What is engagement?
An active, expansive relationship between the city and the community that includes any level of public participation; this typically encourages two-way dialogue.

What is public participation?
Public participation is a type of engagement that usually occurs in decision-making processes. It can define minimum standards, such as public hearings, comment periods and open records. It also can indicate a range of public involvement approaches from informing to partnering and collaboration.

The City of Boulder recognizes that good public processes and engagement make local government more effective and responsive to the community it serves. Traditionally, the city has assigned individuals within specific departments to planning and facilitating engagement opportunities with the community. There have been numerous successes, as well as efforts, including some in recent years, that have not met the expectations of the community and decision-makers.

In January 2016, City Council recognized improvements were needed in how the city engages, informs and includes the public. Council directed staff to involve the community in developing recommendations to enhance engagement. The city created a 14-member Public Participation Working Group, supported by one council member and two city employees. The group met more than 30 times over 18 months. This working group presented a comprehensive report to council in August 2017. This can be found at www.bouldercolorado.gov/city-council/public-participation-working-group.

The report identified several problem statements, defined five core principles of ‘best in class’ engagement and made recommendations for improvement. While the report provided additional details and strategic counsel, the group made two over-arching recommendations:

1. Change the culture of engagement in Boulder
2. Utilize a comprehensive decision-making process

### FRAMEWORK GUIDE:

- **Section 1: WHY**
  Explain the purpose of this framework and the city’s engagement mission

- **Section 2: HOW**
  Outlines six strategies that will guide the city’s work

- **Section 3: WHAT**
  Lists some of the specific work items expected in the first two years, including the adoption of a clear decision-making process

- **Section 4: WHO**
  Lists the city employees and groups who will collaborate in support of enhanced engagement

- **Section 5: RESULTS**
  Demonstrates the process the city will follow to measure its progress
IDENTIFYING WHAT GOOD ENGAGEMENT IS

City Council supported the working group’s findings and provided some additional input at a study session on Aug. 28, 2017. Based on this, city staff developed a plan to introduce a more comprehensive, consistent and strategic approach to civic engagement in Boulder.

The result is this Engagement Strategic Framework. This document incorporates specific recommendations made by the working group. It also draws upon the experiences and expertise of staff and best practices that are supported by an organization recognized globally for its commitment to meaningful engagement. That organization is the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

This framework will guide staff’s work over the first 24 months of implementation. It features clear strategies as well as some specific tactics that roll up to one or both of the working group’s core recommendations.

This important work ahead starts here – with this “why” statement: The City of Boulder is working to improve its engagement culture and processes because it recognizes that local government makes better decisions and creates more responsive programs and services when the community it serves has a meaningful voice. The best engagement is appropriately scaled, consistent and reliable, inclusive and respectful of all participants.

This framework represents the City of Boulder’s commitment to building on the lessons of its past by creating engagement opportunities that support high performance and the industry’s gold standard, while also encouraging the innovation and creativity that are hallmarks of our community.
Culture change is an ambitious goal that could lead an organization down a wide variety of paths. To focus its efforts, the city identified six strategies it believes will help establish a strong foundation for this work. These strategies are aligned with organizational and community values, as well as many of the suggestions the working group made about potential action areas.

Culture changes requires authenticity, a clear vision, focus areas that support that vision; and consistency. It also takes time.

Boulder intends for its work to be innovative, and these strategies will serve as touchstones as new ideas and priorities emerge. When considering tactics and techniques, the city will evaluate the extent to which they support one or more of the strategies before deciding if they are the “right” approach. This is particularly important if the ideas require new or re-allocated resources.
To adopt and sustain a culture and practice of meaningful civic engagement in the City of Boulder to achieve outcomes that reflect our community’s concerns, aspirations and shared values.

**SIX STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS**

**LEARN TOGETHER**
Build skills and a shared understanding of core principles, practices and processes associated with high-quality community engagement.

**HELP PEOPLE KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT**
Implement consistent processes to support the creation and use of effective and appropriately-scaled engagement plans. Communicate clearly about opportunities for timely and meaningful public input and engagement. Follow set meeting schedules as much as possible. Define roles.

**CULTIVATE RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS**
Enhance existing relationships with those affected by city decisions and programs through positive and constructive dialogue. Pilot new approaches to invite and encourage all impacted individuals and groups to participate in ways that are welcoming and comfortable to them.

**BE TRANSPARENT**
Develop and implement techniques that increase transparency into decision-making and democratic processes. Help everyone understand constraints and the variety of perspectives on any given issue and explain how the feedback received during a process shaped the outcome.

**USE THE RIGHT TOOLS**
Assess our current and existing engagement tools and techniques and choose those that most effectively allow us to reach desired audiences. Recognize the value of a mix of digital platforms, printed materials and in-person methods.

**EVALUATE AND EVOLVE**
Demonstrate a commitment to innovation and continuous improvement through honest evaluation of clearly defined metrics as well as ongoing creativity in the pursuit of new ideas. Make Boulder an international model of meaningful participation.
NEAR-TERM ACTION ITEMS

Each year, the city creates work plans designed to accomplish specific objectives for that year. These two pages include some of the work items the city has identified for the first two years of this program, consistent with its six strategies for success.

LEARN TOGETHER

**2017 (4TH QUARTER)**
- Create base materials to explain IAP2 principles, spectrum and new city processes
- Survey and choose five to six pilots to test the nine-step engagement wheel
- Develop a civic education program
- Understand engagement best practices for high-conflict issues

**2018**
- Create and share full toolkit of handouts, templates and cheat sheets
- Launch pilot projects
- Implement civic education program
- Train leadership team and council members
- Train Engagement Coordination Committee

**2019**
- Assess and address areas of additional learning and innovation

HELP PEOPLE KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

**2017 (4TH QUARTER)**
- Create and present framework to council for feedback
- Define roles and write charter for Engagement Coordination Committee

**2018**
- Digital depiction of decision-making timelines and engagement opportunities
- Re-evaluate role of boards and commissions in engagement and plan appropriate training to support this
- Educate community members about city’s new approach, the levels of engagement and the promise that accompanies each

**2019**
- Create an empirical resource estimate tool

CULTIVATE RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

**2017 (4TH QUARTER)**
- Start community conversation about civil discourse guidelines
- Gather follow-up feedback from recent Perceptions Assessment on Boulder as an inclusive and welcoming community

**2018**
- Develop and ratify civil discourse guidelines
- Study and begin to develop more culturally sensitive engagement processes
- Explore partnerships with ambassadors to underrepresented groups
- In-person town hall concept development and pilots
- Further gaps assessment to identify those who are not participating and why

**2019**
- Quality of life and engagement study for a group not typically involved in city issues
BE TRANSPARENT

2017 (4TH QUARTER)
- Creation and use of consistent feedback reports, including “if not, why not” explanations

2018
- Process improvements to how community members contact council and how this correspondence is shared with the public
- Creation of an online resource that shows how council members vote on specific topics

2019
- Explore innovative approaches other cities and organizations are using to increase transparency through video, websites and other communication platforms

USE THE RIGHT TOOLS

2017 (4TH QUARTER)
- Assess responses to RFP and select digital engagement platform
- Develop consistent questions that help evaluate process, rather than outcome, satisfaction

2018
- Share toolkits and engagement approach online with public
- Implement digital engagement platform, work processes and strategic understanding of best uses
- Explore telephone town hall technology and best practices
- Web refresh/new navigation approach (in partnership with IT and Communication)
- Explore FB Live Q and A sessions with council members and key staff

2019
- Assess companion digital engagement tools
- Develop clear project process guidelines for subcommittees
- Establish consistent criteria for working group participation

EVALUATE & EVOLVE

2017 (4TH QUARTER)
- Establish format for, and culture of, debriefs after engagement efforts
- Define base outputs for pilot projects and other engagement efforts
- Creation of initial metrics for overall engagement program

2018
- Creation and use of ongoing surveys to evaluate engagement satisfaction and performance

2019
- Re-evaluate strategies and work focus areas based on what has been learned
A DEFINED PROCESS FOR MAKING DECISIONS

The second core recommendation the working group made was significantly more concrete than the first. The public is sometimes confused about how decisions are made, the group found, in part because there is inconsistency. This leads to a lack of trust or clarity about how community members’ input will be used. Too often, it seems to make no difference at all.

In response to this feedback, the group identified nine steps that contribute to good decision-making and designed a “wheel” to illustrate how it should work.

With this framework, the city is committing to piloting this approach. As with many tactics, the approach supports more than one strategy area. The city views it as a component of helping people know what to expect and being transparent.
BOULDER’S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

STEP 1 Define the issue before embarking

STEP 2 Determine who is affected

STEP 3 Create a public engagement plan

STEP 4 Share a foundation of information and inquiry

STEP 5 Identify options

STEP 6 Evaluate options/develop recommendation

STEP 7 Make a decision

STEP 8 Communicate decision & rationale

STEP 9 Reflect & evaluate

1. Process Assessment Stage
2. Planning Stage
3. Decision Stage
4. Options Stage
5. Shared Learning Stage
WHAT

TEACHINGS & TOOLS TO GUIDE ENGAGEMENT PLANS

Step 3 of Boulder’s decision-making process calls for the creation of an engagement plan. City staff will utilize the teachings of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) to guide all future plans.

IAP2 was founded in 1990 to support organizations that are committed to meaningful public participation. IAP2 views public participation as any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and uses public input to make decisions. Public participation includes all aspects of identifying problems and opportunities, developing alternatives and making decisions. IAP2 provides both practical guidance and adaptable materials to promote best practices methods and learning in this field.

One of IAP2’s hallmarks is a tried and tested five-step process for creating strategic engagement plans. These steps build consistency and compel the process designer to develop a practice of 1) gaining internal commitment, 2) assessing impacted individuals and groups and their corresponding perceptions, 3) selecting an appropriate level(s) of engagement, 4) defining the decision-making process and engagement objective(s), and 5) designing an engagement plan.

In 2016, 25 city staff members received IAP2 Planning and Techniques training. Several departments have begun to implement components of this system and have already experienced improved outcomes.

“I am excited to build on the city’s history of engagement and public participation with new ideas and strategies.

There’s a lot to be achieved by helping those of us on staff and community members know what our standards are and what they can expect.”

—Brenda Ritenour, Boulder’s neighborhood liaison
As an example, staff overseeing the Prairie Dog Working Group process in 2016 and 2017 began implementing many of the IAP2 steps as part of its efforts. As an outcome of this application, a clear and credible process is being followed, and relationships between stakeholders and staff remain respectful and productive. The staff team preparing for the 2018 Open Space and Mountain Parks Master Plan update is also working hard to develop its engagement plan around these best practices, making it much easier for community members to see when key points of engagement will occur.

There is solid alignment between the Core Principles outlined previously in this framework and IAP2’s Code of Ethics and Core Values. Additionally, IAP2 provides an established set of practices that other governments, some in our region as well as others around the world, are leveraging. This means Boulder can readily access trainers, facilitators and a network of skilled practitioners. Our community can both learn from — and contribute to — this body of work.

To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding a problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

To obtain public feedback on public analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

To work directly with the public throughout a process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of a preferred solution.

CHOOSING AN APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

IAP2 teaches its members to make strategic decisions about the level of engagement they plan to use. The level will vary depending on the magnitude or complexity of the decision, the needs of the decision-makers, the expectations of those who will be impacted, the amount of time available for a process, and resources. The city will follow a modified version of IAP2’s engagement spectrum to help identify the role of the community in project planning and decision-making processes.

INFORM

To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding a problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

CONSIDER

To work with the public to understand their needs, the public process, and ensure that public concerns and aspirations are considered.

INVOLVE

To work directly with the public throughout a process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

COLLABORATE

To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and implementation of a preferred solution.

increasing impact on the decision

INFORMATION

PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC

PARTICIPATION GOAL

Adapted from ©IAP2 International Federation 2014.
The city has created two dedicated positions — an engagement manager and an engagement specialist — with the responsibility of improving and strengthening the culture of civic engagement. This team’s success will require a balance of leadership, increased coordination, thoughtful prioritization, shared learning and collaboration with fellow city employees and with the Boulder community. In collaboration with others, these individuals will support effective engagement by:

**ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE TEAM**

- Promoting innovation in the design of engagement opportunities and tools; ensuring that community members receive feedback about how their input is used
- Coaching and consulting with departmental project teams as they create and implement effective engagement plans
- Creating a vision for success in the short- and longer-term as well as processes that support continual evaluation and learning
- Networking and cultivating positive relationships with other public participation practitioners, key stakeholders and community influencers
- Serving as skilled facilitators for select projects – and deepening the bench of trained facilitators across the organization
- Creating a vision for success in the short- and longer-term as well as processes that support continual evaluation and learning
- Creating and maintaining training programs and tool kits to support decision-makers, internal staff and community members
- Expanding the city’s engagement commitment beyond a project-specific focus to more general relationship-building and listening
- Identifying opportunities to include more voices in city processes and developing approaches that make all feel welcome and invited to participate
- Identifying potential pilot projects; assisting project teams to identify an appropriate level of engagement and related techniques
- Networking and cultivating positive relationships with other public participation practitioners, key stakeholders and community influencers
- Creating a vision for success in the short- and longer-term as well as processes that support continual evaluation and learning
- Creating and maintaining training programs and tool kits to support decision-makers, internal staff and community members
- Expanding the city’s engagement commitment beyond a project-specific focus to more general relationship-building and listening
ENGAGEMENT COORDINATION COMMITTEE

This is an existing committee of approximately 25 members from a cross-section of city departments. These employees share an interest in improving engagement in the organization and community. This committee will continue as a core element of this framework. Under the guidance of the engagement manager, members will allocate five to eight hours a month to tasks that contribute to the city’s integrated engagement efforts. Possible areas of contribution include:

- Researching best practices and recommending potential new strategies and innovative ideas
- Brainstorming process improvements to increase communication and shared learning
- Serving as liaisons between the engagement team and their departments
- Planning and facilitating integrated and strategic engagement events
- Assisting in the creation of effective training programs and toolkit materials
- Serving as peer support for other work groups as they develop more meaningful and inclusive engagement plans
- Helping to evaluate the program, consistent with agreed upon metrics

Several city departments have designated employees who plan and conduct outreach for specific projects or work groups. These individuals will continue to be responsible for outreach and engagement efforts assigned to them.

Because the individuals in the two centralized positions cannot design, conduct and evaluate every engagement effort the city is planning in any given year, these department partners will coordinate with the engagement resource team to strategize activities, aiming for consistent engagement across the city. Department-level engagement staff members bring a tremendous amount of expertise, often have existing relationships and channels of communication. Furthermore, the budgets for their outreach and engagement work come from their departments, so they should be making the decisions about how these resources are spent.

ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH STAFF IN DEPARTMENTS

Several city departments have designated employees who plan and conduct outreach for specific projects or work groups. These individuals will continue to be responsible for outreach and engagement efforts assigned to them.

NEIGHBORHOOD & COMMUNITY LIAISONS

The city employs two liaisons — one who works with residents and neighborhoods and another who works with the University of Colorado as well as other local institutions and groups — to identify potential partnerships, maintain positive relationships and resolve issues. Another employee is working with city departments to enhance the experiences of volunteers who engage with local government by donating their skills and time.

These work areas support engagement in its broadest sense and are designed to have a positive impact on city and community interactions of all kinds. Each of these employees also have some work plan items that specifically support this framework’s six strategy areas.
# RESULTS

## MEASURING THE CITY’S PROGRESS

To ensure that the strategies are making a positive difference and the city’s efforts are having a meaningful impact, staff has identified a set of measurable and informational indicators for the first year of implementation. The following desired outcomes will be evaluated based on the methods outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>SUCCESS OUTCOMES</th>
<th>HOW OUTCOMES WILL BE MEASURED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learn together</td>
<td>The city achieves a high level of staff, decision-maker and community clarity around engagement levels/promise to the public.</td>
<td>End of class surveys for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help people know what to expect</td>
<td>The city communicates clearly with the community about levels and processes of engagement, resulting in increased understanding and satisfaction by those who choose to participate.</td>
<td>Survey of community members with a consistent set of process-related questions, including one about whether individuals feel like their input was heard and/or know how their input was considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivate respectful relationships</td>
<td>The city has made comprehensive stakeholder assessment part of its routine engagement planning process. It also has gained an increased understanding of its inclusivity gaps and has developed strategies for addressing them.</td>
<td>Development of baseline data through demographic analysis, identification of relationships that need nurturing, barriers, and observations about tone and tenor of participation in correspondence and in meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be transparent</td>
<td>The city consistently demonstrates the connection between feedback/input and criteria and decisions. It improves access to council correspondence and council member voting information, modeling transparency around key decisions.</td>
<td>Survey of community members with a consistent set of transparency questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the right tools</td>
<td>The city offers a more diverse array of easy-to-use options for individuals to learn about processes and programs, give input and see how that input is used. It balances in-person and online engagement opportunities to meet diverse needs.</td>
<td>Online analytics tracking number of visits and bounce rate to site/platform, survey of community members with consistent set of questions about venue choice and design of sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate and evolve</td>
<td>Evaluating effectiveness of work during and after processes has become standard practice in the city, and this information is consistently shared with the public.</td>
<td>Analysis of process improvements, compilation of evaluations and existence of 2019 strategies based on assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FACTORS THAT WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED

Culture change takes time, and the Public Participation Working Group advised the city to be transparent and clear about expectations and any limitations. In keeping with this, staff has identified three proposed indicators that will not be a part of its ongoing evaluation.

Existence of continued disagreement or dissatisfaction with outcomes, especially for more controversial issues

While it is expected that general relations between the city and the Boulder community will improve through this program, there will continue to be a wide variety of viewpoints about specific policy decisions and outcomes in Boulder. This diversity of thought is an important part of any democracy. When the city measures its progress, it will look at levels of process satisfaction rather than outcome satisfaction.

Amount of engagement or percentage of projects that fall into categories of Involve or Collaborate

The City of Boulder already conducts a high volume of engagement and public processes. This framework is not intended to increase these efforts just to achieve more “points.” In fact, if done in a more coordinated and strategic way, it is likely there could be “less” engagement — but the engagement that occurs will be more targeted and meaningful for decision-makers, staff and community participants. No value will be placed as to where projects fall on the city’s engagement level chart (see page 9). Some projects are appropriate at levels of Inform or Consult, while others require more of an Involve and Collaborate approach, either in their entirety, or during some phases, or with individuals who might be especially impacted. Through strategic planning, the city will endeavor to answer the question: “What is the appropriate level of engagement given the desired objectives?”

Length of time it takes to complete engagement plan

The city’s decision-making process may appear to have additional steps, leading some to conclude that quality engagement will inherently take more time. This is not necessarily the case, and the length of time for a process will not be considered a “badge of honor.” Instead, the city will utilize early steps in the process, like clearly defining its why statements and including all impacted individuals, so there is clarity throughout the remaining parts of the process. This is expected to lead to efficiencies. At the same time, it is important to understand that for some projects, especially those that are more complex, it will be important to build in an adequate and realistic timeline to engage the community in a meaningful way.
The framework was adopted by Boulder City Council on Nov. 21, 2017, with a request for some revisions. This version reflects these edits, which were accepted in May 2018.

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