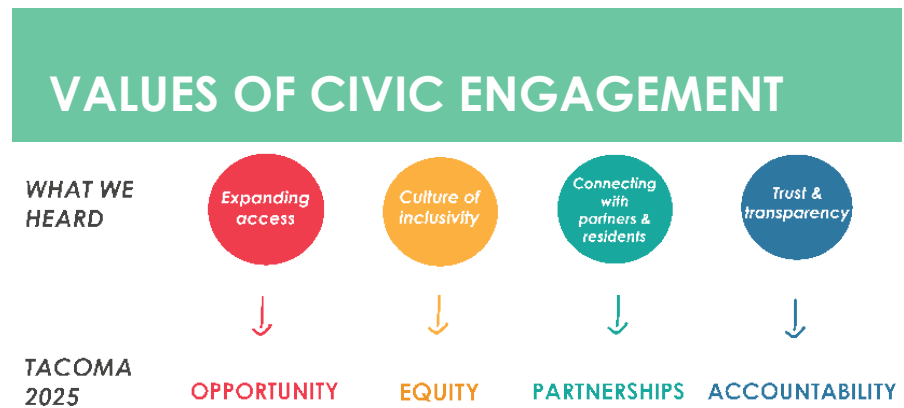


VALUES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement is valued across departments as a path to building equity in the City of Tacoma, and the organization is taking steps to align practices with its commitments. The four Tacoma 2015 values of Opportunity, Equity, Partnerships, and Accountability emerged in our interviews with staff as they talked about departmental values of expanding access; building a culture of inclusion; connecting with partners and residents, and creating trust and transparency. However, while many departments are committed to these values, they are uncertain of how to coordinate and operationalize a shift in practices under the current organizational structure.



In interviews, students heard from City of Tacoma staff about the values they hold regarding the importance of civic engagement.

Expanding Access

Staff talked about the potential for effective civic engagement to empower resident involvement and expand access to resources. Employees recognize that their practices can help to create opportunity by sharing ways to access City services, listening to residents, and making adjustments in department policy.

“If it is really about historically marginalized [communities], you have to go about things completely differently.”

— Christopher Wright,
Neighborhood and Community Services

While interviews with staff revealed the City’s commitment to expanding opportunities for community engagement and involvement, this does not

**“If you come with a plan and all the answers,
then I know you’re not ready to listen.”**

— Tanisha Jumper,
Interim Director of Media and Communications Office

mean that there is always sufficient institutional support to build trust with residents. For example, when engagement is conducted without acknowledgement of historical barriers to opportunity, departments may limit their ability to discover and act on the wealth of knowledge that comes from Tacoma’s diversity. Acknowledgement of past inequities can allow the City and TPU to build new ways to approach residents that truly open the process up for opportunities in initial engagement, ongoing involvement, and lasting improvements. A commitment to improve access to City decision-making builds Opportunity for Tacoma residents, the first core value of Tacoma 2025.

Building a Culture of Inclusion

“If we’re not connected with some folks, I believe it’s our responsibility to figure out how to fix that.”

— Amy McBride, Community and Economic Development

Commitment to inclusion and equity means that staff strive to take into consideration who is not fully participating in civic life—and seek to understand why. Building an inclusive culture means empowering and resourcing groups and individuals with historical, economic, and operational disadvantages, and many staff described this commitment as a motivation for their work. An inclusive culture also emphasizes an internal readiness to hear more diverse voices and act on their ideas and suggestions. This value aligns directly with the core value of Equity in Tacoma 2025.

Connecting with Partners and Residents

City staff value relationships with residents and organizational partners, recognizing that ongoing community connections are critical to effective civic engagement. Many staff feel a sense of duty to, “meet people where they are,” as some staff describe it, even though many staff admit they do not always have the tools or training to know how to achieve this ideal.

“In working with neighborhood groups, we just try give them every opportunity to advocate for themselves and work with them to achieve their goals.”

— Allyson Griffith, Neighborhood and Community Services

“[Our goal is] to empower the community and to foster leadership.”

— Kristin Lynett, Environmental Services:
Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability

Across the board, City staff recognize partnership- and relationship-building as a meaningful and strategic way to address the needs of Tacoma residents and communities. Community members and organizations who play an active part in service delivery and decision-making often possess more ownership and investment over the outcomes—increasing the likelihood they will continue to show up and participate in decision-making processes. Formalizing these community relationships through organizational partnerships can offer the potential for expanded community empowerment and leadership. In addition, partnerships can improve City policy-making by ensuring that departments hear from those most directly impacted by these decisions. This commitment to building connections is consistent with Tacoma 2025’s core value of Partnerships.

Trust, Transparency, and Accountability

“Now people want to know more. They want to know why. Transparency—you need to be able to provide that.”

— Mike Slevin, Director of Environmental Services

Many staff see civic engagement as an important opportunity for government and residents to understand one another. However, shifting institutional practices and priorities can make building trust difficult—



On the steps of the Philadelphia Art Museum looking towards City Hall. The LCY student researchers examined the Serve Philadelphia initiative as a case study. LEE CANNON

Case Study: Serve Philadelphia's Civic Engagement Academy

Serve Philadelphia is an initiative of the City of Philadelphia's Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteer Service (OCEVS), which was founded in 2010 as a result of a Cities of Service leadership grant.

In a targeted effort to increase civic understanding and empower more people in the City of Philadelphia, OCEVS launched its Civic Engagement Academy (CEA) in 2010. It brings representatives from different City departments to underserved neighborhoods in a two-month course. The series is designed to introduce residents to City departments, provide information about how to effectively access services, encourage residents to pass along the information to their communities, and prepare residents to take the step toward becoming community leaders, organizers, and activists.

The Civic Engagement Academy works with community organizers and leaders upon request and strives to tailor sessions to the interests and needs of the community. Generally, the CEA Learning Series introduces Philadelphians to the principles of community organizing and focuses on topics such as goal setting; asset mapping; timeliness and benchmarking; targeting and recruitment; data evaluation; volunteer management; community meeting management; building coalition; and media and marketing. During each session, residents hear lectures from City officials and community leaders, and learn how to apply what they have learned through a hands-on activity and discussion. The City's goal is for people to feel empowered and to "have the tools they need to be part of the change they want to see in their neighborhood."

especially when there are historic tensions between communities and government. There may also be competing priorities, as departments strive to balance timing, budgets, and efficiency with more open-ended opportunities for community participation.

“I think government has a great role to create those opportunities, but sometimes we don't always see that we have that role. We just have to get a job done and be efficient.”

— Ellen Walkowiak, Community and Economic Development

In shifting organizational values to put equity at the forefront, some departments are taking intentional steps to transform their work into a platform that invites community collaboration and greater transparency. This work is ongoing. Building trust, transparency and accountability is key to the core value of Accountability laid out in Tacoma 2025.

Challenge: Making Values Visible

In the context of the City's goal of strong fiscal management, it can be challenging to justify investing staff time and resources into more proactive, innovative approaches to civic engagement. However, these values are not necessarily at odds, as more robust civic engagement often helps departments design better policies and achieve stronger community support. In addition, a clear statement of values that elevates the importance of civic engagement could promote consistent support across departments.

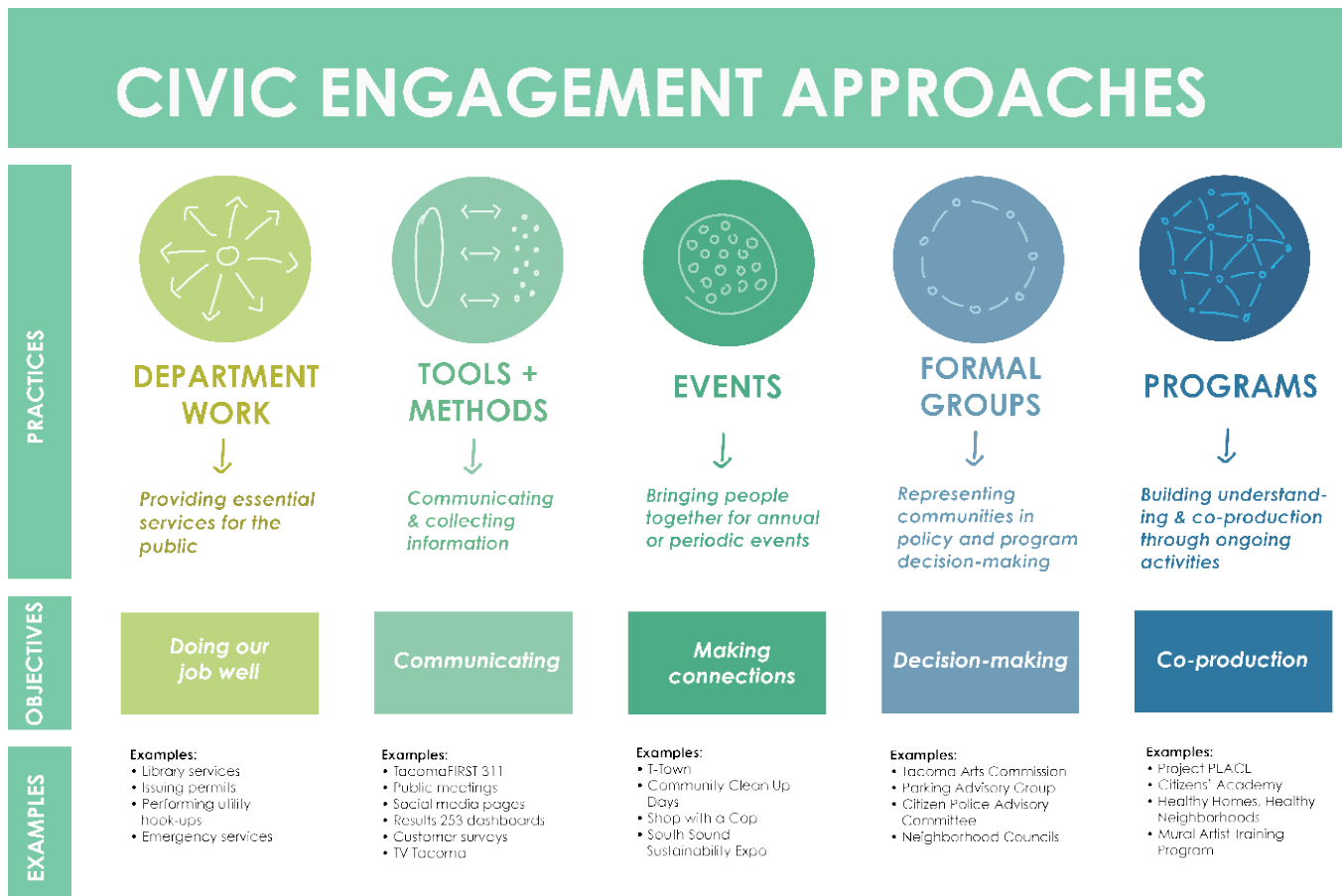
“At some level, to be truly effective, this needs to be the community's plan, the community's goal. What are the community standards that you need to meet in order to fit in and meet the citizens' expectations?”

— Brian Boudet, Planning and Development Services

VARIATION IN PRACTICES

Civic engagement is valued across departments as a path to building equity in the City of Tacoma, and the organization is taking steps to align practices with its commitments. The four Tacoma 2025 values of Opportunity, Equity, Partnerships, and Accountability emerged in our interviews with staff as they talked about departmental values of expanding access; building a culture of inclusion; connecting with partners and residents, and creating trust and transparency. However, while many departments are committed to these values, they are uncertain of how to coordinate and operationalize a shift in practices under the current organizational structure.

Based on our interviews, we identify five different categories of civic engagement practiced by the City, which are described in the following



Developed from interviews with City of Tacoma staff, this graphic outlines the different approaches to civic engagement taking place across departments. It forms the basis of the Civic Engagement Approaches tool, presented in Appendix F.

sections. Each of these categories outlines both a description (practices) as well as the rationale (objectives) that different departments employ in this array of engagement approaches.

Department Work: Doing Our Job Well

Civic engagement is often part of the core functions and direct services that City departments provide: utility hookups, customer service, permitting, emergency response, and management of third parties providing public services. Effective delivery of these services is often a prerequisite for other kinds of engagement, as it forms the basis of the public's expectations for city government. Resources for this type of civic engagement are generally allocated based on the roles and responsibilities of each department.

“A significant amount of the [civic engagement] decision-making is dictated by the project.”

— Patrick Babbitt, Environment Services:
Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability

Tools and Methods: Communicating and Collecting Information

Many staff emphasized the importance of effective communications with the public. These ‘tools and methods’ include ways to communicate information to the public, such as public meetings, posting public records online, newsletters, direct mail, videos, tip sheets, data dashboards, social media platforms, and utility bill inserts. They can also include ways to gather information from the public, such as the 311 app, the City's community survey, public polling, and market research.

Many of the tools to communicate information to the public seek to inform residents of City programs, policies, and events. “Pushing out information,” as one department manager described it, can be a particular focus of this work, as staff seek to ensure public understanding of their department, tailoring communications to make them more legible for the public (for more on this, see *Understanding Each Other*).

Sometimes, this work is mandated by statute; in other cases, this work is not legally required, but departments have found it directly relevant to meeting their goals. In other cases, while not required in daily interactions with the public, effective communications support the overall success of projects.

“The core function of my group is getting more market feedback and providing data to help inform decision-making at the executive level—and to understand what customer preferences are.”

— Dan Drennan,
Tacoma Public Utilities: Public Affairs and Communication

“We have significant state mandated requirements for public engagement associated with growth management planning. The City code includes requirements also.”

— Brian Boudet, Planning and Development Services

Market research and surveys are frequently used tools to aid in understanding public needs. Though many staff acknowledged that marginalized populations tend to be underrepresented in surveys, others highlighted public polling as a way to improve understandings of the needs of communities who may not be participating in other forms of public engagement.

Social media has been a particularly important change in the way that communications happen between City departments and the public. Despite the potential limitations of these platforms, new media sometimes allow for improved communications between City staff and the public.

“The growth of social media has really changed how we do our work. There are conversations that happen at a different level, and that changes the dynamics of engagement.”

— Chris Gleason, Tacoma Public Utilities:
Public Affairs and Communication

Events: Making Connections and Bringing People Together

City-hosted events are often designed to bring communities together and help constituents learn about the services each department provides. Events can also be a way to inspire action and promote community pride.

These events are viewed as a critical way for creating connections with community members. Though events do not always constitute meaningful public involvement in City policy and decision-making functions, they often serve as an important way to begin to build relationships with members of the public.

“Outreach is a lot of what we do. It could be job fairs, community events, or just being that face of the City.”

— Shelby Fritz, Human Resources

“I would say that civic engagement is part of everything we do, because we can't have events if we're not engaging the public.”

— Tammi Bryant, Tacoma Venues and Events

Formal Groups: Engaging Community Representatives in Decision-Making

The City provides opportunities for residents to engage through in a variety of formal settings, including twenty-seven different official Committees, Boards, and Commissions. In these groups, community members advise and make recommendations to the City Council and/or City staff, and in some cases even serve as a formal decision-making body for policy affairs.

Neighborhood Councils are another structured way in which the community is involved in local governance. Created in 1992, the eight Neighborhood Councils “advise City Council on issues of local importance and [in seeking] consensus among residents on specific plans of action.”

Programs: Ongoing Activities of Engagement and Co-Production

City-developed and hosted programs offer opportunities for staff to engage with community members in deeper, more meaningful ways. Programs can enable long-term relationship building, as well as create

“The Transportation Commission is helping drive and establish policy, and that guides the work that we do.”

— Kurtis Kingsolver, Director of Public Works

Case Study: Los Angeles Department of Water and Power Equity Metrics Data Initiative

In 2017, the nation's largest municipal utility released the Equity Metrics Data Initiative (EMDI) plan, "to track, measure, and report on how its programs are provided to all customers and residents of Los Angeles." Approved with the 2016 LADWP Water and Electric Rate Action, the EMDI launches a data-driven framework that considers how well programs, services, and resources are allocated throughout the utility to see where disparities exist. This information and analysis provides important information about services and operations, aligning with the City's goal to reach all customers fairly and equitably. The EMDI has now established a framework to guide the LADWP in reaching fair and reasonable services to all ratepayers.

Stakeholder outreach and participation played—and continue to play—important parts of this initiative. This remains essential to ensuring equity. The initiative also offers an example of institution-wide goal setting that takes into account the various needs of different departments.



Downtown Los Angeles night photography at the Los Angeles Water and Power building. The LCY student researchers examined the City's Equity Metrics Data Initiative as a case study. ANDREW SCOTT BAUER

the conditions for co-production, where residents, community members, and City staff build trust through shared activities (see more information on co-production in the introduction). In their ideal form, well-developed programs allow for community ideas, perceptions, and experiences to drive decision-making. This yields a more transformational model of community inclusion in the formation of City policy.

By enabling ongoing interactions, the implementation of programs is often an important step that allows people to work towards shared responsibility for the content and delivery of services. Programs also offer an opportunity to enact targeted universalism, as they allow staff to tailor approaches to reaching particular communities with the purpose of achieving universal goals.

“The police have a Citizens Academy where they bring residents in [to learn about how the Police Department works]. Anybody that’s ever been through it has had a night and day experience. I think there are tons of opportunities for us to do things like that, to educate people about how government works.”

— Andy Cherullo, Director of Finance Department

“We practice adaptive project management. The community is constantly changing both culturally and socioeconomically. As a result, we’re always looking at adjusting the strategy to reflect the needs of the community.”

— Linda Stewart,
Director of Neighborhood and Community Services

Challenge: Standards and Department Flexibility

As the City develops standards and shared expectations for community engagement, care must be taken so that increased coordination does not come at the expense of flexibility within departments and opportunities for innovation.



Downtown Tacoma with Mount Rainier and foothills in view. CITY OF TACOMA