



Frequently Asked Questions Achieving Equitable Outreach and Engagement for All

On November 22, 2016, Mayor Murray signed the 2017-18 City Budget that was adopted November 21, 2016 by Seattle City Council. Included in his budget is an ordinance and resolution that advances the City toward achieving equitable outreach and engagement.

What is the legislation?

The budget includes an ordinance outlining a new citywide framework for community engagement, including the creation of the Seattle Community Involvement Commission to advise Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (DON) on a range of issues. It also updates and amends existing Seattle Municipal Code language and references, as well as removes language requiring staffing of Neighborhood District Councils.

The accompanying resolution now requires all City departments, with assistance from DON, to develop and periodically update community involvement plans that make participation more accessible to the public and consistent with the following public outreach and engagement principles and plans called out in Executive Order 2016-06:

- Expand inclusive outreach and engagement.
- Create well-designed, responsive and culturally-relevant public involvement plans.
- Build community capacity for meaningful participation and authentic outreach and engagement.
- Provide a wide range of opportunities for obtaining information and involvement in decision-making processes.
- Achieve greater equity with meaningful involvement of under-served and under-represented communities.
- Effectively and efficiently manage the use of all resources, including community members' time.

Why is this change needed?

The City of Seattle's past community engagement system had not been significantly updated for more than 20 years. While steps had been taken to improve inclusive community engagement across the City, the need persisted for more equitable and accessible community engagement processes within City departments.

As Seattle's population continues to change, the City needs to continually revisit and expand its public engagement efforts in order to ensure growing demographic groups are represented in City decision-making processes and that barriers discouraging people from participating are eliminated.

Equitable engagement is essential to any community involvement process, especially for under-represented and under-served communities, including, but not limited to, renters, immigrants and refugees, communities of color, people experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ, low-income households, youth, and seniors.

We recognize that there are barriers to participation which is why we want to create more opportunities, not less. We also know that not every neighborhood and community is the same; some are starting at different places, which is why we will allocate our resources differently to level the playing field.

We have an incredible opportunity before us to rethink and reimagine how we interact with one another. It's not just about how the City talks with communities, but it's about how communities can talk with and learn from one another.

How will the 13 District Councils and the City Neighborhood Council be impacted?

For many years, the District Councils have been staffed by District Coordinators. Beginning in January, 2017, the Department of Neighborhoods will redeploy staff to concentrate on capacity building and helping to mobilize communities.

District Councils and the City Neighborhood Council can continue to exist and operate "as is." They will have the ability to request assistance from the City and may continue to interact with the City as any other neighborhood organization.

Do the District Councils have a future?

YES! Their future is whatever the District Councils want it to be. The community will drive that decision, and we will help support. In fact, we are already working on developing training opportunities for all community groups that will help with organizational development and sustainability. This assistance can help with the transition, and topics may include meeting facilitation, membership recruitment, and strategic communication, including social media.

How will community grants be reviewed and ranked?

The Department of Neighborhoods is currently studying options and new models for reviewing and ranking community grants. New processes will be in place for 2017. DON will work with the Community Involvement Commission (more information below) to assess the impact of these changes and advise on process improvements.

What role will Neighborhood District Coordinators have?

The goal is to have Neighborhood District Coordinators redeployed to focus on the new business needs of the department as outlined in the ordinance. They will continue to support community engagement efforts in neighborhoods across the city.

What is the role of the new Community Involvement Commission?

The commission will advise and make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on the development of plans, policies, regulations, strategies, and community grant funding processes that advance equitable public engagement and civic participation. The commission will be established in the first quarter of 2017.

Who will be on the Community Involvement Commission?

The commission will be comprised of 16 commissioners – seven appointed by the Mayor, seven appointed by the City Council, and two appointed by the commission. All commissioners will need to be confirmed by the City Council and the commission will be staffed by DON.

How is DON working with other departments to achieve equitable outreach and engagement?

The Department of Neighborhoods is working collaboratively with all departments on creating equitable community involvement plans. DON has begun facilitating this work by providing consultation, support, and oversight on each department’s outreach and engagement efforts in order to ensure that the City is providing consistent and accessible information that:

- Is easily understandable by all residents.
- Encourages and provides clear opportunities for public response.
- Provides a wide range of opportunities for public participation.
- Achieves greater involvement of under-served and under-represented communities.

How will the City’s outreach and engagement be different?

In order to do things differently, we recognize that not everyone has the same resources or time to commit to engagement. Not everyone can attend a community meeting and that should not bar people from participating. Through meetings, conversations, and surveys, we have heard what people want and we are developing tools to respond to those needs.