



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of September 29, 2022

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** September 16, 2022
From: Bill Eisenhauer, Head of Engagement
Subject: Engagement Framework – All Our Voices Equity Update

RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorse the proposed Engagement Framework.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The strategic direction for the City's equity journey was established through the Declaration of Principles and Values in the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, which states "Welcoming diversity and fostering a spirit of inclusion and equity in everything we do."

In June 2019, Council gave specific direction to embed distributional, procedural, structural and inter-generational equity into the City's corporate policies guiding hiring, staff training and professional development, procurement and civic engagement.

In June 2022, Council endorsed the City's Equity Framework to guide program and policy design and implementation to ensure that underserved and marginalized populations are experiencing the same benefits and outcomes as the general population.

The proposed All Our Voices Engagement Framework (attached as Appendix A) will be the community engagement pillar of this important initiative by updating the City's corporate policies that guide civic engagement.

This equity and inclusion update builds on the City's current framework, adopted in 2018, and aligns with considerations to advance engagement practices identified in the Equity Framework, the recent Governance Review, the Welcoming City Strategy, the Accessibility Framework, the International Decade for People of African Descent initiative, the Youth Strategy and other City plans.

The City worked with Simon Fraser University's Morris J Wosk Centre for Dialogue, recognized experts in the field, on this update to ensure it continues to deliver high-quality community engagement informed by a diversity of perspectives, identities and lived experiences.

Over a 14-month period, SFU's Centre for Dialogue and the City's Engagement Department, with support from the City's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, held a series of community conversations, roundtables and small group discussions with equity-seeking communities and individuals to explore what the City could do differently or better when planning equitable,

inclusive engagement. A community survey broadened the engagement and gave residents an opportunity to reflect on the project and provide their input.

Staff took the time required to “learn-by-doing”, applying best practices in equitable engagement to this engagement work and exploring new approaches to building reciprocal relationships.

The results of what was heard, along with best practices research, has informed the All Our Voices Engagement Framework.

Through this work, the City is building a place where everyone feels welcome and is able to participate in engagement opportunities that help inform decisions that impact their lives.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's endorsement of the proposed All Our Voices Engagement Framework.

BACKGROUND

In 2011, the City of Victoria adopted the International Association for Public Participation's core values and started to develop our engagement best practices.

In 2015, Victoria was recognized for its leadership in engaging community with the IAP2 Organization of the Year Award. In 2017, Victoria was one of the first municipalities in Canada to develop an Engagement Framework. This was co-created with community and has been continually refined through in-the-field practice since that time.

The framework has strong commitments to being welcoming, inclusive and accessible, including strategies to ensure those commitments are delivered.

We are updating the Engagement Framework to embed equity into the City's corporate policies guiding civic engagement and reflect the commitments in the City's new Equity Framework.

While the City's current Engagement Framework stands as a leading example among municipalities across the country, there is still much work to do to ensure everyone feels welcome and is able to participate in engagement opportunities to help inform decisions that impact their lives.

To help ground this work in current best practices, the City worked with Simon Fraser University's Morris J Wosk Centre for Dialogue, a national leader in inclusive, equitable engagement. Their guide *Beyond Inclusion - Equity in Public Engagement*, developed in 2021 following Canada-wide consultations, includes eight principles for meaningful and equitable inclusion of diverse voices in public engagement.

Victoria is the first municipality in Canada to take this work done by SFU's Centre for Dialogue and apply it in a municipal context. The SFU Centre for Dialogue and the City co-designed the engagement process to complete the update, with close collaboration from the City's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

The SFU Centre for Dialogue has taken the findings from this engagement process, along with best practices from their Beyond Inclusion Guide, direction from Victoria's Equity Framework, Victoria's Governance Review, Welcoming City Strategy, the Accessibility Framework, Youth Strategy, Senior's Action Plan, and others and woven them into the new All Our Voices Engagement Framework.

The goal of the All Our Voices equity and inclusion update to the Engagement Framework was to explore what the City could do differently or better when planning equitable, inclusive engagement.

This work is about exploring how the City plans and hosts engagement processes that are safe and open to everyone in our community, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, country of origin, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, ability and other unique characteristics.

Engagement objectives were to:

- Create opportunities to begin the process of building reciprocal relationships with equity-seeking communities.
- Engage with equity-seeking communities and the broader community, on an Inclusion and Equity update to the City of Victoria's Engagement Framework.
- Incorporate community feedback, along with best practices from Simon Fraser University, and emerging direction from the City's Equity Framework and other guiding documents to inform the inclusion and equity update to the Engagement Framework.
- Redefine what a successful engagement process looks like. Success is typically measured by the number of people reached (quantity vs quality). We will focus on the quality of the relationship that we build, the quality of the information shared and the depth of the understanding developed.

Two phases of engagement took place between February 2021 and the June 2022. The focus was on connecting and listening to equity-seeking communities and individuals who in many cases have not had their voices heard in past engagement opportunities, along with participants from the broader community.

Phase 1: Community Conversations and Best Practices Research

The City hosted 22 Community Conversations with organizations who represent or serve equity-seeking groups as a way to start building reciprocal relationships. City staff also worked to understand emerging best practices in equitable, inclusive engagement through studies with SFU and IAP2, additional research and by participating in sessions such as the Global Series on Inclusive Engagement.

Phase 2: Community Roundtables, Coffee Chats and Community Survey

The City hosted a series of roundtable discussions with equity-seeking groups, targeted coffee chats and a community survey. This engagement was an opportunity for the City to "learn by doing". Many best practices in equitable, inclusive engagement were piloted, including partnering with community organizations and removing as many barriers to participation as possible. A community survey was also held to bring more people into the conversation.

Community engagement activities included:

Community Conversations - The Engagement and EDI teams co-hosted online meetings with 22 equity-seeking groups with the goal of starting to build reciprocal relationships and to begin the conversation about what equitable and inclusive engagement could look like.

Welcome Day Pop-Up Engagement Station – Engagement and EDI staff interacted with over 65 participants, sharing information about City programs and beginning the conversation about what the City could do to make engagement welcoming, easy to participate in and safe.

Online Community Roundtable - This curated online dialogue with community members from equity-seeking communities explored what equitable engagement could look like.

In-Person Community Roundtable and Tour of City Hall - Participants in this session represented a diverse range of individuals with lived experience who live in Victoria. Food was shared and Iftar boxes were available at the end of the session for anyone fasting during Ramadan. The evening roundtable explored what equitable engagement could look like.

Small Community Roundtables - A series of three small community roundtables provided an opportunity to meet with equity-seeking communities at times and locations that worked well for them.

- A roundtable for new Canadians was co-hosted by the Intercultural Association of Greater Victoria.
- The Issamba Centre brought together members of the Black community for a dialogue.
- The Chinese Community Services Centre co-hosted a session with 14 community leaders, which evolved into a larger All Our Voices pilot project exploring what a reciprocal relationship could include.

Coffee Chats - Coffee Chats were a tool to ensure we didn't miss hearing from important perspectives. One session was held with a community member who has health challenges and is precariously housed. Another was with a community member who engages actively with Black and racialized youth and works closely with people experiencing homelessness.

Community Idea Boards - Community Ideas boards were placed in key locations around the City, including two libraries, the Crystal Pool and Fitness Centre and City Hall to give people an opportunity to post ideas and suggestions.

Community Survey - A community survey was hosted on the City's Have Your Say engagement platform to invite a wider cross section of equity-seeking community members to share ideas and feedback. It was promoted widely by community serving organizations that participated in the community conversations. The survey was also an opportunity for anyone in Victoria to contribute ideas or feedback. As part of the pilot project with the Chinese Community, the survey was translated into Cantonese and was available through the Chinese Community Services Centre. An interesting side note is that for all of the people who completed the translated survey (10), this was the first time they had participated in a City of Victoria engagement program. These are the voices we haven't been hearing from.

Feedback and research from Phase 1 and Phase 2 was considered and analyzed by SFU's Centre for Dialogue and has been central in informing the All Our Voices Engagement Framework.

The updated Framework centers *inclusion* and *equity* at the heart of City engagement processes. It aligns with the City's broader work on equity, including its Equity Framework, which is grounded in the concepts of decolonization, anti-racism, disability justice, gender diversity and dignity. It sets out a vision for how the City speaks with and listens to the community of Victoria, and how we can welcome all voices and honour different ways of knowing,

In addition to other guiding direction for equitable engagement, the framework now includes Seven Principles for Engagement created to guide the City's engagement practice. They seek to make public participation more transparent, equitable and effective. The principles are based on what we have heard from our communities during the *All Our Voices* engagements, along with best practices on public participation from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	COMMITMENT TO THE COMMUNITY
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will work with communities to identify and address barriers to your participation in engagement • We will consider which voices are missing • We will provide you with the information and resources you need to participate meaningfully alongside us in our engagements • Where possible, we will provide various channels for providing input
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will strive to inform and engage all communities who are impacted by changes or decisions being considered • Where possible (when a specific community is highly impacted by a potential decision) the City will involve the community in the design of the engagement through outreach and working groups
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will take guidance from the Accessible Events Toolkit and work with community members to make our engagements more accessible
Welcoming and Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will work to create engagement spaces where everyone feels that they belong • We will create safe(r), welcoming and respectful engagement spaces and processes where everyone feels comfortable sharing feedback • We will establish clear guidelines for respectful conduct
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will set and manage expectations by telling you what level of involvement you can expect, what decisions have already been made and what's on /off the table for discussion • We will share clear and concise summaries of what we heard from communities and check that all feedback was accurately captured • We will inform you of how your inputs were used to inform decisions
Timely and Clear Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will aim to provide you with notice of engagement processes as early as possible and at least two weeks in advance so that you have time to learn about the issue and actively participate • We will provide materials for review in advance where relevant • We will strive to use plain and accessible language in our communications and present you with balanced and relevant information • In many cases, we will provide two levels of information – a brief summary as well as more technical information for those who want more detail
Continuous Learning and Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will incorporate the lessons we learned into future engagement processes • We will seek your feedback on how we are doing • We will engage with you to update or refresh this Engagement Framework so that we integrate new learnings and practices

One of the other important things we heard from community as part of the All Our Voices conversations was the need to redefine evaluation and ongoing learning. A new addition to the framework is a commitment to evaluate the process using the seven Guiding Principles at the end of every engagement project. This feedback and evaluation process allows us to track how well objectives were met, discuss lessons learned and share recommendations for future processes.

Alignment with Supporting Strategies and Plans

Over the past several years, the City has developed a number of strategies and action plans with accompanying implementation plans. The All Our Voices Engagement Framework is aligned with considerations for equitable and more inclusive engagement activities identified in other existing approved plans, strategies and actions that are currently underway across the organization.

These plans are focused on traditionally underserved populations or support the community as a whole, including underserved populations, and include the following:

- Equity Framework
- Accessibility Framework and Short-Term Action Plan
- Welcoming City Strategy and Action Plan
- Transgender, Non-Binary, and Two-Spirit + Inclusion Action Plan
- International Decade for People of African Descent Initiative
- Seniors' Action Plan
- Youth Strategy
- Governance Review

Tools and Resources for Staff

Beyond the guidance in the Engagement Framework itself, numerous resources for staff are being developed by SFU's Centre for Dialogue and the City including an All Our Voices Toolkit which includes templates and case studies to support capacity building. A glossary will provide a set of common definitions.

SFU's Centre for Dialogue will also deliver a training workshop for City staff on the All our Voices Engagement Framework and use of the Toolkit resources to help build staff's skills to develop and successfully implement the framework to deliver equitable engagement.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

The All Our Voices Engagement Framework is the guiding corporate policy for civic engagement outlining the approach and areas of focus for advancing equity in civic engagement. Its implementation will be led by the Engagement Department, who will work with all departments to build internal capacity. Staff in many departments work on engagement with the community and all have a role to play in advancing this work. At times and depending on the engagement work being undertaken, other external organizations and groups may be required to assist the City in gathering input from certain communities, including Indigenous populations.

This Engagement Framework is intended as a living document – it will evolve as the conversation on equity and our own learning evolves – and will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. As such, staff recommend that Council endorse the Framework.

Accessibility Impact Statement

The Engagement Framework is aligned with the City's Accessibility Framework and Action Plan. The City's Accessibility Advisory Committee was consulted in its development and input from the committee has been incorporated into the framework. It is part of the mandate and core work of the Engagement Department to create engagements where everyone feels welcome and is able to participate to help inform decisions that impact their lives. One of the seven guiding principles of the City's All Our Voices Engagement Framework is Accessibility, with a commitment to work with communities and seek their feedback on how the City can make engagements more accessible and remove barriers to participation.

2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan

The 2019-2022 Strategic Plan includes a Declaration of Principles and Values Statement for "Welcoming diversity and fostering a spirit of inclusion and equity in everything we do".

Under the Strategic Objective #1 Good Governance and Civic Engagement one of the outcomes established by Council is that "There is broad engagement with a diversity of participants conducted in a respectful and inclusive way."

Impacts to Financial Plan

Embedding equity considerations in engagement requires a commitment of time and resources to deliver an equitable engagement experience. Resources required to implement equity and inclusion in engagement will be included in project budgets for Council's consideration as part of future financial planning processes.

CONCLUSIONS

The All Our Voices Engagement Framework embeds equity into the City's corporate policies guiding civic engagement and reflects the commitments in the City's new Equity Framework. It will guide the City's work to build a place where everyone feels welcome and is able to participate in engagement opportunities that help inform decisions that impact their lives.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Eisenhauer
Head of Engagement

Melinda Jolley
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Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager

List of Attachments

Appendix A – Draft Engagement Framework
Appendix B – All Our Voices Engagement Summary