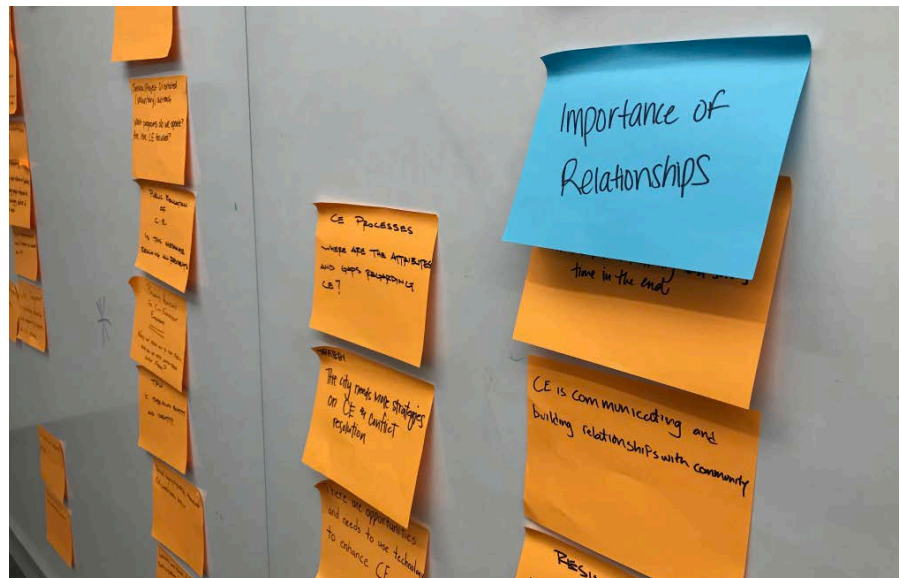


In November of 2017, the students of UWT’s MA in Community Planning program met with City Manager Elizabeth Pauli to start a dialogue around the production of this Roadmap to Civic Engagement. Over the course of two quarters, students conducted and transcribed interviews with 60 City of Tacoma staff members. Students analyzed this data and reviewed policy and practice documents, presenting their preliminary findings on two occasions to City and TPU employees to share preliminary findings and encourage reflection and feedback. In recognition of the importance of staff alignment and agreement with their findings, the project was an iterative, ongoing dialogue between staff and students, and took a social constructionist Grounded Theory approach to data analysis.

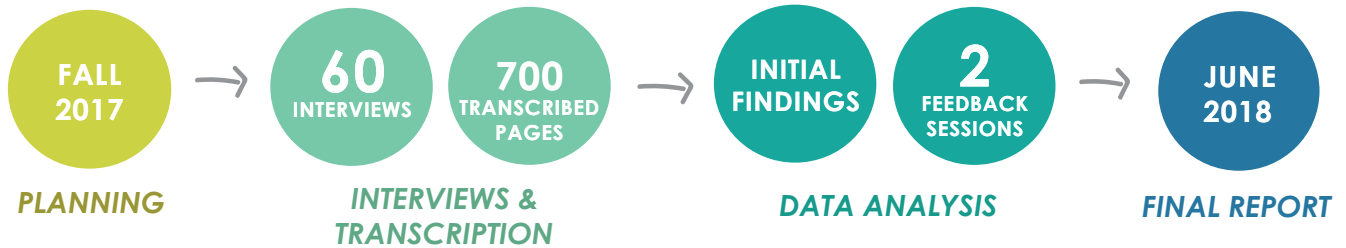


Students collaborated to identify, merge, and sort themes to generate the findings and recommendations outlined in this report. ANNEKA OLSON

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Student research questions focused on the attitudes and practices of City employees regarding civic engagement. This allowed students to tailor their findings and recommendations to the internal experiences, culture, and practices of civic engagement at the City of Tacoma.

- How does the City of Tacoma approach civic engagement?
 - How do employees speak about civic engagement?
 - How do they describe their connections with the public?
 - What are their practices to encourage civic engagement?
- What are opportunities to increase connection with the public and build civic trust to advance equity and prepare for growth?



PROCESS

Phase I: Planning

In late 2017, students and faculty developed a project scope and statement of values in conjunction with David Nash-Mendez, Senior Management Fellow, in coordination with City Manager Elizabeth Pauli.

Phase II: Interviews and Transcription

Over the course of a four-week period throughout February and March 2018, researchers conducted more than 60 interviews with City of Tacoma staff. Interviewees participated from 18 different City departments and TPU. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, yielding more than 700 transcribed pages. For a complete list of interviewed staff, see Appendix A. For Survey Tool, see Appendix B.

Phase III: Data Analysis

This project used a Grounded Theory approach, which is an inductive approach to analysis wherein a theory is developed from the data. There are no pre-existing frameworks or categories. This approach allowed students to be highly context-specific for the City of Tacoma rather than relying on existing frameworks. From the interview data, students wove together emerging themes to systematically tell the larger story of how the City of Tacoma currently practices civic engagement. Specifically, students identified “chunks of meaning” that emerged from the data before organizing these into themes to address their research questions.

Feedback sessions

As part of the analysis process, students prepared two mid-project presentations to a total of 40 employees from both General Government and TPU. Presentation attendees included individuals students had interviewed and additional interested staff. During these feedback sessions, students presented their preliminary findings and asked

staff whether these findings fit with their experiences; students also sought ideas for next steps for civic engagement opportunities. In keeping with their social constructionist approach, students used the feedback from both sessions to adjust their findings and guide their final recommendations. Students also provided two reports to City of Tacoma directors on project status during the course of the project.

A note on interpreting findings across TPU and the City

Although TPU operates independently from General Government—for example, the Tacoma 2025 plan does not yet include TPU goals—the findings in the report address both organizations’ approaches and sentiments towards civic engagement.

Phase IV: Findings and Recommendations

The findings presented in this report emerged from close analysis of civic engagement practices at the City of Tacoma. The recommendations are closely aligned with student findings, and are tailored specifically to the City’s context.

POSITIONALITY OF RESEARCHERS

“A researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions.”

The Community Planning program at UWT focuses on the social and institutional dynamics that create and sustain systemic power disparities, seeking to build analytic and practical intervention skills that help communities and leaders create equitable and just realities for themselves. We recognize that our findings reflect our shared positionality as university-based researchers and community planning professionals, with varying years of experience and forms of expertise. Review short, biographical statements of faculty and students in Appendix C.

However, some of the shared characteristics that define us are as follows: We are ten graduate students and two Ph.D. instructors, all of whom identify as White. Half of the students identify as female, half as male, and both instructors are female; ten of us work at least part-time outside of our affiliation with this graduate program; four of us are parents, and all of us have lived or worked in Tacoma for at least the last two years.

PROJECT LIMITATIONS

Addressing Race and Racism

We did not ask directly about race or racism in our interviews. Instead, we asked more generally about forms of residential privilege. In hindsight, especially as a group of all White Community Planning students, this may have further reproduced a tendency of White mainstream culture to rely on coded language to talk about disparities that are deeply influenced by dominant patterns of racial and ethnic bias. Nevertheless, these issues were clearly evidenced in our interview data, which indicates the importance of ongoing training, awareness, and interventions to proactively address deeply embedded concepts of race and ethnicity in civic engagement practices.

Connecting with Residents

Any effort to improve civic engagement practices requires authentic, ongoing feedback from the people most affected by the City's practices: local residents and community groups. Our research did not engage residents and community group members over the course of the project. As graduate student researchers, we are limited in our ability to represent, speak for, or create expectations on behalf of the City. We view this community outreach as an essential next step so that the City can better understand how and where to improve inclusion in civic engagement.



Students sought staff feedback at two events, recognizing that their input would be key to understanding and implementing the report's findings. ANNE TAUFEN