

## 1. TOOLS FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Students created a series of tools to support City of Tacoma staff as they implement civic engagement initiatives at both the organizational and departmental level, and as the City continues to work to put the Tacoma 2025 Values of Opportunity, Equity, Partnerships, and Accountability into action.

### Civic Engagement Statement of Values

A **Civic Engagement Statement Of Values** provides clarity and direction for all City of Tacoma departments. This report offers a preliminary statement, based on our interviews; however, a statement of civic engagement values will be most effective if it is revised and adopted by City staff members.

Explicitly stated values hold people accountable to each other, and remind members of a shared public realm of their existing and aspirational commitments to one another. See Appendix E for a graphic representation of values.

These value statements were developed based upon our experiences studying the City of Tacoma's civic engagement practices:

- 1.Expanding access:** Civic engagement is an opportunity to provide resources and venues for residents to develop skills, take part in decisions, build relationships, access and take advantage of City services, and improve mutual understanding between City staff and community members.
- 2.Culture of inclusivity:** Engaging with residents is an opportunity to embrace the asset of diversity in all of the City's work. We seek to bring to the fore equitable practices by addressing uneven access and representation among all communities and by recruiting, building relationships with, and supporting diverse residents, including youth, in our partnerships, decision-making, and service delivery.
- 3.Connecting with partners and residents:** The City of Tacoma values partnership with all members of the public. Due to inequities, in terms of access to government resources, which characterize many neighborhoods, the City works to develop partnering strategies that ensure all residents gain access to government services and decision-making processes.

**4. Trust and transparency:** We recognize civic engagement as an ongoing accountability to residents in all our work, and strive to make clear commitments and to set realistic expectations around public participation, resident representation, community partnerships, and service delivery.

## Typology of Civic Engagement Approaches

A **Typology Of Civic Engagement Approaches** illustrates, describes, and categorizes the different communication and engagement methods elicited in the interviews and research. Each approach pivots around a central objective that falls along a spectrum, from participation to inclusion. Each can be utilized by City staff to identify potential areas for equity investment and improvements.

The practices and approaches provisionally identified through this project are detailed in the Findings section, entitled, Variation in Practices. In particular, the distinction between participation and inclusion highlights the fact that opportunities for resident-City co-production are more likely within sustained, programmatic interventions that allow for targeted approaches to specific groups or communities. See Appendix F for the Typology of Civic Engagement Approaches tool.

## Designing Purposeful Civic Engagement

The **Designing Purposeful Civic Engagement** tool helps staff and managers with different programmatic and service responsibilities identify how and where to put the City's shared civic engagement values of equitable policies and practices into action. A series of questions encourages reflection and suggests targeted steps among the various approaches.

The draft design tool poses questions intended to help departmental staff first clarify why they are undertaking civic engagement – its purpose, both in terms of organizational values and its function for the department's work – followed by questions that orient decision-makers toward how civic engagement should be pursued. The tool highlights where civic engagement typically requires more resourcing, as well as the functional constraints that frame different departmental responsibilities and service areas. See Appendix G for the Designing Purposeful Civic Engagement tool.

### Case Study: Equity Rationale in Budgeting Allocations

In 2014, Tacoma’s City Council and City Manager both identified equity and empowerment as key policy priorities. Simultaneously, the Tacoma 2025 visioning process foregrounded equity as one of the four key goals held by the public. Moreover, 71% of residents stated that it was “essential” or “very important” to expand access to City services and infrastructure to people of different races and ethnicities, abilities, and income levels (OEHR Annual Report). This increased attention to equity within and outside of City government led to the Council’s adoption of the Equity and Empowerment Framework in October of 2014. The framework highlights five goals, focusing on the City’s workforce, successful community engagement and service-delivery, inclusive decision-making, and support for human rights. In order to connect this policy document to regular departmental work, the Office of Equity and Human Rights worked with the Department of Finance to integrate questions about equity in the budget development process.

Initially, the process consisted of direct training around racial equity budgeting for City Council and employees in the Office of Management and Budget. As the process continued, staff integrated specific questions. For example, if a director hoped to gain a budget enhancement or reduction, that person included the question, “How will this impact equity?” According to the Department of Finance’s Director, Andy Cherullo, “You need to really need to think about [why and how your budget justification impacts equity], and if your answer is no, you have a slim chance of getting additional resources for things.”

The “department work” of budgeting is something that cuts across City departments; it also requires the thought and input of many staff and departments. This approach allows the City to systematically evaluate how equity is implemented in different departments while also acknowledging that it will, by definition, look different for each department.



Participants of a Tacoma 2025 visioning event. TACOMA 2025 VISION AND STRATEGIC PLAN

## 2. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STEERING GROUP

A civic engagement steering group serves as a learning community within the City and as a recognized leadership body to push ahead civic engagement initiatives. In addition, the inclusion of diverse community members ensures that engagement strategies are all-embracing and effective.

### Proposed Structure

While there are a variety of formal citizen commissions that provide leadership to different City departments, we recommend that this group perform a more informal governance and knowledge-sharing role. However, the group could provide advisory support to the Human Rights Commission, or to another formal body, for increased influence on policy-making.

### Participation

We recommend that the group be equally comprised of City of Tacoma staff, from a cross-section of departments, and diverse community representatives. These members should reflect the city's racial, language, and cultural diversity, and should particularly seek to reflect the needs of marginalized communities. Ideally, this group would be comprised of 10 – 15 City staff and 10 – 15 community representatives. The group will be most effective and welcoming if the participation of both internal and external stakeholders is roughly equal.

### Group Responsibilities

The authority of this group may be to provide policy recommendations, programmatic feedback, project proposal feedback, and to summarize City efforts that promote an equitable environment for the residents of Tacoma. This group will be tasked with overseeing organizational engagement strategy and policy, and with achieving objectives toward equitable civic engagement, including:

- Encourage growth as a learning community with the primary function to promote the exchange of information and to train across departments and integrate community feedback. The group could also serve in an advisory capacity to another formal body, such as to the Human Rights Commission, to generate and consult on best practices related to civic engagement.
- The adoption of the community engagement Statement of Values, and management and training around the Designing Purposeful Civic Engagement Design tool, described in the previous finding.

### **Case Study: Learning Communities**

Pioneered at MIT's Society for Organizational Learning, learning communities have been successfully implemented in a multitude of public and private-sector organizations. Defined by Senge and Scharmer (2006) as, "a group of people working together to nurture and sustain a knowledge-creating system," learning communities focus on three domains of activity:

1. Research: a disciplinary approach to discovery and understanding, with a commitment to sharing what is learned.
2. Capacity building: enhancing awareness and capabilities, individually and collectively, to produce meaningful results.
3. Practice: working together to achieve practical outcomes.

Importantly, learning communities are often comprised of a variety of different internal and external actors:

- Executive leaders: provide support for line leaders and develop learning infrastructures; they also lead by example in the gradual process of evolving the norms and behaviors of a learning culture.
- Local line leaders: undertake meaningful organizational experiments to test whether new learning capabilities lead to improved business results.
- Internal networkers: serve as the "seed carriers" of the new culture; also called community builders, they can move freely about the organization to find those predisposed to bringing about change. They also help out in organizational experiments, and aid in the diffusion of new understandings.

The group might include executives from different departments, mid-level managers, and staff members that regularly interact with community members in their work. Community representation might include a designee from each council district, as well as community members that represent historically marginalized communities.

A learning community centered around inclusive, innovative approaches to civic engagement could enable the City of Tacoma to create internal infrastructure and capacities. It could also support the development of cross-functional, cross-departmental teams in sharing the existing internal knowledge of the organization and in researching, developing, and disseminating best practices.



*Photo of Massachusetts Institute of Technology campus: site of the Society for Organizational Learning, one of this project's case studies. WIKIPEDIA*

- Input or management for the distribution of funding specific to civic engagement initiatives (see following recommendations.)
- Provide leadership and guidance for the drafting and implementation of the forthcoming civic engagement request for proposals process, which will conduct public-facing data gathering and community input.

### **3. RESOURCING**

Resourcing is an integral piece of our proposal: every initiative requires organizational support and funding in order to be sustained. We understand that the City works under significant budget constraints and we wish to reinforce that this is part of the larger movement toward implementing Tacoma 2025 and achieving equitable community development across the City. The following options are offered as potential areas of resource support, both in terms of increased organizational support and increases in direct funding for civic engagement activities.

#### **Organizational Support**

- Training and professional development opportunities to improve overall confidence and competencies of staff and to increase effectiveness of civic engagement practices, including but not limited to topics such as conflict resolution, crisis de-escalation, cultural humility, trauma-informed care, anti-racism, facilitation and hosting, collaborative project management, crucial conversations, and communications.

- Staff or consultant capacity for qualitative data analysis to interpret large amounts of public input in ways that illuminate a breadth of community perspectives, including specific feedback on limitations of current or planned civic engagement investments.
- Creation of participatory budgeting with a percentage of the City budget, empowering residents to engage fully and directly in the deliberation and decision-making of urban governance and resource allocation.
- Use of existing institutional mechanisms to prioritize continuous improvement in civic engagement, such as the inclusion of civic engagement skills and practices in job descriptions, or through the dedication of time to sustain meaningful civic engagement commitments. There are ways for resource allocation to happen without finding new sources of revenue, such as restructuring job descriptions to allow for civic engagement budget allocation, participatory budgeting to recruit others to participate, and wrapping civic engagement strategies into other revenue streams.

## **Funding**

- A dedicated budget line for civic engagement, accessible to all departments, to support investments in areas of high need where funds are lacking, or civic engagement is not currently required or prioritized.
- A staff position that provides guidance, coordination, and strategic support for the development and implementation of civic engagement investments, across the City and in partnership with external constituencies, community groups, and neighborhood residents.
- A system of justification and prioritization for civic engagement investments in the budget allocation process, potentially managed by the proposed Civic Engagement Steering Group and enlisting in one or more of the tools described above.
- A catalyst fund to support innovative proposals for civic engagement that address an existing challenge, build new relationships with residents, encourage risk-taking or experimentation, and/or create cross-departmental collaboration.

### **Case Study: Participatory Budgeting - Vallejo, CA**

The City of Vallejo's innovative approach to municipal budget allocation has made it a model for government institutions worldwide. A town of 120,000 people in the Bay Area, Vallejo established its participatory budgeting process in 2012. The process has engaged more than 20,000 residents during the last 6 years, allocating \$8.3 million in funding for 47 projects. While the process represents a small percentage of the annual budget, the impact on local civic engagement is substantive.

Participatory budgeting operates through four stages: first, residents submit ideas for projects that could improve the city; next, volunteer delegates turn ideas into proposals; then, residents aged 16 and older vote on what to submit to City Council; and finally, City Council allocates the funding for the approved projects. The process relies on a variety of levels of resident participation, with residents assuming the roles of budget delegates, steering committee members, meeting facilitators, workgroup members, poll workers, ballot counters, and outreach advocates.

In addition to increased levels of co-production, resident trust, and local democracy, Vallejo has become the gold standard for public participation and collaborative government, winning multiple awards and receiving widespread media attention.



*Vallejo, California's innovative approach to budgeting has made it a model for government institutions worldwide. PATRICK NOUHALLER*