in the Township of Centre Wellington, the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee could not continue their traditional lifestyle and settled in their villages along the Credit River and in the Grand River Valley. These Indigenous nations uphold their Treaty Rights within our jurisdiction.

Today, the Township of Centre Wellington remains home to Indigenous Peoples from across Turtle Island. We are grateful to have the opportunity to share and respect Mother Earth and are committed to building constructive and cooperative relationships with Indigenous Peoples.

A Message to Our Community

In 2025, we connected with **community** members to learn from their experiences and hear their ideas about what meaningful engagement looks like. This input, along with research on other Canadian municipalities' practices and international engagement standards from the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), was used to inform the Township's first **Community Engagement** Charter and Strategy. The Community Engagement Charter is our promise for how we will involve our community on matters that affect their lives, outlining the vision, guiding principles, and expectations for how we engage. We greatly value all contributions and are committed to continuing to listen to our community's feedback and improve how we engage moving forward.

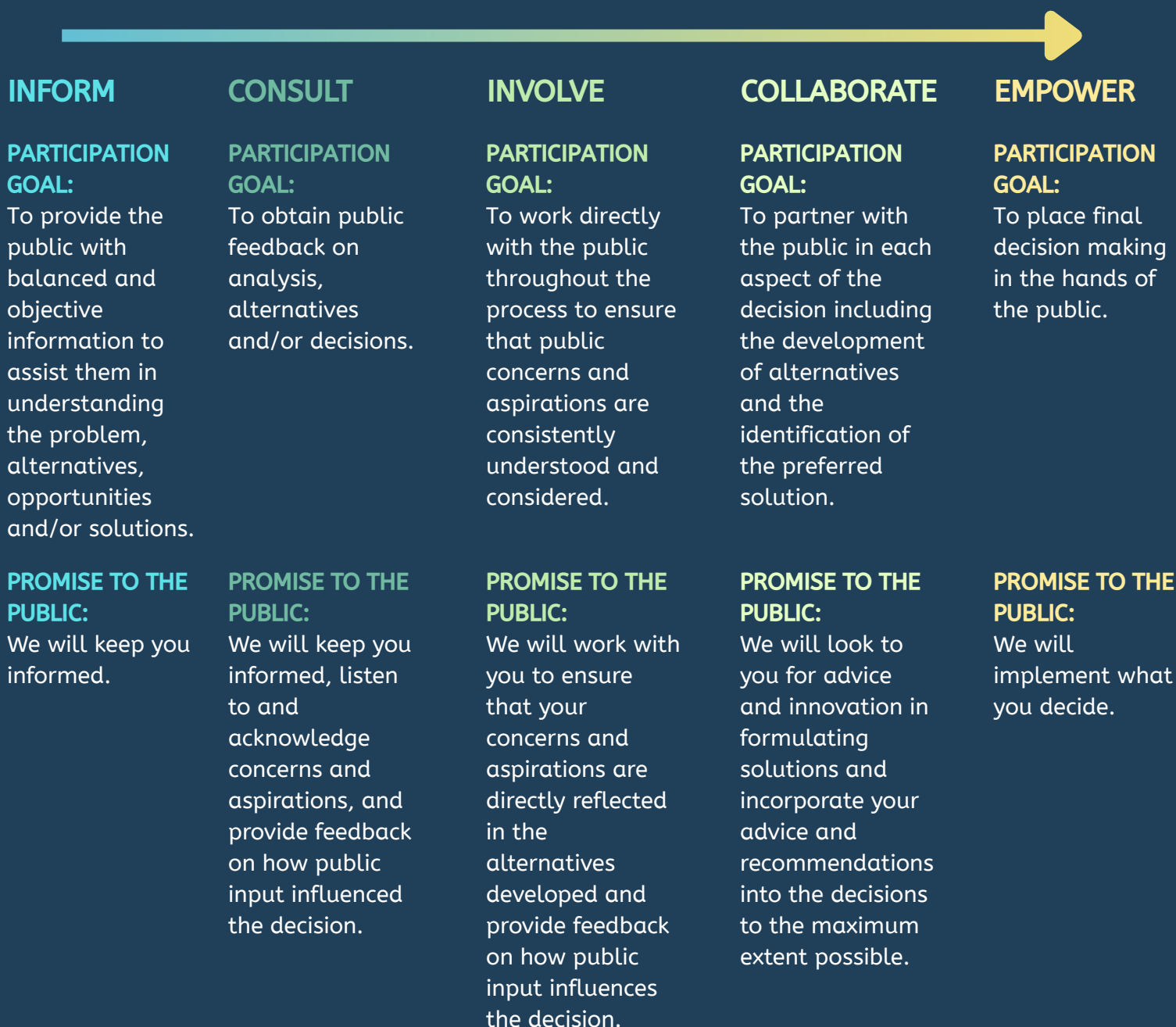
This document will continue to evolve as our practice of Community Engagement grows. It will be reviewed and updated regularly.

INTRODUCTION

What is Community Engagement?

Community Engagement is the practice of working with our community in meaningful and inclusive ways to shape important Township decisions, actions or change.

To help guide our approach, the Township uses the **International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation***. The Spectrum recognizes that not every project - or every part of a project - requires the same depth or level of engagement.



**Content depicted in this chart is taken directly from the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation | IAP2 International Federation 2018. All rights reserved. 20181112_v1*

**The IAP2 Spectrum was originally developed almost 30 years ago. It is currently undergoing a review to match the evolving engagement landscape. Once updated, this new Spectrum will be considered for incorporation into our Community Engagement Charter.*

How the Community Engagement Charter and Strategy Work Together

The Community Engagement Charter and the Strategy work together to strengthen how the Township engages with the community. The Community Engagement Charter is our promise for how we will involve our community on issues that affect their lives, outlining the vision and expectations for how we engage. The Community Engagement Strategy outlines how we turn our commitment of the Community Engagement Charter, into action. It sets out clear goals and principles to work from and a consistent, effective and coordinated approach for the Township to engage with the community.

Our Community Engagement Charter and Community Engagement Strategy define our community engagement practices.

This work goes beyond any single **project** - it's about:



BUILDING LASTING TRUST



IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY



CREATING BETTER WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER

About the Language in This Document

Throughout this document you will see certain words in **bold**. These are important terms we often use and you can find their meanings in the glossary at the end of this document.

When we say **Township** we mean the local municipal government that provides a variety of services, programs and infrastructure in the Township of Centre Wellington. When we use the word “**we**” in this document, we mean the Township.

When we say **community** we mean the people who live, work and play in the Township of Centre Wellington that care about and are affected by what happens here. This includes individuals, groups, organizations and those with shared interests, values, religion, cultures or identities. We also recognize that individuals hold multiple, overlapping identities—such as race, class, gender, and ability—and that these intersections shape their unique experiences, needs, and level of access to opportunities and services within the Township.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CHARTER

Our Community Engagement Vision

Centre Wellington is a community where open dialogue, respectful participation, and inclusive engagement help inform local decisions and strengthen the connection between community and local government.

When We Will Engage and When We May Not

Community engagement is most meaningful when there is a genuine opportunity for the community to influence changes. The Township will engage when input can inform or shape outcomes and when participation adds value to both the community and the **decision-making** process.

Engagement must always be authentic, purposeful, and respectful of the community's time and the Township's responsibilities. Not every decision requires engagement - some may be administrative, time-sensitive, or already determined by legislation, policy, or safety needs.

Engagement will be considered when:

- A Project, policy, program, or service may impact the community;
- Decisions or directions have not yet been made and there is opportunity for community influence;
- A new initiative is being developed, or an existing one is being evaluated or updated;
- Engagement is legally required, or Council requests it; and/or,
- The community expresses interest or requests involvement.

Engagement may not occur when:

- A decision has already been made or cannot be changed;
- The issue is administrative or technical in nature, with no community impact;
- The Township's intent is to inform or educate when the community can't change the outcome;
- The situation is time sensitive and involves an emergency or urgent public safety matter; and/or,
- The Township cannot meet engagement commitments (e.g., due to time, resource, or legislative constraints).

In circumstances where engagement is not possible or appropriate, we will communicate the decision to the community to uphold our commitment to transparency and **equity**.



Community's Role in Decision-Making

You can expect to contribute in different ways depending on the project, its stage, and the decisions being made. Each engagement process is unique and will also reflect the level of community interest and influence.

We will carefully consider what **level(s) of influence** on the IAP2 Spectrum are most appropriate for each project and we will clearly communicate this. No matter the level, our goal is to create genuine opportunities for participation and to continually explore new and effective ways to engage with our community.

We will consider greater involvement and collaborative processes when there are significant changes or impacts in the community, especially for those who have faced historic or ongoing marginalization, discrimination or oppression. This is also true when there is an imbalance of power and fairness that keeps communities from being part of decisions and leadership.

Connection to Decision-Making

Community engagement is one of several important inputs in the Township's decision-making process. Community perspectives are considered alongside other factors such as technical expertise, financial resources, legislative requirements, and alignment with existing plans and policies.

In line with our principle of transparency, we will report back to show how community input influenced outcomes - demonstrating accountability, building trust, and strengthening future engagement efforts.



Our Commitment to Equity

The Township is committed to embedding the principles of **diversity**, equity and **inclusion** into our work, services, and policies to create a community where every resident feels valued, respected, and included. To achieve this in our engagement practice, we have committed in our Community Engagement Charter to be equitable and inclusive.



What does this mean?

Inclusion in engagement means intentionally involving people who reflect different demographics, perspectives and lived experiences of the community who may be impacted by an issue. Inclusive engagements are welcoming, foster belonging and ensure everyone is respected and fully able to participate. However, inclusion alone does not guarantee equal influence on decisions due to existing inequities in power, resources and privilege within engagement processes and broader systems.

Equity recognizes that not everyone starts from the same place. Factors like where and when engagement happens, **systemic barriers** like poverty, historic and ongoing marginalization, language **barriers** or cultural norms and **discriminatory practices** can make it harder for some people to participate. We also recognize that even when people are engaged, their voices may not influence outcomes equally, as differences in power and privilege affect both how people participate and how their contributions influence the outcomes. We will work to ensure that everyone can equally participate in engagement opportunities and influence outcomes. This means distributing opportunities and resources to address historical and ongoing barriers facing **marginalized** and underrepresented groups.



How do we do this?

Building more equitable communities takes ongoing effort—not just one engagement process or one decision. To support this, we apply an **equity lens** throughout our community engagement practice. An equity lens is a series of important questions we ask ourselves. It helps us pause, reflect and challenge our usual ways of thinking and working so we can create fairer processes and outcomes. This lens is applied at every step of our engagement framework to ensure we design inclusive and equitable engagements and outcomes that are reflective of our **diverse** communities and perspectives; questions are embedded throughout our staff toolkit to support this.



Roles, Responsibilities and Commitments

Effective community engagement depends on shared commitment and collaboration among all participants. The following outlines the key roles and responsibilities that support meaningful and transparent engagement.



TOWNSHIP STAFF

Township staff, consultants, and external organizations leading engagement on behalf of the Township, play a key role in making community engagement successful through their ongoing support, collaboration, and connection with the community.

Township staff will:

- Fulfill the commitments of the Community Engagement Strategy.
- Evaluate the need for engagement and the level of community influence on projects to determine if, when, and how engagement should occur.
- Coordinate engagement efforts to respect the community's time, interests, and availability.
- Engage as early as possible, tailoring engagement to fit each project.
- Build new relationships and strengthen existing ones within the community.
- Identify and remove barriers to equitable participation.
- Engage community members with respect.
- Provide decision-makers with engagement data and insights that accurately reflect community feedback to support informed decision-making.
- Report back on how engagement has shaped decisions and outcomes, highlighting the voices of those most impacted and often underrepresented.
- Evaluate, learn from, and continuously improve the quality of our engagement practices.



THE COMMUNITY

Successful community engagement relies on the community's active involvement and constructive participation in shaping Township decisions and initiatives.

The community will:

- Actively participate in engagement opportunities.
- Share ideas, experiences and perspectives.
- Engage respectfully and openly, listen, consider and be open to different views.
- Recognize and understand the many different inputs and factors being considered such as intergovernmental, social and cultural, technical, financial, and environmental needs.
- Keep informed, follow project updates and encourage others to engage.
- Let us know if someone experiences any barriers to participation that have not been addressed.
- Tell us how we are doing and how we can improve.



COUNCIL

The support of Council, as key leaders in the Township of Centre Wellington, is essential to the success of community engagement efforts.

Council will:

- Promote engagement opportunities.
- Listen and learn at engagement events.
- Empower Township staff to determine if, when and how to engage the community based on best practices and project goals.
- Recognize community input as a valuable resource for decision-making.
- Consider input from diverse community members.
- Explain decisions and how community engagement and other factors influenced the decision-making.

A Note About Council Advisory Committees

Council **Advisory Committees** provide valuable advice and community perspectives to help shape Township projects. As one potential engagement method, determining the role and level of influence of Council Advisory Committees for a project happens early in the engagement process.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Community Engagement Strategy is how we turn our commitment of meaningful engagement into action. It sets out a clear, consistent and coordinated approach for us to engage with our community. It's about building trust, being more inclusive and making sure everyone has an opportunity to help shape Centre Wellington's future.



How We Will Achieve These Goals and Know If We Are Successful

Outlined in each goal (Pages 9-11) are the principles and approaches to guide how we will work to achieve each of these goals, and the actions we can measure to evaluate our success.





EQUITABLE, INCLUSIVE AND BARRIER-FREE ENGAGEMENT



Equitable Participation

We will actively seek out and include those affected by a project or decision, and design engagements to include those who are often marginalized or missing to ensure diverse people, perspectives and ideas are welcomed and considered in fair and responsive outcomes

Measures of Success for “Equitable Participation”

- Barriers to participation are identified and addressed where possible.
- Diverse outreach and engagement opportunities and tailored to reach underrepresented groups.
- Participants feel safe, welcomed and respected.
- Participation reflects a broad cross-section of the community, including diverse demographics, perspectives and lived experience.
- Feedback from underrepresented groups is integrated into decision-making.
- Decision-makers weigh data, including public input, based on impact and desired outcomes and share this publicly.
- Resources and opportunities are distributed to address historical and ongoing barriers to participation.

Measures of Success for “Accessible”

- Engagement opportunities are communicated in a variety of ways to reach those most affected or invited to participate.
- Information is clear, and builds understanding about the project.
- A variety of online and in-person engagement methods are used.
- Participants feel it was easy and convenient to participate.
- Participants feel they had meaningful opportunities to provide their input.



Accessible

We will share clear, timely information so everyone knows when, where, why and how to get involved. We will engage early and often, offering different ways for people to participate in whatever way works best for them.





BUILD TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY

Measures of Success for “Transparent”

- Communication about the purpose of engagement, ways to participate, timelines and background information is shared clearly and in advance with all those affected or invited to participate.
- Descriptions of decision-making criteria are provided for each engagement project.
- The community understands what they can influence.
- Community input is analyzed and summarized with a direct link to the decision or change.
- **What We Heard Reports** are made public for each engagement project.

Measures of Success for “Accountable”

- Community engagement objectives and level of participation and input are identified.
- Community engagement plans are developed and approved.
- Sufficient budget and resources are allocated to complete meaningful and effective engagement.
- Decisions are clearly communicated in a variety of ways, explaining how community input was considered, what could or could not be accomplished and why.
- Participants understand how their input was used.

Measures of Success for “Relational”

- Non-digital outreach activities are used to invite people to participate.
- Conflict is assessed and strategies are used to constructively engage.
- The community is invited to exchange ideas, help problem solve, ask questions and actively participate in conversations with others to deepen understanding of issues and impacts.
- Participants feel heard, valued and respected.
- Participants believe their input will be considered.
- Relationships are built, maintained and/or strengthened.



Transparent

We will make commitments and clearly communicate how community input will be used. We will openly share information about the issue, the decision-making process and how decisions will be made.



Accountable

We will follow through on our commitments and decisions by clearly explaining how and why they were made, and by reporting back to the community to demonstrate transparency and accountability.



Relational

We will put people first, create connections, strengthen relationships, build community, acknowledge challenges and tensions, and encourage open and positive dialogue.





CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT



Evaluate

We will evaluate, learn and adapt our practice over time to improve engagement processes, strengthen trust and ensure we meet our community's evolving needs. We will strengthen what works well and make improvements where needed.

Measures of Success for "Evaluate"

- Each engagement process is evaluated against our guiding principles.
- The community is included in evaluating success.
- Achievements are shared and celebrated with the community.
- Annual corporate engagement reports are shared publicly.
- Best practice research in community engagement informs updates to our practice.



Resource Commitment

We will ensure that adequate resources, including dedicated staff time, sufficient budget, and necessary training/tools are allocated to community engagement, to sustainably meet our commitments to quality engagement.

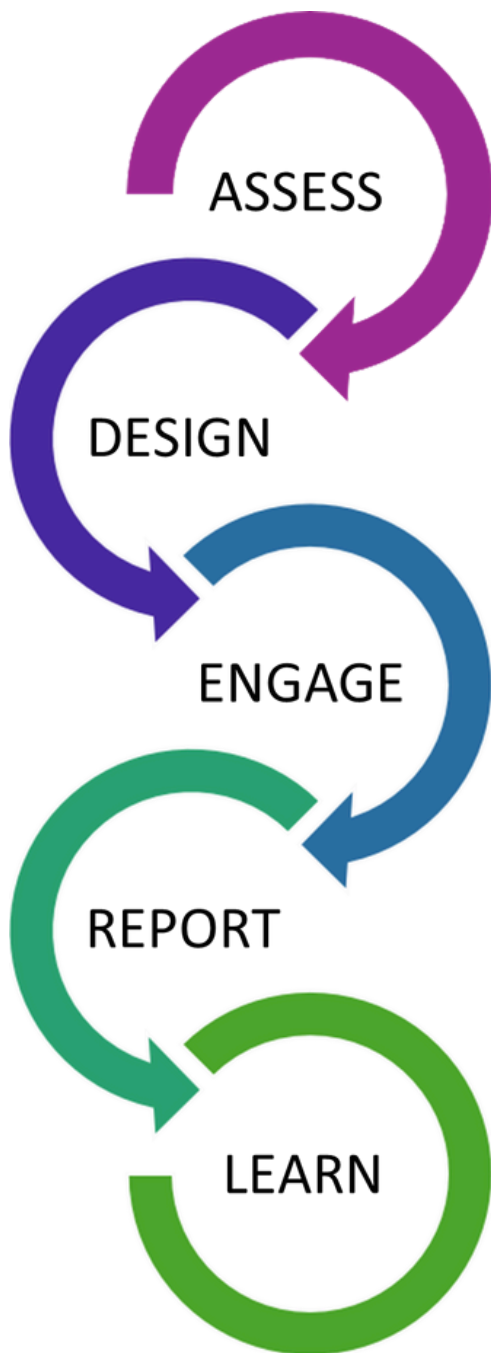
Measures of Success for "Resource Commitment"

- Sufficient staff, time and budget are allocated for engagement across the organization.
- Staff receive the necessary training and learning opportunities.
- Staff receive the necessary resources and tools.



OUR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Our community engagement framework outlines steps to ensure engagement is meaningful, consistent, inclusive and equitable for each project. While the framework provides structure, it is not meant to be rigid. Its flexibility allows us to adapt to each project's unique context and the needs of those affected, supporting the best possible outcomes.



ASSESS: Assessing the need for and scope of engagement identifies genuine opportunities, sets clear expectations about why we're engaging, and defines the decisions and limits of community influence.



DESIGN: This step focuses on designing who we'll engage with, what we hope to achieve, when we'll engage and how we will do this.



ENGAGE: Here we promote and invite people to participate, host and gather input, monitor and adjust if needed.



REPORT: Once all input is received, we review and make meaning, evaluate the process and report back what was heard.



LEARN: Here we close the loop and communicate the outcomes and decisions, how input was considered, evaluate the final outcomes and reflect and share lessons learned.



GLOSSARY

Accessible engagement means deliberately addressing barriers preventing all those impacted by an issue to participate in the process.

Advisory Committee is a group of community members representing specific demographics, perspectives or lived experiences who provide advice and recommendations to Township Council.

Barriers are physical, social, economic or cultural obstacles that limit or prevent people from participating in engagement. See also: Systemic Barriers

Community means the people who live, work, play or spend time in Centre Wellington. It includes anyone who cares about or is affected by Township decisions or change.

Community Engagement is the practice of working with a community in meaningful and inclusive ways to shape important Township decisions, actions or change.

Decision-Making in community engagement is how the Township considers community input, along with other factors, to make decisions that affect the community.

Discriminatory Practices are ongoing discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, citizenship status, or other lived experiences. These can be overt or unconscious biases built into processes.

Diverse/Diversity refers to the presence of differences in our community, including race, culture, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, ability, age, socio-economic background, spiritual beliefs, citizenship and immigration status, and more. It also includes differences in attitudes, perspectives and lived experiences.

Equity in engagement means giving people what they need and creating fair opportunities for everyone—particularly those most affected or historically excluded—to participate fully, be heard and help shape outcomes.

Equity lens is a tool to help plan and implement equitable, inclusive and accessible community engagement processes. It involves asking critical questions to ensure diverse voices, particularly those from marginalized and underrepresented groups, are sought, heard and considered, increasing the public's impact on the outcomes.

Inclusion in engagement means proactively seeking and empowering participation from a diversity of community members, especially those who are most impacted or affected by an issue or outcomes, and creating engagements where everyone feels respected, accepted and are fully able to participate.

Level(s) of Influence refers to the degree to which the community can influence decisions and outcomes in a community engagement process.

Marginalized refers to groups of people under-represented in decision-making due to historical and ongoing systemic barriers that are designed to exclude. Examples include, but are not limited to, Indigenous Peoples, people of colour, women, gender non-binary individuals, LGBTQ2S+ individuals, people with disabilities, youth, seniors, immigrants and refugees, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and levels of education. Other terms often used include: under-represented, historically excluded, under-served.

Participation involves taking part in engagement activities (in-person or online) by sharing ideas and giving feedback to help shape decisions or change.

Project is an initiative or activity the Township undertakes that may or may not require community engagement.

Systemic barriers, such as colonialism, racism, sexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and heterosexism, are obstacles built into existing policies, practices, or structures that make it harder for marginalized or under-represented groups to participate in community engagement processes. Because these are deeply rooted in how systems operate, identifying and removing them requires intentional and sustained action.

What We Heard Report is a document to summarize and communicate all the feedback, input and perspectives gathered from community engagement on a specific project or initiative.



For More Information

1 MacDonald Square
Elora, ON N0B 1S0

519-846-9691
1-800-750-5023

www.centrewellington.ca

Accessible formats available upon request

The Township gratefully acknowledges Topent Ltd. and their team for their expertise, collaboration, and valuable support in creating our first Community Engagement Charter and Strategy.

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