

2023-2024 Race, Equity & Inclusion Working Group

Updated as of 11/30/2023

The following principles of meaningful community engagement were identified by the REI Working Group at its October 2023 meeting. Working Group members were invited to review after the meeting and make further edits or recommendations. *Principles in blue were added after the October Working Group meeting.*

Meaningful Community Engagement:

- Acknowledges history of harm/past experiences with government
- Builds on a foundation of trust/reciprocity with community
- Gets on the ground to understand the needs of the community
- Recognizes a community is not homogenous, nor are the needs, challenges, or opportunities
- Demonstrates impact or returns to the community to show their impact
- Is clear on the ask/what it is you seek to engage the community
- Is iterative and open to evolving over time
- Looks for gaps, looks for who is not at the table, and seeks to create a bridge
- Invests in the long run
- Acknowledges and addresses structural barriers and mitigates for those
- Considers and goes after resource approaches that support all of the above
- Seeks to share and transfer power over time
- Fosters transparency and authenticity
- Ensures that the intended Community is engaged
- Develop cultural competency skills and cultivate humility*
- Support capacity building to engage meaningfully*
- Engagement processes should include space to be iterative and reflective*

*From [Policy Link Community Engagement Guide](#):

Develop cultural competency skills and cultivate humility. Developing cultural competency skills is an essential foundation for community engagement processes that build multicultural relationships and prioritize multiple types of knowledge. It involves building an awareness of and mutual respect for cultural differences, attitudes, practices, and histories; and establishing behaviors that demonstrate a commitment towards increasing community agency for change.

Support capacity building to engage meaningfully. Capacity building is a critical aspect of leveling the playing field for careholders and community organizations to engage effectively in planning and decision-making processes. A lack of awareness and understanding of planning jargon, technical and policy expertise, political dynamics, knowledge of process, and bureaucratic norms can often inhibit the ability of participating groups and residents to

have a meaningful voice. Capacity building is a two-way process. While many government agencies have these technical capacities and resources to share with others, community organizations have capacities that they might lack: understanding of cultural norms, credibility with members of marginalized communities, substantive networks and relationships in the community. Connecting and working with these organizations and careholders and help build institutional capacity to conduct effective engagement processes.

Engagement processes should include space to be iterative and reflective. Who creates the space for engagement? Who decides whom and what interests will be invited to the table? How do we measure success? Meaningful community engagement is sometimes messy, ambiguous, iterative, and no like to conform to your standard public participation schedule. As knowledge from the community is generated and shared, new issues and needs may be uncovered, and changes to timeline and goals may be required. The process in its entirety should remain flexible enough to make mid-course corrections where needed. Part of building community capacity is allowing space for reflection, risk taking, and cultivating the humility to learn from mistakes and modify the approach.