

GUELPH NEEDS MORE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Municipal elections are a time for citizens to influence the future of the City. City plans, policies and services are not neutral. They impact different residents differently. Being aware of different impacts is an important part of developing policies that account for these differences. This factsheet¹ is about community engagement—how the city involves community members in local decision making—and how we can do better in Guelph if we think more about the diverse experiences of Guelphites.

Why Do We Need an Inclusive Approach to Community Engagement?

City staff and councillors make decisions that have huge impacts on our lives, in wide-ranging areas such as property taxes; utilities (e.g. hydro); land use planning and zoning; emergency services; parks and recreation; public art; public transportation; and economic development.

How residents are affected by these decisions varies depending on factors such as age, gender, and ability.² So collecting information from a wide range of perspectives gives us a fuller understanding of problems and possible solutions. For instance, women³ tend to know how well city services work together because they access those services regularly as caregivers (e.g. Which bus routes will get them from their kids' daycare to work, or from the playground to the public library, and when?).⁴ Many women also know first-hand the value of city funded social services, because most social service providers are women, and women are more likely to work as volunteers.⁵ While many women do participate in a variety of ways, many others are not able to participate in the city's community engagement efforts because they are busy caregivers, lack the necessary experience or resources, have been taught that public planning is primarily men's business, or are concerned about their confidence and safety in public. Some residents are also limited from participating in public decision making because they experience social stigma for reasons such as their physical or mental health.⁶ These same residents have unique experiences that can inform and improve city-level decision making when community engagement efforts are able to gather their input.

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<https://vote.guelph.ca>

If consultation processes included spaces for low-income, and or New-Canadian, and/or racialized moms (sometimes single parenting); and if those processes made outreach efforts to older adults, and folks with disabilities... many community members would feel better about the decisions. And more included... And if planning processes were informed or steered by folks from some of these marginalized communities....

-Personal communication with GNSC staff

How Are We Doing Community Engagement in Guelph?

We have a Community Engagement department consisting of two highly trained staff members who are guided by a collaboratively developed *Community Engagement Framework*.⁷ Other city departments can ask the community engagement staff for their expertise when planning and hosting community engagement efforts. *Staff Reports* to City Council include a "Consultations" section so councillors know how the public has been consulted.

Community Engagement staff invite and gather public feedback using tools such as an online engagement platform (www.haveyoursay.guelph.ca), interviews, focus groups, working groups, user-centred design processes, meetings, information tables at public events, and many others. They travel around Guelph to talk to people, and try to enable participation by providing childcare and bus tickets. They collaborate with local organizations, and coordinate advisory committees. However, the Community Engagement department would benefit from having more internal capacity to promote their work, and evaluate who they are reaching, and how effective their engagement efforts have been at reaching a diverse cross section of the population. Guelph has a *Diversity Strategy* that includes a commitment to "plan and deliver services that are reflective of our community's interests"⁸, but no funds have been approved to support the *Strategy's* implementation.

The Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition (GNSC) hosts information events to put residents in contact with councillors, by-law officers, firefighters, and other public officials. These are

important relationship-building opportunities, but don't allow for serious, facilitated discussions.⁹ Organizations such as the GNSC are not funded to facilitate community engagement with residents, even though this happens in other cities such as nearby Cambridge.

In all cases, municipal authorities should ensure that clear and accessible information is available. That is a premise and a basic requirement of democratic life.

-A. Michaud¹⁰

How Can We Do Community Engagement Better in Guelph?

To move towards more inclusive community engagement, we can ask the City to:

1. Equip Community Engagement staff with the resources to do more comprehensive promotion and evaluation of their efforts. Collecting community engagement evaluation data helps to ensure broad public participation in decision making.¹¹
2. Require external contractors hired by the city to facilitate community engagement to demonstrate their equity and inclusion expertise in their proposals to the city.
3. Add a "Social Impacts" section in the Executive Summary of *Staff Reports* to City Council, to highlight this as a priority.
4. Provide regular clear language training for all city staff to help make information coming from City Hall more accessible to all residents. This includes dedicating resources to making technical information available and accessible.
5. Dedicate resources to implement our City's *Diversity Strategy*, including funding local organizations to facilitate meaningful dialogues between citizens and councillors.

What Can I Do to Promote More Inclusive Community Engagement?

Ask your ward candidates:

- What is the value of the city doing community engagement that is more inclusive of diverse voices?
- How do you think we can ensure diverse voices are listened and responded to as part of community engagement efforts in Guelph?
- Where in our ward can you help to improve community engagement?
- What can Guelph do to ensure that City Council and Advisory Boards reflect the diversity of our community?

¹ This is one of three factsheets, produced through a collaboration between the Canadian Federation of University Women - Guelph Chapter and L. Levac at the University of Guelph. They were written and revised by L. McMurtry, B. Ryan, T. McKeeman and L. Levac. We are grateful to all the people who provided us with information, and who are working to make Guelph a safe and fair city for all. We humbly acknowledge our work in the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit.

² City of Ottawa, City for All Women Initiative. (2008). *Gender Equality Lens: Promoting Equality and Inclusion for the Full Diversity of Women in the City of Ottawa* (p. 15). Available at: <http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/sites/default/files/publications/genderequalitylensguide-08-en.pdf>

³ We have used the word 'women' to be brief, but recognize that there is much diversity among women based on age, race, ability, Indigenous identity, and experience with poverty, among other factors.

⁴ City of Ottawa, City for All Women Initiative. (2008). *Gender Equality Lens: Promoting Equality and Inclusion for the Full Diversity of Women in the City of Ottawa* (p.4). Available at: <http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/sites/default/files/publications/genderequalitylensguide-08-en.pdf>

⁵ Adapted from City of Ottawa, City for All Women Initiative. (2008). *Gender Equality Lens: Promoting Equality and Inclusion for the Full Diversity of Women in the City of Ottawa* (p. 4). Available at: <http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/sites/default/files/publications/genderequalitylensguide-08-en.pdf>

⁶ Wilmer, S. ARCH Representative. (2018, March). *Women on the Bridge Panel*, Guelph, ON.

⁷ City of Guelph. (2015). *Community Engagement Framework*. Available at: http://guelph.ca/wp-content/uploads/CEF_Framework_2015.pdf

⁸ City of Guelph. (n.d.). *Diversity Strategy* (p. 23). Available at: https://guelph.ca/wp-content/uploads/Diversity_Strategy_2012.pdf.

⁹ Personal communication with Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition staff (GNSC), June 2018.

¹⁰ Michaud, A. (2004). *A City Tailored to Women: The Role of Municipal Governments in Achieving Gender Equality*, Ottawa (p. 13). Available at: https://www.fcm.ca/Documents/reports/Women/A_City_Tailored_to_Women_The_Role_of_Municipal_Governments_in_Achieving_Gender_Equality_EN.pdf

¹¹ Smith, B. et al. (2008). *Promoting Good Local Governance: Tools to Support Environmental Sustainability, Gender Equality and Social Cohesion* (p. 17). Available at: https://www.fcm.ca/Documents/tools/International/Promoting_good_local_governance_Tools_to_support_environmental_sustainability_gender_equality_and_social_cohesion_EN.pdf