



# TOWN OF STOW PLANNING BOARD

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES & RESOURCES

Authored by the Community Engagement Working Group (see Appendix B)

*Note. Photo of Stow Town Center by StowTV, ©2022*

# TOOLS & RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

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# INTRODUCTION

In the context of municipal governance, effective and inclusive community engagement harnesses the diversity of interests and provides agency and visibility to all community members. These Community Engagement Guidelines (CEG) provide measurable strategies informed by the principles of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion for use by the Planning Board.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES<sup>1</sup>

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In 2021, the MAPC (Metropolitan Area Planning Council) identified the core values of equity, resilience, prosperity and stewardship to guide the work of Massachusetts cities and towns.<sup>2</sup> We uphold these values in all aspects of the CEG and recognize their importance in the democratic process; furthermore we recognize that in order to shape effective policy, a culture of trust and communication between Stow citizens and our public employees is paramount.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GOALS

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Inclusive and equitable community engagement will ensure equitable representation by:

- Using **shared language**<sup>3</sup> of mutual respect and understanding;
- Authentically representing all voices in the community;
- Ensuring voices that have historically been left out of community decision making are not only included, but able to feel empowered to participate in the visioning, planning, and monitoring of the work in an authentic way.
- Creating opportunities to engage residents in the comfort of their own community spaces and/or through trusted leaders;
- Strengthening awareness of town government processes and the role of citizen engagement;
- Building trust across communities;
- Creating planning outcomes that have a diverse base of support;
- Building community support for recommendations, goals and action steps in town initiatives;
- Improving accountability and transparency in Stow;
- Providing context, methods, and tools for effective community involvement;
- Creating consistency in all engagement processes;
- Provide suggestions for metrics for determining effectiveness of community engagement that allows for flexibility in the calibration of scope, details, and timeframes in engagement approaches over time.

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1 see Appendix B

2 see Appendix C

3 see Appendix B

# 5 STEPS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The process of community engagement follows 5 steps of guiding questions and recommendations to ensure confidence in the results of the effort.

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4	STEP 5
<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>STAKEHOLDERS</b>	<b>TACTICS</b>	<b>PERFORMANCE</b>	<b>ASSESS</b>
Establish purpose, preparedness, and parameters	Identify and define a list of stakeholders	Identify community engagement tactics	Establish performance metrics	Assess the success of community engagement

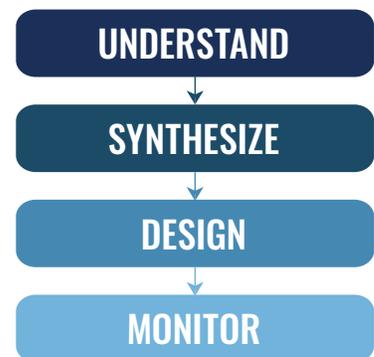
# 1 ESTABLISH PURPOSE, PREPAREDNESS, & PARAMETERS OF YOUR PROJECT

<p><b>Describe your issue/topic.</b> What is it that you have been asked to produce or consider?</p> <p><i>(e.g. write a Comprehensive Plan, make a recommendation on a building code, identify budget priorities, address a zoning request, review an existing policy and make recommendations....)</i></p>	
<p><b>What are the parameters of your project as you understand them at this point?</b></p> <p><i>(e.g. what is your timeline, what resources do you have available, what existing policies inform your work?)</i></p>	
<p>What is the mandate of your committee? <b>What values guide your work?</b></p>	

## DETERMINE THE PHASE OF THE PROJECT & WHY YOU NEED A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The planning and decision-making processes have 4 phases. Which phase(s) is your committee designing this community engagement plan for?

- Understanding** the need & context of the issues/project/needs.
- Synthesizing**, analyzing, and interpreting gathered information.
- Designing** a plan, imagining what is possible, selecting a solution.
- Implementing, **monitoring**, and adapting.



## 2 IDENTIFY AND DEFINE A LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS

1. Look at local data such as census and past projects. Consider demographic groups such as:

age      race      gender      ethnicity      religion      income      education  
 home ownership      sexual orientation      marital status      family size  
 health      language      disability status      education      other \_\_\_\_\_

2. Reach out to stakeholders to learn of potential other stakeholders you may not have considered.

3. Reflect on what arenas of our community listed below may be impacted and who are stakeholders within each arena

- a. The natural environment
- b. The built environment
- c. Education
- d. Health
- e. Economic
- f. Access to resources or opportunities
- g. Safety
- h. Housing
- i. Transportation
- j. Social/ Cultural/ Community
- k. Other arenas:

Given the above arenas of impact, identify stakeholders who have a potential interest in your project.

Stakeholder Group	Potential Interest in Project

### 3 IDENTIFY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

What existing resources and challenges are in place for stakeholder engagement?

What local partners and groups already represent stakeholders you have identified?	
What working group members or town government officials can assist with community engagement activities?	
What existing relationships does our committee already have with the community?	
What financial resources are available?	
What challenges might prevent stakeholders from engaging?	
Other	

### DETERMINE TACTICS, IDEAS, AND OUTREACH METHODS

Take information gained in steps 1–3 and use Figures A1, A2, & A3 (Appendix A) to fill out this table:

Stakeholders	Tactics	Engagement level

## 4 ESTABLISH PERFORMANCE METRICS

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A successful engagement process includes metrics that enable managers to track progress and gauge the effectiveness of selected approaches and techniques (See Appendix A, Figure A5). Metrics provide an opportunity for improving strategies to increase engagement during a project or reflect on engagement approaches once a project is complete.

## 5 ASSESS

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Below is a list of guiding questions to ask yourself if the community engagement strategy failed to provide the anticipated engagement results, or more engagement is necessary:

1. Was the stakeholder analysis accurate? Were any groups missed, or under/over-represented?
2. Were the chosen methods of engagement tailored to the key stakeholders?
3. Do any of the results collected suggest a lack of understanding or education on the topic addressed?
  - a. Are there opportunities for education prior to seeking engagement?
  - b. Could the issue or topic be framed in a different manner to connect to the interests of the stakeholder groups identified?
4. Were there opportunities to fit varying stakeholder comfort levels? For example, public, private, in-person and/or virtual settings and approaches?
5. Could third party delivery or representation help to improve comfort in participation.

# THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WORKSHEET

After completing all steps in the document, use this worksheet to develop a community engagement plan for your project.

## STEP 1

<b>Project</b>	
<b>Values</b>	
<b>Stage of Project</b>	

## STEP 2

<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	
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## STEP 3

<b>Tactics, Ideas, and Outreach Methods</b> (see Fig. A1, Fig. A2, Fig. A3)	<b>Levels of Engagement</b> (see Fig. A1)	<b>Resources, Opportunities, Challenges Addressed</b> (see Fig. A4)

## STEP 4

<b>Performance Metrics</b> (see Fig. A5)

## STEP 5

<b>Monitoring &amp; Assessment</b>

# APPENDIX A: FIGURES

## FIGURE A1: TACTICS AND ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

Once your level of engagement is determined, use the provided tools to reach out to stakeholders.

<b>INFORM</b>	<p>A decision has been made, and the community needs to be provided with balanced, objective information, but doesn't have the ability to make changes to the decision.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fact sheets</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> brochures</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> flyers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> flyers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> websites</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> social media</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> short videos</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> email/listserv</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> trainings</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> forums</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> phone banks</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> infographics and storyboards</li> </ul>
<b>CONSULT</b>	<p>The town is asking the community to respond to information, options, ideas, and to provide feedback that will shape the outcome.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Advisory councils</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> workshops</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> survey polls</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> open houses</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> interviews</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> observation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> tabling</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> charettes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> journey maps</li> </ul>
<b>INVOLVE</b>	<p>Community members' aspirations, experiences, and concerns inform in all phases of the project. Decision-making is shared.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participatory action research</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> visioning workshops</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> community mapping</li> </ul>
<b>COLLABORATE</b>	<p>The community participates in all phases: identifying needs/focus, collecting information and data, synthesis and analysis, and creating potential solutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participatory workshops</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> human-centered design</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> focus groups</li> </ul>
<b>EMPOWER</b>	<p>The community designs, plans, and develops the work and the town provides support and resources to facilitate the effort</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Community-initiated activities equipped or empowered by the town</li> </ul>

Level of Engagement:	
Stakeholders:	
Tactics:	

## FIGURE A2: IDEAS FOR ATTRACTING PARTICIPATION

- Gift Cards
- Interpreters
- Ambassadors
- Childcare
- Transportation
- Newspaper
- Door Prizes
- Attend Events where stakeholders participate
- Food
- Competitions
- Mini grants
- Socially distanced events
- Partnerships with community agencies

## FIGURE A3: OUTREACH METHODS

As you develop a community engagement strategy, consider the following methods to reach various types of common stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder Group	Outreach Methods / How to Reach Stakeholder Group
<b>Residents with English as a second language</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships (organizations, groups, schools, health centers)</li> <li>• Translate request materials into other languages and contact information on outreach materials</li> <li>• Cultural events • Cultural associations</li> <li>• Immigration attorney offices</li> </ul>
<b>Residents with Disabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships • State Disability commissions</li> <li>• Community health centers • Council on Aging</li> </ul>
<b>Households with Young Children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PTO meetings • Communication through the school system</li> <li>• Childcare institutions • Early education centers</li> <li>• Cultural organizations • Libraries • Shelters • Food pantries</li> <li>• Food service programs • Sending information in backpacks</li> </ul>
<b>Older Adults</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council on Aging • Management companies</li> <li>• Flyers • Outreach from town committee</li> </ul>
<b>Youth and young adults (18–34-year-olds)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School civics clubs • Social studies classes</li> <li>• After school programs • Summer camps</li> <li>• Social media • Targeted FB/Instagram ads</li> </ul>
<b>Residents Working More than one job</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce development centers • Career centers</li> <li>• Economic development and Industrial Commission</li> <li>• Management companies • Transit hubs</li> </ul>

<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	<b>Outreach Methods / How to Reach Stakeholder Group</b>
<b>Racially and Ethnically Diverse Populations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizations • Cultural Institutions</li> <li>• Places of Worship • Diversity Groups in Municipalities</li> </ul>
<b>Small Business Owners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chamber of commerce • Walking tour</li> <li>• Off-hours quick calls • Personal relationships</li> <li>• Short email questionnaires • Facebook groups</li> </ul>
<b>Renters/cost-burdened owners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management companies • First time homebuyer classes</li> <li>• Ready Renter Lists • Grocery store bulletin boards</li> <li>• Contacts with MetroWest Collaborative Development</li> </ul>
<b>New Residents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome packet from town</li> <li>• Facebook groups • Committee contacts</li> </ul>
<b>Introverts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold meetings remotely • Post public meetings to YouTube</li> <li>• Provide ample notice for public meetings and requests for feedback</li> <li>• Anonymous voting • 1:1 meetings</li> <li>• Private feedback opportunities</li> </ul>

## FIGURE A4: IDENTIFY RESOURCES, OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND SCALE

### RESOURCES

Local partners and groups already representing stakeholders you have identified.

Availability of working group members or town government to carry out community engagement activities.

Relationships we already have with the community.

Financial resources.

### OPPORTUNITIES

How might we learn from our stakeholders?

How might our engagement raise awareness of community assets?

How might our engagement build investment in our work?

How might our engagement build relationships between stakeholders?

What other opportunities might stakeholder engagement provide?

### STAKEHOLDER BARRIERS

Government involvement feels intimidating;

Unfamiliarity with municipal processes;

Lack of trust in the governmental establishment;

Feel their voice will not be heard or are reluctant to participate due to unfamiliarity with other participants;

Hesitation due to feeling insufficient familiarity about a specific topic or concern that they cannot clearly express themselves;

The questions on digital surveys may inform or lead the respondent to the answer;

Reliance on surveys may limit the possibilities and complexities of an issue;

Costly to participate in events for parents who have to pay for childcare;

Language barriers;

Attendance conflicts with work schedules (atypical work schedule);

Lack of an association or sense of belonging within the broader Stow community;

Cannot associate impact on daily life;

Lack of easily accessible, regularly updated information on Town projects and efforts.

## FIGURE A5: PERFORMANCE METRICS

The following metrics can inform the development and tracking of community engagement strategies.

Metric	Ways to measure	Some quantitative/qualitative targets
<b>Number of individuals engaged</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting attendance/participation</li> <li>• Number of individuals who participate in engagement activities</li> <li>• Number of survey responses received</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of individuals participating in at least one engagement activity over the course of the project;</li> <li>• Diversity of or number of differing engagement opportunities offered.</li> </ul>
<b>Number of individuals informed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media reach, e.g. views/likes/shares/reach</li> <li>• Webpage views</li> <li>• Mailing list entries</li> <li>• Number of people invited to activities</li> <li>• Requests for information</li> <li>• Meeting attendees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of individuals informed about the process</li> <li>• Variety of venues and strategies for reaching identified stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Number of people deeply engaged</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1:1 or group interviews</li> <li>• In-depth conversations</li> <li>• Focus Group attendees</li> <li>• Project Management Meetings</li> <li>• Amount of time people spend engaging on topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of individuals deeply engaged in process</li> <li>• Key champions identified to take on further outreach/implementation</li> </ul>
<b>Diversity of interests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sectoral or jurisdictional representation in engagement activities</li> <li>• Type of group engaged</li> <li>• Focus or interest area of group or individual engaged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple connections with community members from each major group (as described above)</li> </ul>
<b>Inclusivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age, race, gender, ethnicity</li> <li>• Residency, e.g., year-round vs. seasonal, owner vs. renter</li> <li>• Current vs. prospective residents</li> <li>• School population engaged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation is representative of Stow demographics</li> </ul>

# APPENDIX B

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This document was authored by the Community Engagement Working group, including members of the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Group (JEDI), Nashoba Area Social Justice Alliance (NASJA), and the Stow Planning Department. The Community Engagement Working Group would like to thank and recognize Briar Biddle for the design of this guide.

These guidelines borrow from best practices identified and refined by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) as well as from the following plans, strategies, and toolkits:

- [Town of Brookline Community Engagement Plan](#), October 2020
- [Town of Nantucket Community Engagement Plan](#), December 2020
- [City of Issaquah, Washington Public Engagement Toolkit](#), February 2017

In addition, the Community Engagement Working Group would like to thank Dr. Raul Fernandez, Lecturer, Boston University, for his advice guiding the initiation of this project.

## BACKGROUND

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1. **Guiding Principles:** From 2021–2022, members of JEDI, NASJA, and staff in the Planning Department began researching best practices in community engagement by attending workshops provided by the MAPC, meeting with municipal officials experienced in community engagement planning, and reviewing relevant examples from towns that have implemented similar efforts.

The research led to the creation of the Stow Planning Department’s Community Engagement Working Group for the purpose of drafting a plan for further review by Stow Departments, Boards and Committees. The Community Engagement Working Group anticipates these resources and guidelines to be a starting point, as the Town of Stow is committed to *fostering a community where all feel a sense of belonging regardless of race, class, ethnicity, religion, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, income, and other dimensions of diversity*. This document is to serve as an idea for officials and residents to refine and amend as Stow changes and adapts to new challenges and opportunities.

2. **Shared Language:** The words, terms and language expressed in Stow’s community engagement processes will reflect a mutual respect and understanding for the individual experiences and cultural context of Stow residents. Language that signals historical bias or exclusion will be avoided and replaced with terms that can adapt to our evolving social norms. Shared language that supports inclusivity will be used for the purpose of building bonds in the community – an indication of community optimism and strength.

# APPENDIX C

## RESOURCES

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- [MAPC Core Values](#)
- [Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision Making](#)
- [Liberating Structures](#) – “easy-to-learn [microstructures](#) that enhance relational coordination, trust, [and] foster lively participation in groups of any size, making it possible to truly include and unleash everyone.”
- [Canva.com](#) – Templates for creating brochures, community mapping, journey mapping, agendas: a free design platform that is used to create social media graphics and presentations.
- [Appreciative Inquiry](#)
- Focus Groups
- Observation
- Interviews
- Mapping
- Participatory Action Research
- Human-Centered Design: [National Equity Project–Liberatory Design](#)