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Engagement and Administration

ENGAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION GOALS

- **GOAL AD-1** Engage the Tacoma community equitably in planning for future projects and decisions in a coordinated, inclusive, and safe manner, prioritizing the empowerment of historically under-served and under-represented groups—as identified in this Plan’s Community Profile.
- **GOAL AD-2** Build and sustain community partnerships and programs to enhance capacity, improve engagement effectiveness, and strengthen trust between the government of Tacoma and communities that have historically been marginalized in public processes.
- **GOAL AD-3** Ensure that City decision-making processes are clear and transparent to all, including traditionally under-served and under-represented groups such as youth and BIPOC, as identified in this chapter’s Community Profile.

Engagement and Administration

11.1 Introductory Context

What is this chapter about?

The goals and policies in this chapter convey the City’s intent to:

- ▶ Conduct engagement that increases the community’s meaningful participation in decisions that shape Tacoma’s future.
- ▶ Provide a wide range of opportunities for engagement, including seeking feedback in non-traditional spaces, willingness to be innovative in communication media, and ensuring accessibility through support in multiple languages and formats.
- ▶ Provide transparent and inclusive public processes that uphold everyone’s right to be informed and heard, ensuring that all voices are valued and amplified in planning.
- ▶ Achieve greater equity in decision-making by intentionally engaging across the different spectrums of race, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and economic circumstance that reflect our diverse community.
- ▶ Actively pursue the sustained transformation of systemically racist institutions and the creation of an anti-racist culture at the City of Tacoma.
- ▶ Build belief, trust, and positive relationships between community members and the City through follow-through and authentic engagements.
- ▶ Coordinate among City departments and with partner agencies to implement the Comprehensive Plan and collectively hold each other accountable to community feedback by making sure it is meaningfully incorporated in planning and decision-making.
- ▶ Ensure that coordinated and equitable community engagement is adequately and sustainably resourced with funds and organizational capacity.

Book I: Core Policy Elements

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Why is this important?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Decisions are better—more equitable, resilient, and accountable—when those most impacted by decisions are engaged in the process. Collaborative and inclusive community participation is essential to supporting Tacoma's core values of opportunity, equity, partnership, and accountability.

To meaningfully consider all community members' needs and concerns, particular efforts must be made to improve relationships with traditionally under-represented and under-served groups, including low-income communities and communities of color. Consistent with the City's core values and vision for government performance, deep and inclusive community engagement is essential to transparency and equity in long-range planning decisions. It also makes it possible to create and work towards a shared vision for the future.



DIVERSITY: Diversity refers to the many ways in which people differ, including race, socioeconomic status, age, and gender. Tacoma is one of the most racially diverse cities in Washington State and prioritizes addressing race-based inequities.

INCLUSION: Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power. (Heal the Heart Charter)

EQUALITY: a measure of equal treatment

EQUITY: when everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well-being and achieve their full potential.



WHAT IS EQUITABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

The following definitions are taken from the draft of the City of Tacoma Equitable Engagement Plan which will be adopted as a shared tool for all engagement efforts across the city.

"Equitable community engagement is the process of intentionally seeking involvement from community members who have not been historically included in City processes, are most impacted by the City's initiative, project, or program, and are reflective of Tacoma's diversity. Equitable community engagement should:

1. Operate using a social justice and an anti-racist lens
2. Build and maintain relationships with community members who will be most impacted by a project, program, or City initiative and value their expertise and knowledge
3. Demonstrate respect by ensuring thoughtful and meaningful communication efforts, coordination with other City efforts, and culturally responsive approaches
4. Center and amplify the voices of those who are most often marginalized in conversations about the future of their community
5. Recognize the historical context of oppression in the City and how it continues to cause systemic barriers, preventing some communities from accessing services today
6. Challenge practitioners to engage with the community as partners and exercise flexibility and responsiveness based on community feedback
7. Value participants' time and contributions and incorporate their recommendations in the final product, when appropriate/feasible"

City of Tacoma Equitable Engagement Framework

ANTI-RACISM: Identifying and challenging the values, structures, and behaviors that perpetuate systemic racism. (Heal the Heart Charter)

How does this chapter address key themes?

All community members are affected by the Tacoma Comprehensive Plan. However, historically, not all community members have been equitably aware of the plan, its impact on decisions affecting their lives, or their ability to influence it. While much of the rest of the Comprehensive Plan describes policies, this chapter focuses on how these policies and their ensuing actions are carried out, and how they will be stewarded to ensure continued reflection of community priorities. Central to this "how" is community engagement. A consistent, well-resourced, and accountable system of equitable community engagement creates



EQUITY



OPPORTUNITY



PUBLIC HEALTH



SAFETY



SUSTAINABILITY

the needed relationship between planners and policy-makers, and the residents they serve to create responsive policies. **(Equity)**

The focus areas of the One Tacoma Plan are themselves the result of community engagement and community-defined priorities. Some of this community engagement was conducted expressly for the Comprehensive Plan, but this plan also builds on engagement conducted by the City of Tacoma and other partners in recent years for initiatives such as Home in Tacoma, Neighborhood Planning, Participatory Budgeting, and the CAP. Staff and officials will continue to focus on these themes throughout implementation and stewardship of the Comprehensive Plan and associated actions. **(Opportunity, Public Health, Safety, Sustainability)**

WHAT ARE SOME BASELINE CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES?

Key developments in and around Tacoma since 2015 relevant to engagement include:

- ▶ The City of Tacoma invested in equitable community engagement capacity and system-building. For example, two City positions, one dedicated to harmonizing community engagement efforts and another dedicated to coordinating Language Access, were created and staffed. The City now has a cross-department Community Engagement Practitioners Work Group that meets regularly, and city-wide tools, such as the Equitable Engagement Plan draft and gift card policy, now set common expectations for engagement.
- ▶ New programs to invest in community engagement have been resourced, and existing programs have grown their capacity. For example, in 2021 the City Council created the Neighborhood Planning Program as a direct request for more engagement. To date, neighborhood planning support has helped create and implement a community-based vision in McKinley Hill, Proctor, and South Tacoma. Although the Neighborhood Planning Program was paused due to budget constraints in mid-2025, these planning efforts piloted neighborhood-based equitable engagement tools and tactics. Although the Neighborhood Planning Program was paused due to budget constraints in mid-2025, these planning efforts piloted neighborhood-based equitable engagement tools and tactics. Individual departments, including Public Works and Environmental Services, have created department-specific Community Engagement Plans based off a city-wide framework for engagement.
- ▶ In 2018, the Mayor's Office supported a youth engagement task force that was charged with establishing a permanent Youth Commission. The Mayor's Youth Commission was established by Resolution 40502 in 2019 to advise on policies, codes, plans, and practices through a youth-lens, providing an opportunity for youth to engage in policy making decisions and local government.
- ▶ In 2019, a group of staff from across the City of Tacoma's General Government and TPU formed with the goal of collaborating on community engagement efforts across the organization. This Community Engagement Practitioners Work Group includes over 50 staff who meet on a regular basis to share ideas, strategize, and consider how departments can work collaboratively to further improve engagement efforts City-wide.
- ▶ Resolution 40622 (passed 2020) affirms the City Council dedication and commitment to comprehensive and sustained transformation of all the



These developments have changed the context and the processes by which Tacoma conducts community engagement. They also offer new opportunities to further strengthen equitable community engagement practices across all City departments.

institutions, systems, policies, practices, and contracts impacted by systemic racism.

- ▶ Resolution 41278 (passed 2023) directs the City Manager to create an Equity Toolkit for special events for community use as a public education tool.
- ▶ In 2022 the City of Tacoma launched its first participatory budgeting process in District 4, awarding \$1 million for youth and cultural programming. The District 2 process identified a covered skate park featuring public art under I-705.
- ▶ The Puyallup Tribe of Indians, a sovereign nation of more than 6,000 members whose traditional homelands include the land on which Tacoma is built, completed their first Comprehensive Land Use Plan in 2023. Around the same time, HB 1717 (Concerning Tribal participation in planning under the GMA, 2022) brought new requirements to the GMA related to Tribal coordination, elevating the need for collaboration and engagement between municipalities and neighboring Tribal nations.
- ▶ Belief and Trust is an explicit Council priority. This theme refers to the percentage of residents who believe they are able to have a positive impact on community and express trust in the public institutions in Tacoma.

EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE FRAMEWORK

WHAT IS EQUITY? Equity is when everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well-being and achieve their full potential

VISION - Our vision is for Tacoma to be an inclusive and equitable place to live, work and play

MISSION - Our mission is to achieve equity in our service delivery, decision-making and community engagement. We will do this by identifying and eliminating the underlying drivers within our community that perpetuate racial inequity and provide opportunity and advancement for all

PRIMARY GOALS - If our proposed framework is successful, we believe that our municipal workforce and community will achieve five goals:

- ▶ City of Tacoma Workforce Reflects the Community it Serves: Actively work to eliminate racial and other disparities and provide accommodations for people with disabilities in hiring, promotion, retention and contracting
- ▶ Purposeful Community Outreach and Engagement: Work with community partners and businesses to promote equity and inclusion within Tacoma and throughout the region, producing measurable improvements and disparity reductions
- ▶ Equitable Service Delivery to All Residents and Visitors: Provide guidance, education and assistance to all departments as they develop sustainable methods to build capacity in achieving equitable outcomes and services
- ▶ Support Human Rights and Opportunities for Everyone to Achieve Their Full Potential: Promote, support and build capacity for compliance with civil rights laws, ordinances and regulations, including the ADA, within the city of Tacoma
- ▶ Commitment to Equity in Local Government Decision-Making: Be transparent and collaborative with internal and external individuals and groups, holding ourselves and our partners accountable for measurable improvements and outcomes



CULTURALLY COMPETENT: the ability to understand, appreciate and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own.

TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH: integrates understanding and awareness of individual, historical, racial, and systemic trauma into all aspects of organizational behavior to reduce the likelihood of further harm and to promote healing.

TRANSCREATION: Often referred to in contrast to translation, transcreation describes a holistic approach to adapting content in a way that is culturally relevant and appealing to a given audience.

11.2 Goals and Policies

The goals and policies of this chapter lay out how the One Tacoma Plan will be implemented with inclusive and equitable community engagement at its core. The City is taking steps to build the tools and processes necessary to create and maintain meaningful relationships with community members from all walks of life in Tacoma. The City also commits to coordinating internally to ensure a consistent and unified approach that minimizes burden on communities while making engagement as relevant, engaging, and beneficial as possible. The goals and policies acknowledge that the City and our initiatives will have to learn and adapt over coming years to respond to a community that is also growing and changing every day.

INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Tacoma is committed to authentic community engagement. The City's commitment to diverse and inclusive public engagement is demonstrated by the Equity and Empowerment Initiative Framework, which was adopted by City Council in September 2015. The Framework has been incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan (see box on the next page) and the following goals and policies are designed to be consistent with the Framework.

The complexity and changing character of planning issues, technology, and the City itself requires thoughtful innovation to ensure people-focused and equitable community engagement. Increasingly diverse demographics, as well as past failures of top-down approaches, point to the need for new grass-roots strategies that promote inclusive participation. Changes in communication technology allow, and even require, the City to offer new avenues for engagement, and hopefully, collaboration. Finally, the City's natural and built character and infrastructure are constantly evolving and continually require input. In this environment, strong internal coordination and communication are essential to ensure consistency and build trust between government and community. The City-wide Equitable Engagement Plan will be the keystone document for coordinating city efforts. Within this Plan, the City of Tacoma uses a Spectrum of Community Participation adapted from the Community Engagement to Ownership Spectrum developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power to calibrate the appropriate level of engagement expected for city projects. The following policies also challenge City staff to assess current practices and develop new tools through an ongoing evaluation and improvement of engagement methods.

GOAL AD-1: Engage the Tacoma community equitably in planning for future projects and decisions in a coordinated, inclusive, and safe manner, prioritizing the empowerment of historically under-served and under-represented groups—as identified in this Plan's Community Profile.

Policy AD-1.1: Develop, resource, and roll-out a City-wide Equitable Engagement Plan that includes shared community engagement practices and project-level guidance for when to engage the community, how to set outcomes, prioritize subgroups most impacted by the project, implement engagement, utilize City resources and community partnerships, how to respectfully use community data and honor privacy, and how to report back to communities for accountability. Support individual departments in developing consistent Equitable Engagement Plans.



Policy AD-1.2: Ensure that City design and development programs, strategies, and standards are established through public processes, regularly evaluated and updated, and incorporate community input, including consultation with appropriate boards and commissions and affected community groups.

Policy AD-1.3: Provide engagement opportunities that are broadly accessible by offering a range of locations, times, and formats, including in-person and online activities. Provide accommodations that allow people with disabilities, neurodivergence, caregiving responsibilities, transportation and/or digital access barriers, and limited English ability to participate fully.

Policy AD-1.4: Develop, resource, and roll-out a city-wide approach to Language Access Planning. This includes standard operating procedures for language access planning, identification of priority languages, and selection and implementation of multilingual engagement strategies.

Policy AD-1.5: Strengthen and sustain the work of the Community Engagement Practitioners Work Group. Conduct regular meetings, develop shared resources, and hold joint planning sessions to ensure consistent, inclusive practices across all city departments.

Policy AD-1.6: Implement an internal system for assessing the inclusivity and effectiveness of communication and community engagement efforts and updating the Equitable Engagement Plan every 2-3 years. This should include collecting data on participation and costs of implementation using best practices, gathering feedback from staff and community partners, and identifying areas for improvement.

Policy AD-1.7: Allocate sufficient funding for engagement activities on a City-wide and project-by-project basis, including funding to compensate participants for their time and partnership. Include guidance on budgeting for engagement activities in community engagement tools.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

By building and maintaining partnerships with individuals, partner agencies, and organizations that represent a wide variety of interests, the City gains a better understanding of diverse needs and concerns, benefiting the community as a whole through more equitable decision-making. The following goals and policies support building and maintaining strong and supportive relationships with the many individuals and organizations that represent the diverse communities and perspectives in Tacoma.

GOAL AD-2: Build and sustain community partnerships and programs to enhance capacity, improve engagement effectiveness, and strengthen trust between the government of Tacoma and communities that have historically been marginalized in public processes.

Policy AD-2.1: Build and maintain partnerships with:

- a. Community leaders and community-based organizations
- b. Historically under-served and under-represented communities, including low-income communities, LGBTQand, BIPOC communities, youth, and the disability community
- c. Neighborhood and business associations, including groups without formal affiliations
- d. Businesses, unions, employees and related organizations
- e. Interest groups, cultural groups and affinity organizations
- f. Institutions, governments, and Tribal sovereign nations
- h. Media, including ethnic media

Policy AD-2.2: Collaborate with Neighborhood Councils and Neighborhood Business Districts to better reflect population diversity and the range of interests within the areas they represent.

Policy AD-2.3: Prioritize collaborating and contracting with Tacoma area community-based organizations (CBOs) and interest groups whenever feasible to help build capacity. Include detailed guidance on contracting with and meaningfully resourcing CBOs in the Equitable Engagement Plan, and address barriers to contracting with small organizations.

Policy AD-2.4: Expand and sustainably fund ongoing community engagement programs, such as the Community Liaison and Language Ambassador program to co-create engagement strategies with and build capacity among communities and in neighborhoods that have historically been marginalized in public processes.

Policy AD-2.5: Work with the Mayor's Youth Commission, schools, and other youth-focused community partners to design and implement strategies to improve and sustain youth engagement in planning.

Policy AD-2.6: Leverage existing opportunities to engage with residents, such as community events and organizations, as well as meetings of appointed advisory groups, such as the Planning Commission, Landmarks Preservation Commission and the Transportation Commission.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Consistent with Tacoma's core values, the City is committed to transparency in community engagement processes. When community members have a good understanding of a process, they are better able to participate effectively. Improved transparency and communication allow the city to better understand community opinions and needs and serve to build belief and trust.

GOAL AD-3: Ensure that City decision-making processes are clear and transparent to all, including traditionally under-served and under-represented groups such as youth and BIPOC, as identified in this chapter's Community Profile.

Policy AD-3.1: Ensure that City design and development programs, strategies, standards, and public improvements align with the vision of the One Tacoma Plan and support the achievement of the goals and policies of the Plan.

Policy AD-3.2: Establish and communicate clear roles, rights, responsibilities and timeframes for participants and decision-makers.

Policy AD-3.3: At each stage of the planning process, identify and communicate which topics can be shaped by community input, and which are guided by established regulations or policies.

Policy AD-3.4: Following decisions resulting from community-engaged processes, communicate to participants:

- a. The issues raised in the community engagement process,
- b. How public input affected outcomes,
- c. The rationale used in making decisions,
- d. Whether and how decisions can be challenged or appealed and,
- e. If a decision is outside of City control, how community members can engage with the jurisdiction or agency that makes the final decision.

Policy AD-3.5: Invest in communications tools and strategies, including digital platforms, messaging services, paid media, and overall departmental capacity to support equitable community engagement.



11.3 Priority Actions

ACTION	LEAD
<p>Develop tools, templates, and best practice guides for engagement and communications during and after engagement available for all departments to adapt and use (e.g., guides for survey and event reporting). These resources will guide staff through conducting engagement that is culturally relevant, appropriate for priority audiences, internally consistent, and resourceful. Measure the efficacy of these tools and their resulting plans where feasible. (Supports Goal AD-3)</p>	<p>Mayor's Office, Office of Strategy</p>
<p>Develop a process and secure data infrastructure to share quantitative and qualitative community engagement data across City of Tacoma departments and key community partners such as TPS and TPCHD to minimize respondent burden, use resources efficiently, and provide high quality data-informed services.</p>	<p>Mayor's Office, Office of Strategy</p>
<p>Develop and implement a comprehensive, ongoing training program for all city staff and community partners and CBOs involved in community engagement. This program should cover cultural competency, anti-racism, trauma-informed practices, best practices for engagement with youth and vulnerable populations, accessibility considerations, self-care for engagement staff, and techniques for creating psychologically safe spaces.</p>	<p>Mayor's Office, Office of Strategy</p>
<p>Continue to develop shared tools for the Work Group including an events calendar, guides and examples to optimizing use of digital tools, guides and best practices for communications, community compensation guidelines and protocols, community contacts and relationship management, resources and vendor lists for printing, meeting supplies, translation, transcreation, and accessibility services.</p>	<p>Mayor's Office, Office of Strategy</p>
<p>Identify costs associated with best practices for equitable engagement.</p>	<p>Mayor's Office, Office of Strategy</p>
<p>Include guidance on meaningfully resourcing Community Liaisons and Ambassadors in the Equitable Engagement Plan and/or associated tools.</p>	<p>Mayor's Office, Office of Strategy, PDS</p>
<p>Explore additional opportunities (such as a Community Planning Academy) to build community and neighborhood capacity to foster ongoing community engagement and advocacy.</p>	<p>Mayor's Office, PDS</p>
<p>Support and improve equity within formal processes for participation, such as Neighborhood Councils and Neighborhood Business Districts. Review and update these programs periodically to identify capacity needs and opportunities for improvement.</p>	<p>Mayor's Office, NCS, CED</p>

