



GREEN
MUNICIPAL
FUND

FONDS
MUNICIPAL
VERT



TIPS ON INTEGRATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INTO URBAN FORESTRY

Community engagement is a key component of urban forestry. Deciding what trees to plant where and how to manage them has important impacts on the people who live, work or play nearby. Urban forestry projects are stronger when diverse perspectives and experiences shape them.

This tip sheet outlines strategies you can use to choose how and when to engage people in your community around urban forestry projects and provides examples of how to do so in a meaningful and inclusive way. These strategies will help you communicate with residents and other interested parties and prepare high-quality project proposals and funding applications.

A program of/
Un programme de la



Funded by/
Financé par



TreeCanada

WHAT ALL URBAN FORESTRY PROJECTS SHOULD INCLUDE

Community engagement is a crucial aspect of most urban forestry projects. Identifying and developing distinct engagement strategies can provide new insights into how different groups value urban forests and address any concerns that may arise. Taking the time to involve individuals or groups will generate stronger project outcomes, including maximizing the benefits of newly planted trees and ensuring that trees are well maintained. Good proactive engagement can also build capacity and enthusiasm to support the long-term management and protection of the urban forest.

HIGH-QUALITY PROJECTS OFTEN:

- Identify residents that may be impacted by or interested in a proposed urban forestry initiative and engage them **early on in project design**. Participants may include Indigenous communities and organizations, individual residents, schools, utilities and local businesses as well as volunteer groups.
- Distinguish between different types of engagement, including **internal** and **external**. They include other municipal departments, operations staff and council members as part of the engagement strategy to strengthen project design, achieve co-benefits and ensure the project is aligned with other municipal priorities.
- Offer **diverse methods of engagement** tailored to different audiences, considering barriers such as language, time of day and accessibility. They seek advice from community-based organizations on ways to overcome these barriers and design (or co-design) inclusive engagement opportunities.
- Leverage **municipal communication tools** such as social media, websites, digital engagement platforms, print media and newsletters to ensure broad reach.
- Develop a **clear communication plan** for each participant group that explains how and why they will be engaged, who will lead the engagement and how the outcomes of the engagement will shape the project.
- Value **community knowledge** and integrate community wants and needs into project design and implementation. They provide **feedback mechanisms** so that participants understand how and where their input is being used in the project.

DEPENDING ON THEIR SCOPE, HIGH-QUALITY PROJECTS SOMETIMES:

- Involve **Indigenous individuals, organizations and rights holders** in planning and decision-making, including selecting culturally significant tree species and incorporating Indigenous languages and knowledges into signage or educational materials.
- Engage participants and rights holders as **team members or partners**, rather than simply consulting them or informing them about the project.
- Gather **letters of support or other written evidence of collaboration** from partners and rights holders.
- Involve local community groups or individual members of the public in **planting, monitoring and maintaining** trees.

What is inclusive community engagement?

Inclusive community engagement involves practices that reduce barriers to participation, empower diverse groups with decision-making and focus on building relationships to engage meaningfully and intentionally.

This type of engagement is an important way to ensure that equity-deserving groups benefit from and contribute to urban forestry projects.

To learn more about ways to integrate inclusive practices into community engagement, review Climate Caucus's **Community Engagement Handbook**, which includes strategies for engaging various equity-deserving groups.

You can also learn how to centre tree equity in urban forestry plans and practices in our factsheet, **Advancing tree equity and growing community canopies**.

HOW TO PLAN YOUR APPROACH FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

When developing your community engagement plan for urban forestry projects, be sure to identify all the participant groups and rights holders that will be involved in or impacted by the project and provide a **clear and specific description** of how and why they will be engaged. Explain any methods you will take to ensure the engagement enables broad participation and will generate meaningful outcomes.

The **Spectrum of Public Participation** offered by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an effective tool to help guide community engagement methods. It presents five levels of engagement ranging from Inform to Empower.



The table below shows examples of how various engagement methods¹ can be categorized according to the IAP2 spectrum.

| Level of engagement | Examples |
|---|--|
| Inform: You will provide or have provided the group with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and/or solutions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Using broad communication channels (e.g., radio, social media, website updates) to share regular project updates with community members.■ Distributing flyers or handouts to residents and local businesses near where the new tree planting project is taking place.■ Hosting a booth at community events to share information about urban forestry priorities and upcoming projects. |
| Consult: You will provide or have provided opportunities for feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Collecting feedback via online surveys or forums on community priorities for a new urban forest management plan.■ Holding open houses to answer questions about residential planting programs. |
| Involve: You will work or have worked directly with the group throughout the process to ensure their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Running workshops with local non-profit community groups to design and implement a planting project along an active transportation trail.■ Hosting education sessions with students at a local elementary school to teach them how to plant and care for fruit trees as part of a community food forest project. |
| Collaborate: You will partner or have partnered with the group in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Partnering with a local Friendship Centre to co-design a healing forest and outdoor gathering space.■ Convening a citizen committee to select new sites and species for future planting projects. |
| Empower: This group will have/has had final decision-making power. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Providing guidance and financial or in-kind support to community-led projects that seek to enhance local green spaces. |

© Federation of International Association for Public Participation 2024. All rights reserved. This work was created with contributions from Lewis Michaelson, Martha Rozelle, and Doug Sarno. www.iap2.org.

When developing your engagement plan for different participant groups, consider where your planned methods fall within the spectrum and if this is the appropriate level of engagement for each group. The amount

and type of engagement should depend on the nature of your project, the level of impact the project will have on members of your community and your own capacity.

¹ The Tamarack Institute’s [Index of Community Engagement Techniques](#) describes a range of engagement methods that can be used for urban forestry projects.

The table below summarizes examples of common challenges with community engagement and opportunities to address these challenges.

| Challenge | Opportunities |
|---|--|
| You are not sure how to fit community engagement into your timelines. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Plan to start early. If the project is already underway, create a schedule with key milestones and decision points that can be influenced by group input.■ Make a list of all participant groups and how you might engage them to gauge how much time and effort may be required.■ Seek out advice from other departments or project teams who have led engagements to learn about ideal timelines, methods and lessons learned. |
| You lack the time or resources to invest in community engagement. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Look for efficiencies by partnering with other projects or teams who are planning to engage the same groups.■ Ask community partners to assist with engagement activities and enhance your reach.■ Choose a few priority projects to focus on that will have the greatest impact on the community. |
| The groups you want to engage are not available or are overstretched. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Provide alternative ways to receive input. Give advance notice about your timelines and when decisions need to be finalized to allow as much flexibility as possible.■ Consider the role of each group in your project and whether they need to be consulted or involved versus informed about the project.■ Clarify availability with representatives from community groups and offer compensation for participation. |
| You have low participation rates. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Assess different methods and platforms to determine which has the greatest reach and engagement. Use multiple methods where possible.■ Explore potential barriers to participation and seek advice from community leaders on new methods as needed.■ Share the results of your community engagement so participants are aware of how their feedback is being integrated into the project. |
| You do not have an existing relationship with the groups you want to engage. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Invest in relationship-building prior to talking about a specific project. Meet with the intention to learn and build trust.■ Take time to understand the needs, wants and interests of the groups. Focus on listening rather than telling.■ Go where people are already gathering to reduce any burden on these groups and respect their time. |

Submitting funding applications

When describing your community engagement approach in funding applications, be sure to:

- Highlight policies, guidelines or other resources that govern your municipality's approach to inclusive engagement or equity more broadly. Explain how your project is aligned with these policies or guidelines.
- Describe practices your municipality has adopted for the project that encourage the participation of equity-deserving groups.
- Clearly explain timelines for community engagement, including what is planned and what has already happened, as well as who you have engaged or will likely engage.
- Explain how community engagement has been or will be used to shape the overall project design, including the role of any project partners.
- Review the application guide and other materials closely, including evaluation criteria, to understand how community engagement will be considered when the application is assessed.
- Where possible, include letters of support from engagement partners.

The **Growing Canada's Community Canopies** (GCCC) initiative provides funding for tree planting projects, including those that integrate inclusive engagement practices. To learn more about available funding, [visit our website](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: A Guide for Municipalities, Federation of Canadian Municipalities**
Explores how municipalities can build renewed and respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples.
- **Equity and Inclusion Lens Handbook, City of Ottawa and City for All Women Initiative**
Explores how municipal staff can plan and develop programs and activities with an equity lens that is inclusive of the full diversity of residents.
- **Index of community engagement techniques, Tamarack Institute**
A comprehensive list of techniques that can be used for community engagement across the five levels of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.
- **A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making, Department of Rural and Community Development, Ireland**
A reference guide that explores key principles and techniques for inclusive engagement in local planning and decision-making.
- **Engaging Meaningfully: Leveraging Community Engagement to Advance Implementation, ICLEI Canada**
Covers the role of meaningful partnerships in the context of municipal climate action.
- **Tools of Engagement: A Toolkit for Engaging People in Conservation, National Audubon Society**
A detailed guide for community engagement focused on nature conservation.

This resource was created in partnership by Tree Canada and FCM's Green Municipal Fund for the Growing Canada's Community Canopies initiative, which is delivered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and funded by the Government of Canada.