

Seattle City Council

Open Government Committee

Public Engagement Plan

Purpose of the Citizen Engagement Plan

The purpose of the Seattle City Council's Public Engagement Plan (PEP) is to improve the level of service provided to our constituents in three ways;

- Improve the Council's outreach to constituents on specific processes and issues,
- Make information more accessible through the use of new technologies, and
- Develop and implement a means of evaluating progress on increasing citizen engagement so that lessons learned inform future practices.

Process and Completion of the Plan

The Public Engagement Plan contains three primary objectives that the Open Government Committee is endorsing, with full implementation beginning in 2010. The Plan also identifies key actions to be implemented in 2010 under each objective.

Once the committee approves a final DRAFT of the plan, Council will seek public input on the plan and other actions taken by the Open Government Committee. The plan will then be finalized no later than December 2009.

Currently the committee is scheduled to meet in September and December with a soon to be announced special evening meeting for the purpose of hearing public input in early December. The committee will also consider the need for additional meetings in 2010.

Target Audience

Initially, the target audience for the plan is considered to be those currently engaged in the City's legislative processes *and* those who might become involved in legislative matters given increased opportunities and information.

The PEP is intended to increase the number and diversity of people participating in public discourse on local issues. The target audience for this plan will therefore deserve reexamination as community needs change and participation likely evolves over time.

I. **OBJECTIVE: Enable citizens to more easily engage in the legislative process around specific issues by removing barriers and improving outreach.**

Gather information from constituents on their preferences for venues, format, and context for dialogue with Council.

- Develop and circulate a survey to identify the means by which Council can establish a connection with more constituents
- Conduct interviews with representatives from community organizations
- Identify and address the most common barriers to participation shared by respondents, including but not limited to the following
 - Language
 - Dates and times of meetings and public hearings
 - Location of Council events
 - Format of input being requested
- Summarize the results of information gathered in time to inform a final draft of this plan

Develop strategies to meet the needs and respond to information gathered from constituents.

- Identify actionable ideas from the survey and interview results summaries
- Structure town hall meetings to suit stated community needs

Codify a set of best practices for town hall meetings in order to maximize participation.

- Co-partnering with community organizations
- Minimum notification requirements
- Geographically diversity of meeting locations
- Community participation in the development of agendas
- See additional details under OBJECTIVE II

II. OBJECTIVE: Increase venues for dialogue between Council and constituencies.

On an ongoing basis, make available individual or pairs of councilmembers to attend discussion oriented programs of membership organizations with regular, high turnout.

- Establish criteria for organizational selections
- Identify and contact appropriate organization(s)
- Conduct a pilot program with one large organization beginning in early 2010
- Expand to include additional organizations that meet establish criteria

Establish standard practices for citizen engagement outside City Hall.

- Require a minimum of *at least five meetings per year* (Budget meetings, town hall meetings, issue specific public hearings, or evening committee meetings) to take place *outside of City Hall*
- Hold at least one of the required minimum five meetings in each of the following areas of Seattle: NE, NW, Central, SE, and SW Seattle. Advanced calendaring (minimum six weeks public notice), promotion and co-sponsoring with community partners
- Subject matter to be based on interests of partnering organizations for that meeting

Establish standing times for citizens to meet and Councilmembers.

- One councilmember each month, February through October beginning in 2010
- Format and location of the councilmember's choosing
- Open to the public
- Notice provided no less than one week in advance

III. OBJECTIVE: Improve Electronic and Print Media Outreach.

Make better use of existing city resources.

- Review Council website and individual Councilmember websites, focusing on ways to improve interest, interactivity, relevancy, timeliness, the ability to comment, give opinions, etc.
 - Daily polls
 - prominent comment sections
 - Solicitations for feedback
 - “News of the Day” section (timely news and information)
 - “Did you know” section
- Utilize CM’s e-mail lists and the list of those receiving Council agendas for weekly e-lets, focused on communicating key Council business, hot topics, public hearings, avenues for citizen involvement/input, upcoming opportunities, etc.
- Work with Seattle Channel to support greater citizen engagement and interest. Consider: *Mini-documentaries* (5-7 minutes) that help explain issues the Council deals with – featuring one or two CMs in each; *Personality/Profile pieces* of each CM that allows them to talk about their key issues. (Eric Liu or someone similar could interview)

Engage in using social networking tools.

- Establish Seattle City Council Twitter account to be managed by the Council Communications Manager.
- Establish individual Twitter accounts for each Councilmember and encourage them to tweet on a regular basis (Some are already doing this.)
- Establish Facebook page – Consider a focus or main initiative of the page, i.e. Fiscal stewards of the budget, Living in a Green City – either a branded-type campaign or a specific issue focus.
- Establish Council blog/News Stop that could pull posts from individual Councilmember’s blogs, as well as populate with content aimed at educating the public, sharing the latest news and information and

soliciting feedback (News of the Day, Did you know...?) This would have a button/box on the homepage of the main Council page but would go to a page powered by Wordpress so we can offer RSS Feeds and provide a one-stop page for current news, information, blog posts, hot topics, links for Councilmember pages when they've posted new content, etc.

- Establish a Seattle City Council YouTube channel so we can have another avenue to promote and where people can find videos of the Council in action. (Currently reserved: Seattle City Council as a channel).

Make better use of existing media and community resources.

- Ensure all neighborhood blogs are on media distribution list. Focus on localizing issues for bloggers, when feasible.
- Continue outreach and relationship building with newspaper reporters and contacts. (dailies, weeklies, DJC, college campuses, etc.)
- Continue outreach and access/posts to news websites/blogs (PI, PI-Globe, Seattle Times, Crosscut, Publicola, Slog, Daily Weekly, etc.)
- Research outreach opportunities that may exist with neighborhoods, community groups, NGOs and communities of color – either through their existing communications or by adding to Council e-lert list.
- Capitalize on public calendar opportunities (newspapers, online)
- Explore opportunities with locally-produced news shows – UpFront, KCTS programming, etc.

APPENDIX A

Future Steps for the Committee

1. Confirm or edit the current definition of target audience.
2. Approve DRAFT Engagement Plan to be released for public comment.
3. Review and approve community survey methodology.
4. Identify a means of more accurately defining the current target audience for the Plan.
5. Codify a set of best practices for engagement activities outside of city hall.
 - Public hearings
 - Budget meetings
 - Committee meetings
 - Committees of the whole
6. Consider holding additional committee meetings after hours and or outside of City Hall.
7. Once the Engagement Plan is finalized, create a means of defining success and evaluating actions implemented.