

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND TACOMA 2025

In 2014, the City of Tacoma began planning and implementing what became *Tacoma 2025*, a living document that guides the City in its planning and growth strategies over the next 10 years. Adopted in 2015, the Tacoma 2025 Strategic Plan reflects the input of more than 2,000 Tacoma residents. The effort was an ambitious process that went beyond traditional strategies of public involvement. Through one-on-one interviews, outreach at fairs and festivals, an involved steering group of community members, surveys, online forums, and community workshops, the process engaged residents in creating a shared vision of Tacoma's future.

To maintain and expand the work that took place through the Tacoma 2025 planning process, the City Manager's Office identified a need for increased support for civic engagement across City of Tacoma government. Created by the City Manager's Office with the support of Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU), this project documents existing civic engagement practices and identifies opportunities to expand the organization's capacity for public involvement across departments, moving the City towards the goals outlined in Tacoma 2025 and the Equity and Empowerment Framework. In addition, this project is designed to inform future civic engagement work, including an upcoming Request for Proposals (RFP), within which further identification of community perspectives, needs, and desires around communications and engagement will occur.

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This report focuses on the internal civic engagement practices at the City of Tacoma, cataloguing current conditions and identifying opportunities for increased connection with the public. CITY OF TACOMA

EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

Equity has been established as a consistent guiding principle across the City of Tacoma and as a catalyst for changing the way the City conducts business, pushing the organization to move from 'business as usual' to a more innovative and transformational approach. The Equity and Empowerment Framework, adopted by the City Council in 2014, highlights "Purposeful Community Outreach and Engagement" as one of its five pillars. Tacoma 2025 also highlights equity as one of its four core values, and the document states that "all Tacoma residents must have equitable opportunities to reach their full potential and share in the benefits of community progress."

The City's commitment to equity underscores the fact that different communities may require different investments and resources in order to address the historical and ongoing effects of discrimination, inequality, and institutionalized racism.



T-Town: City Services Expo is one of the City of Tacoma's organization-wide efforts to connect with residents. The event, held bi-annually at the Tacoma Dome, introduces residents to the City services and programs of different departments. ANNEKA OLSON

In addition, the City's commitment to equity underscores the fact that different communities may require different investments and resources in order to address the historical and ongoing effects of discrimination, inequality, and institutionalized racism. Equity is thus a more ambitious goal than achieving equality. In a civic engagement context, an equitable approach ensures the contributions of all residents are valued and developed in the creation of a just and sustainable city. It also requires that some communities receive more attention than others; this is part of guaranteeing meaningful involvement of community members historically excluded from civic processes.

ADAPTING TO GROWTH

The Puget Sound Regional Council has estimated that over 80,000 people have moved to the Puget Sound region each year during the last two years. Tacoma's population was estimated at 211,277 in 2017, up from 198,397 in 2010, a growth of 6.5%, or almost 13,000 people, in just seven years. This growth is expected to increase in coming years in the South Sound, as the metropolitan region continues to add residents, and as affordability worsens and the cost of living escalates in surrounding areas.

The Puget Sound Regional Council forecasts a population increase greater than 60% by 2040 in Tacoma, indicating that local policies related to land use, transportation infrastructure, and other City services will need to adapt accordingly. Therefore, robust civic engagement methods are needed to ensure that City of Tacoma policy reflects the needs of current residents as the city grows. Such methods may also help the City achieve its sustainability, equity, and growth targets.

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INCREASING DIVERSITY

As Tacoma's population expands, it also diversifies. In 2017, 60% of residents identified as White, down from 65% in 2010; 11% identified as Latino, 10% as African-American, 9% as Asian, and 10% as a combination of these categories and/or others. This is consistent with trends

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throughout the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan region, where people of color represent 81% of population growth between 2000-2016. Nineteen percent of Tacoma residents speak a primary language other than English, and 13% are immigrants. While Tacoma’s economy is growing, in the first quarter of 2018, the unemployment rate (6.1%) and the poverty rate (17.9%) remained higher than the larger metropolitan area (4.7% and 10.9%, respectively).

These demographic factors indicate that increased capacity for equity, and the building of civic trust and political will, continue to be critical as Tacoma’s population grows and becomes even more diverse.

COMMUNITY SURVEY – HIGHLIGHTS (2018)

In January 2018, the City of Tacoma conducted its biennial Community Survey to assess citywide satisfaction with City services. The survey was offered in English, as well the next five most commonly spoken languages in Tacoma--Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Khmer. This enabled the City to understand where language access might also contribute to disparities. The results indicate ongoing disparities in resident satisfaction with City government and civic engagement practices:

- There is significant variation by neighborhood in overall satisfaction with City services, ranging from a high of 80% in North and West Tacoma to a low of 62% in parts of Downtown, Northeast, and South Tacoma.
- There is major variation in confidence in government by race, with only 34% of Black residents indicating that their experience with City government has been “excellent or good,” compared to 60% of White residents and 68% of Latino residents.
- Overall, more than two thirds of respondents attended a City event of some kind during the previous year (69%), but only 28% of respondents attended a City meeting or made a complaint or inquiry (33%) over the previous year.
- Households making more than \$50,000 per year were more likely to attend a City event, meeting, or to make a complaint or inquiry than households earning less than \$50,000.

These results highlight the different experiences that diverse neighborhoods, racial communities, and income groups have with City services—likely compounded by historical patterns of institutionalized racism, residential segregation, and income disparity.

KEY CONCEPTS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Here, we outline three key concepts that have been important for our analysis: co-production; the distinction between participation and inclusion in civic engagement process; and targeted universalism.

Co-Production

Co-production is a broad term that acknowledges the essential importance of a variety of stakeholders in influencing, carrying out, or helping to shape future iterations of a program, project, or event. For example, a fully developed process of co-production between community members and government is likely to entail local government agencies and local community groups jointly organizing, funding, and leading a local initiative. Decision-making opportunities for stakeholders or community members, such as membership on advisory boards or commissions, are opportunities for residents to co-produce outcomes. More informal co-production might include people who adopt or modify behavior in accordance with initiatives, who help to promote programs and events, or who generate community support. Importantly, effective co-production can help governments achieve their own goals, while also leading to improved trust, with fewer conflicts with stakeholders, better policy outcomes, and a shared responsibility for the equitable distribution of resources.

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DISTINGUISHING PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

Civic engagement best practices emphasize that the amount, type, and role of public participation usually needs to vary depending on the context or project. For example, the continuum used by the International Association of Public Participation (www.iap2.org) outlines the ways in which degrees of participation vary depending on what the city intends to do with the input it receives, and how realistic and feasible it is for the public to be deeply involved in a given project or decision-making process. They term this “the promise to the public” (see figure to the right).

Another distinction is between the concepts of participation and inclusion, put forth by Quick and Feldman. They note that participation emphasizes input from the public within a more limited scope, focusing on the content of programs and policies. Inclusion, on the other hand, is “continuously creating a community involved in coproducing processes, policies, and programs for defining and addressing public issues.” The distinction also can have important differences in scale: often, participation practices are more achievable at a broader scale, while inclusion requires the involvement of smaller, more dedicated groups.

TARGETED UNIVERSALISM

Adopted as part of Tacoma’s Equity and Empowerment Framework, targeted universalism is a strategy that seeks to achieve universal goals through targeted approaches. According to scholar John A. Powell, a targeted universal approach in civic engagement should be inclusive of the needs of all, but with special attention to the situation of and impact on the most marginalized and underrepresented communities and groups.” The goal is for more than improved diversity, which alone may not address the underlying structures that perpetuate systemic racism and other inequities. Recognizing that neither universal nor targeted

The Spectrum of Public Participation

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advise and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Websites • Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberate polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Advisory committees • Consensus building • Participatory • Decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen juries • Ballots • Delegated • Decisions

The Spectrum of Public Participation, generated by the International Association of Public Participation, illustrates the different degrees of participation that can occur depending on project or context. INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

methods have been effective in achieving lasting transformative change, this shift in thinking reworks the standard approach of universal strategies and employs, in its place, targeted strategies to reach universal goals. Beyond recognizing disparities, targeted universalism also includes the alteration of institutions and structures—in a civic engagement context, this would include the design of a process rather than merely establishing a device for gathering input on the content of that process.