

## AN ORGANIZATION-WIDE INITIATIVE

Civic engagement is one of the highest priorities for an equitable and inclusive City government, and yet it is beyond the scope of one project, initiative, or department. Despite the high value placed on civic engagement and Tacoma 2025 goals across departments, efforts are uneven across the City. Many employees remain unfamiliar with how their department's civic engagement approach fits in with broader strategic plan goals.

Strengthening organizational support for civic engagement aids the implementation of Tacoma 2025, reinforces cross-departmental work, and improves citywide, equity initiatives. In this section, we outline our recommendations for accomplishing improved civic engagement at the organizational level.

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### Creating a Shared Culture of Civic Engagement

The goals outlined in Tacoma 2025 provide an outline of the City's existing support for inclusive civic engagement efforts (from the Government Performance Focus Area):

**“Opportunity:** In 2025, Tacoma residents trust in their City government and civic institutions. Elected leaders and civil servants hold transparency and accountability as primary civic responsibilities. The community believes that local government is tackling the tough issues and actively engaging residents and community partners in those endeavors. Residents engage in civic affairs, participate in government activities, and vote.”

**“Equity:** In 2025, the City of Tacoma government will be inclusive, reflective of the community it serves, and ensure that City resources are distributed equitably to residents and visitors.”

As discussed in our first finding, Values of Civic Engagement, we found efforts to strive toward these goals in different departments. Efforts are ongoing at the departmental level to prioritize working alongside constituents to accomplish projects that reflect their needs, concerns, and desires.

**Tools for Civic Engagement:** In the first recommendation that follows, we outline the need for expanded, organization-wide support of civic engagement, allowing each department to create specific goals, policies, and procedures, with the understanding that their work is part of a greater collective commitment as well as an undertaking to improve connections with the public.

*“I’m not aware of any specific requirements that say that we have to interact. I know we try to have as many touch points with citizens as possible.”*

— Chris Bell, Office of Management and Budget

### **Departmental Unevenness Persists**

As outlined in our finding, Variation in Practice, civic engagement occurs differently across the City. While this reflects differences in the roles and responsibilities of various departments, it also means that many departments practice civic engagement in an ad hoc manner. As a result of this, some departments are more intentional about planning, resourcing, and implementing civic engagement opportunities than others.

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**Civic Engagement Steering Group:** A coordinating mechanism across the City can ensure common understanding of civic engagement. This would help structure the implementation of civic engagement while allowing each department the flexibility to incorporate policies and procedures in a way that is relevant for their work.

*“Equity is a different kind of thing. How do you know you reach that underserved group? In our Neighborhood and Community Services Office, we can probably do counts and say ‘yeah, we’ve served 50 more clients with this program for homeless youth,’ but in other places, it’s a trickier thing.”*

— Andy Cherullo, Director of Finance Department

### **Organizational Resources and Support**

Resourcing: While departmental goals and responsibilities vary, the City government, as a whole, shares in its commitment to successful civic engagement. In addition to creating a common understanding and definition of civic engagement and organizational mechanisms to implement best practices, additional organizational resourcing and funding will ensure that new initiatives around civic engagement are feasible and successful.



*City of Tacoma staff formed cross-departmental groups and provided input on the initial findings for this report. ANNE TAUFEN*

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*City of Tacoma municipal building. The City of Tacoma is the eighth largest employer in Tacoma, with more than 2,000 staff spread across 21 departments and offices. WIKIMEDIA*