

Raleigh Community Engagement

In uncertain and turbulent times, it is the quality, and integrity of the thousands of transactions conducted daily by public servants and the quality, sincerity, and integrity of our community engagement processes that, if done well, maintain constituents' faith, belief and trust and belief in their government.

Our journey to this point. How did we get here?

“At the core of our community’s capacity to effectively express its opinions are neighborhoods and community organizations. Recognizing and strengthening the role of these neighborhoods and community organizations is critical. These local “associations” are the most powerful opportunities constituents have to express their views. These organizations include registries, block clubs; religious organizations; sports and recreation groups; youth, women’s, men’s, and seniors’ groups; issue advocacy organizations; cultural groups, etc.” Kretzmann/Moore 2004

CAC’s have been around over 45 years. They were started with a sound well thought out concept designed to address the challenges at a specific time in Raleigh’s history. They were created in response to a mandate from the Federal government which encouraged more citizen participation as it relates to model cities, community development block grants, etc. The CAC’s mission remained, until recently, to provide neighborhoods with a voice in City government and to serve as an advisory group to the City Council. There were 18 CACs that provided inputs to the RCAC. Their workplan included increasing citizen participation, increasing citizen education, and increasing leader training.

Over time, there have been many changes in Raleigh’s political landscape. According to some historically engaged constituents, some elected officials got to a point when they seem not to want to be bothered with community engagement. The constant reorganization and placement of the Community Engagement Office also contributed to our current circumstances. All of these factors allowed CACs to evolve without direction, expectations, rules of operation, governance, consistency, or accountability.

The Central, South Central, South, East and North Central CACs have been primarily concerned with crime enforcement, crime prevention, neighborhood improvement projects, cleanup projects, nuisance abatement initiatives, abandoned vehicles, gentrification, etc. Other CACs were concerned about economic development, growth, zoning traffic, etc. There have always been major differences in the agendas, interest and concerns among the CACs. However, CACs don’t always exhibit interest in each other’s interest concerns and priorities.

The conditions, activities, human dynamics, politics, demographics, and economic changes that have occurred in Raleigh over those 45 years have delivered us to a very complex and often confusing place. We did not implement a community engagement system that adapted and evolved intentionally, and strategically and to Raleigh’s changing human, economic, and environmental landscape.

The organizations given responsibility for leading our communities, and leading inclusive, participatory engagement community engagement were left to determine their own path. This left a void that created inconsistencies in what CACs did and how they were perceived.

We did not experience CACs adapting and evolving according to demographic changes and other challenges. We were making important decisions with a non-representative sample of the citizenry. CACs seem to have evolved randomly without specific guidance from City government.

The myriad of constituents' concerns and interest. Did the CAC models create opportunities for "all constituents" to engage relative to their interest and concerns?

- Zoning
- Affordable housing
- Economic development
- Education
- Health
- Gentrification
- Parks
- Safety nets for our most vulnerable citizens
- Homelessness
- Environment & Ecology
- Access to transportation
- Jobs/Employment
- Quality of Life
- Youth Development
- Arts & Recreation
- Equity
- Crime & Safety
- Traffic

What's next? Reimagining Community Engagement:

- We focus on what will happen if we get this right as oppose to what happens if we don't!
- Aspiration, and compassion, not frustration and anger, will be the motivation to address our challenges and overcome our community engagement challenges!
- We will focus on what's possible not what's wrong!
- We will learn from the past, but not allow past practices, perceived failure, and historical disappointments to dictate the evolution of community engagement!

The purpose of the Community Engagement Project:

To facilitate a process using the collective -- creative energy, talent, resources, wisdom, and commitment of the Council, our public servants, and our constituents, and the experiences of other municipalities to inform the strategic evolution of Raleigh's community engagement activities, processes, and systems.

These recommendations and strategies result from hours of discussions with constituents, City Staff, elected officials, community organizations, and CE practitioners across the country – research of other jurisdictions. They also draw from Community Engagement studies conducted in 2004 and 2017. They offer a suite of strategies and activities that would be a part of a comprehensive approach to community engagement. It is the responsibility of the Council and City staff to prioritize and sequence the implementation of these recommended strategies, and to find the appropriate time and process to vet them with stakeholders.

Community Engagement Vision

Raleigh functions as an inclusionary, participatory, enabling, democracy in which constituents are appropriately engaged in the design, delivery, evaluation, and evolution of their programs and services.

Community Engagement Mission

Ignite, inspire, interest in and create opportunities for community engagement, community building and community stewardship. This process is about mutual enrichment gathering information through building strong sustainable relationships and sustainable social networks and providing relevant and inspiring activities and experiences.

Preparing for our journey

- *We will be challenged to perform “familiar” roles in “new” conditions and to perform new roles in new, more complex, and challenging situations.*
- *We will need to identify and implement practices that sustain the democratic spirit, cooperation, and collaboration of engaged constituents.*
- *We will need to identify what we absolutely need to learn and understand, and what new skills we need as we embark on our journey.*

The Context for Reimagining Community Engagement

The following context is provided so that our stakeholders understand:

- *The essence of the recommendations.*
- *Our current community engagement processes and systems.*
- *How constituents currently experience community engagement.*
- *The complexities of community engagement.*
- *The considerations that went into creating our eleven recommendations.*
- *The myriad of considerations included in forming our recommendations and,*
- *Factors that must be considered in implementing our recommendations.*

For what are constituents entitled for their significant investment in government:

- Access/Engagement
- Quality
- Value Cost/Benefit
- Stewardship of their investment
- Responsiveness
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Opportunities to engage

Traditionally recognized roles of government:

- Protect the lives, property, and rights of citizens
- Ensure the health and welfare of the citizenry
- Maintain sustainable environment
- Protect, & ensure the wise use of the environment -- balancing environment as economics, art, habitat, science, spirit, etc.
- Provide a safety net for its most vulnerable citizens without creating a culture of entitlement
- Provide and maintain democratic community gathering spaces and experiences for:
 - * Community building, health, healing, and celebration
 - * Building community so that constituents discover, and are calmed by their commonalities, and are enriched by their difference
 - * Psychic turf where like people meet to restore the energy it takes to live in a demographically, culturally and ethnically diverse community
- Enrich the lives of citizens through education, arts, and recreation -- Provide experiences that encourage lifelong discovery, creativity, fitness and learning
- Create and sustain community spirit, pride, & civility
- Ensure the economic vitality of the jurisdiction-Build wealth

Do our current community engagement activities illustrate our responsibilities in these areas?

Democracy is not a spectator form of government. Citizens have responsibilities to government. What can we expect from our constituents?

- Participation/Engagement
- Education: know the issues
- Balancing self-interest with the broader needs of the City of Raleigh
- Don't do anything to cost government money
- Pay taxes
- Vote
- Civic stewardship
- Live sustainably

Raleigh Community Engagement Guiding Principles?

- Public engagement is an investment not an expenditure.
- Our constituents are not a distraction from our work – They are the reason for our work! We understand that the commitment, opinions, resources, and concerns of our constituents are a source of wealth and an organizational asset.
- We honor time and energy as important resources of our residents and provide them with a return for investing their time, energy, and other resources in community engagement.
- Constituents will see the results of their engagement.
- We plan and conduct public process that maximizes the residents' return on investment for the time, energy, and resources they commit to community engagement.

Operating principles?

- Start with citizens
- Design with people in mind
- Don't live in data and demographics
- Design processes with the behavior in mind not our organizations structure
- Make our changes tangible
- Identify what about our current process is broken?
- Meet people where they are
- Park our assumptions

In the absence of clearly articulated and understood values people will substitute their personal values which creates unevenness and interpersonal conflicts. The values need to be absolutely clear. All participants' engagement have to be aligned with the organizational values

Community Engagement: An Organizational Value:

Community engagement is an organizational value. It functions in the heart of our organization. As an organizational value it should be evident in all of our:

- Products, programs and services,
- Policies, decisions, and activities,
- Budget policies, processes, and decisions,
- Personnel policies, processes, and decisions, and
- Transactions

Community engagement is not a set of disparate activities created to give the appearance that we will care what constituents, need, want, and feel or as a legal requirement of the project planning process.

Community Engagement Values?

Trust was articulated as the most important value in all aspects of community engagement. Trust is a firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something. "relations have to be built on trust." When there is trust, when people feel free to communicate, express their ideas, and when they trust those with whom they are interacting, they are innovative and with more effective approaches to challenges.

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|---|--|
| • Trust | • Honest and timely communication |
| • Stewardship of stakeholder talent, time, and resources | • Reliability |
| • Follow through | • Compassion |
| • Responsiveness | • Accountability |
| • Transparency | • Continuous learning and quality improvement |
| • Healing | • Credibility |
| • Innovation | • Compassion |

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is a way of ensuring that community members have access to valued social settings and activities, feel that they can contribute meaningfully to those activities, and develop functional capabilities that enable them to participate fully.
(Seattle)

- The constant flow of energy, knowledge, and information between constituents and their government.
- Harnessing and focusing the collective intelligence, creativity, and energy of the citizenry, public servants, elected officials, and community organizations.
- Engagement should be viewed as interactions between the City, constituents, and community organizations. Community engagement enables the community to offer opinions and propose ideas.
- Activities that engage constituents in providing energy, experience, and wisdom to contributing to the City making appropriate budget, policy, planning, and program decisions.
- The 1,000's of daily transactions that occur between residents and their government.
- A vital component of the City's commitment to continuous learning.

The City engages constituents and community organizations as:

- Citizens/Voters
- Customers
- Partners
- Co-creators
- Volunteers
- Stewards

The Community Engagement Continuum:

- Customer Service: The thousands of transactions that occur every day between direct service employees and citizens.
- When citizens initiate a process because they feel they need to be heard.
- We want citizens to contribute their original thoughts and ideas.
- We have ideas that we want citizens to help us refine.
- We have important information we need to communicate to citizens face to face.
- We are afraid of the political consequences of a particular situation so we either check in with citizens to be sure we are on firm ground or ask them to make the decision.

The City Council and City Staff are consistently aware of:

- Who engages? Why?
- What activates engagement? What inspires constituents to engage?
- Why constituents don't engage? Why?
- What determines how constituents prefer to engage?
- What happens as a result of constituents' engagement?

Why constituents engage:

- Effective pre-planning
- Residents' return on their investment of time, energy, and money
- Stewardship
- Urgency – Pain – Passion - Fear
- The relevancy of our content and process to their culture and concerns
- The degree to which they trust government
- Their kinship with the people conducting the process

Why citizens engage and sustain their engagement?

- They feel welcomed
- The event is nourishing
- They are invited for the right reasons
- Cultural Conflicts are anticipated, acknowledged and resolved
- We follow-through
- They feel a sense of accomplishment
- Issues are irrelevant
- They feel a sense on connection and kinship
- They can recognize their issues in the vision.
- There is an effort to make special accommodation
- They see the results of their work
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The myriad of ways constituents currently engages:

- Point of Transactions – Communicating using the capacity of thousands of transactions that daily occur between residents and city government
- Public Meetings
- Open Houses
- E-Government
- Boards and Commissions
- Surveys/focus groups
- Engagement in Community Engagement Division activities
- Special Events
- Informal gatherings
- Neighborhoods and community organization

Why constituents don't engage?

- Apathy
- Learned helplessness
- Things are good
- No urgency
- The ineffectiveness or perceive impotency of meetings
- Logistic

Why constituents don't sustain engagement?

- The “black hole” – no closure
- They don't feel welcomed
- Their efforts and contributions are not acknowledged
- We invited them for the wrong reasons
- We don't appear to them to be interested in their vision ideas think concerns
- They can't find their “power” in the event or issue
- They have no relevancy or intimacy with the subject of the engagement
- They can't find meaning in the content or process
- Their inclination to engage is impacted by the memory of previous engagements/disappointments

The challenges our “Reimagined Community Engagement System” will need to confront and resolve:

- Our Council is truly a part-time, citizen led City Council. Some constituents expect the same kind of responses and results you get from a full-time professional Council that is adequately staffed. Council District size and term lengths has a significant impact on how community engagement is conducted. These impact governance in many ways, but have significant on community engagement
- Constituents are coming to community engagement processes to articulate their personal interest, needs, and desires with less regard to City-wide issues.
- Reciprocating victimization: The need to get even for past actions, decisions, and disappointment.
- Ensure that our future of community engagement is not that adversely impacted by the frozen perceptions, and memories, disappointments, or perceived failures.
- Managing expectations/Unrealistic expectations.
- Community engagement efforts are episodic and reactive.
- Chaos and ambiguity enable selfish people to exploit the chaos and ambiguity.
- The historical and current sometimes invisible impacts of racism, classicism, internalized oppression, and internalized privilege.
- Personal politics and self-interest contaminating community engagement.
- Historical disappointments.
- Justifiable skepticism.

- Poor communication.
- Festering hostility -- Antagonistic cooperation.
- Polarity management -- Consistent change that trades one set of problems for another.
- Commitment to our historical rituals, practices, and language blind us to new possibilities.
- The impact of self-interest – advancing self-interest as the public good.
- The sorting of the community.
- Lack of collaboration between internal and external stakeholders.
- The belief that there is a certain of disengagement that should be expected and is therefore acceptable.
- All citizens are free to engage. If they elect not to, they should be expected to live with the consequences of their disengagement.
- The tendency to confuse means with ends, symptoms with causes.
- Employees/constituents come into community engagement experiences with their personal experience with and attitudes about community engagement, DEI, and trust.
- Expanding community engagement from planning/project related activities to community engagement that truly reflects our constituents needs, concerns, and interest.

Community Engagement Strategies:

Virtually all of the strategies have been recommended in previous studies and reports. Funding, and organizational structure were never put in place to implement them.

Recommendation 1: Assessment: How will we know if we are successful?

- Conduct periodic analysis of the effectiveness of our current public engagement activities.
- Conduct internal and external benchmarking.
- Identifying criteria or metrics to determine if public engagement activities and strategies are successful.
- Community engagement should not be evaluated by the number of people who attend project planning meetings or who attend gatherings in response to episodic challenges.

Recommendation 2: Supporting community and neighborhood organizations:

At the core of our community’s capacity to effectively express its opinions are neighborhoods and community organizations. Recognizing and strengthening the role of these neighborhoods and community organizations is critical. These local “associations” are the most powerful opportunities constituents have to express their views. These organizations include registries, block clubs; religious organizations; sports and recreation groups; youth, women’s, men’s, and seniors’ groups; issue advocacy organizations; cultural groups, etc.

Recommendation 3: Customer Service: Increase the potency and capacity of the thousands of transactions with constituents as a component of our engagement and communication’s strategies:

- Create goodwill by ensuring that those transactions create a trust and a positive perception of City government.
- Increase the potency and capacity of the transactions.
- Use the transactions to get information from constituents and communicate information to constituents.

Recommendation 4: Implement continuous learning and capacity building strategies and activities for:

- The Council
- City Departments
- Constituents
- Consultants doing work for the City
- Community organizations
- Other Stakeholders
- Design and conduct community engagement capacity building activities for city departments to ensure:
 - * That all City community engagement strategies and activities conducted by city staff or consultants are aligned with our community engagement values.
 - * The design and implement equitable, culturally appropriate, inclusive, relevant, community engagement for all daily community transactions between City staff and constituents.

Recommendation 5: Funding/Support: Community engagement is investment not expenditure:

- In as much as the current Community Engagement team does not have “the capacity” to lead the implementation of these strategies, the City should form a City interdepartmental community engagement Core Team composed of staff from appropriate departments.
- Commitment to community engagement is one of the City’s core values, it must be reflected in the budget.
- We should examine how internal and external collaboration can minimize budgetary impact but have maximum impact.
- Seek foundation support for innovative community engagement activities.
- Use collaboration, voluntarism, corps work, youth employment, to enable us to extend services while minimizing budget impact.

Recommendation 6: The generational implications of community engagement:

- Take advantage of the idealism and energy of youth constituents.
- Youth engagement: Taking responsibility for producing the next generation of “Big Citizens?”
- Create parallel engagement processes for the young constituents.
- Work with City departments and youth serving organizations to design and implement civics experiences that encourage civic stewardship and spirit and the sustained engagement of young constituents.

Recommendation 7: Equity and Inclusion:

Community Engagement staff will work collaboratively with the Office of Equity and Inclusion and appropriate community stakeholder organizations to:

- Understand how the unique evolution of race in Raleigh has impacted the engagement of Black constituents.
- Community Engagement staff will work collaboratively with the Office of Equity and Inclusion and appropriate community stakeholder organizations to discover ways to inspire the engagement of:
 - Renters
 - Immigrants and refugees
 - Youth and senior populations
 - Low-income constituents
 - Communities of color
 - Limited English-speaking ability
 - Constituents with disabilities
- Understand how race, class, ethnicity, age, and other characteristics impact constituent’s inclination to engage.
- Engage ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic, populations who have not historically been engaged

Recommendation 8: Create a community idea/innovation system:

Innovation brings together internal and external stakeholders and their collective talents to increase operational efficiency by promoting continuous improvement, collaboration, and citizen-driven programs and services.

- Create an idea system that inspires constituents, community organizations, and City staff to submit ideas about how to improve community engagement programs, services, and systems and that ensures that historical rituals, practices, and behaviors don't blind us to new community engagement possibilities.
- Create a "Reimagine Raleigh" (Seattle) website

Recommendation 9: Stakeholder communication's strategy: As a leader, how you communicate is just as important as what and why you communicate:

Our strategies can only be achieved by putting together social networks of internal and external participants who have innovation and collaboration at their core.

- The Community Engagement Unit and the Department of Communications should lead a discussion to create strategies regarding improving communications between all community engagement stakeholders.
- Ensure the appropriate use of technology as not to replace other important forms of engagement.

Recommendation 10: Community building, celebrations, and kinship -The more opportunities we give citizens to gather, the more they find common ground, shared vision, and shared purpose:

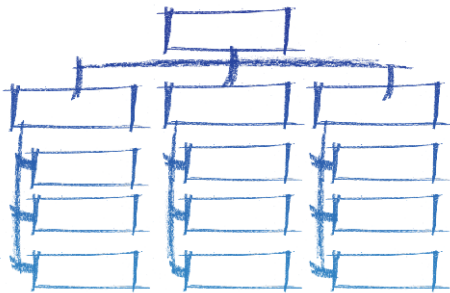
- Welcome to Raleigh Celebration.
- Create creative innovative opportunities for residents to gather and engage.
- Provide gatherings, special events etc. that result in greater kinship – gatherings in which we learn what we all share and in which we learn from our differences.

Strategy 11: The creation of a Community Engagement Office reporting to the City Manager:

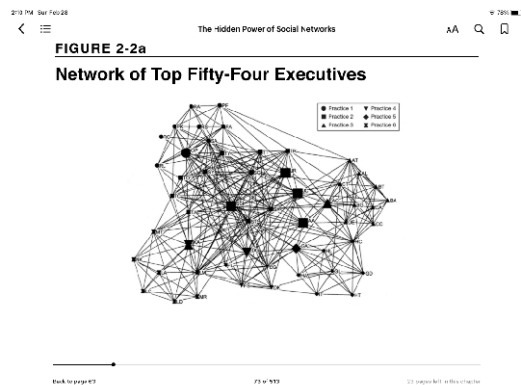
The community engagement office will have enormous responsibility with no authority. Just as in the case of the Office of Equity and Inclusion, it needs the unqualified support of the City Manager

Organizational Structure and Culture

How the work is organized



How the work really gets done-
Interdisciplinary and Intersectional Social Networks



3/6/21

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“Boundaries are not lines that divide us – They are places where we meet.” Wheatley

Systemic challenges cannot be addressed with single disciplinary approaches. Solutions to systemic challenges, like public engagement, don’t exist in disciplines. We find them in the spaces between disciplines. These strategies cannot be achieved without the creation, facilitation, and maintenance of effective social networks. This is all about cross-functional, interdisciplinary.

“Hierarchy and organizational structure are critical boundaries that can affect collaboration within and between organizations. Some networks are similar to hierarchical reporting relationships, which often constrain information flow and innovation. Others are more fluid and operate with less regard to the formal chain of command.

Our strategies can only be achieved by putting together social networks of internal and external participants who have innovation and collaboration at their core.

Staffing: Who will design, facilitate, and implement this work?

Create an office that releases, and focuses the considerable knowledge, talent and energy of our existing Community Engagement Division.

Community Engagement Specialists work with district coalitions, offices, neighborhood associations and other community associations to coordinate organizing efforts, train community members in leadership and community organizing skills, create community-building partnerships, and provide technical assistance to other City bureaus' outreach and involvement efforts.

Augment the work of Community Engagement Specialist by forming internal and external partnerships and collaborations:

Even though the community engagement office needs to fit within the City's existing hierarchy and structure our work will only be accomplished through internal and external, highly interactive, interdependent, collaborative social networks.

Critical internal collaborations

- Shared staff with departments
- Office of Community Engagement
- Office of Communication
- Office of Equity and Inclusion
- Department of Parks and Recreation

We don't have enough people in the right places to accomplish our strategies. We have to find ways to extend services while minimizing budget impact by:

- Leveraging each other's expertise (that means collaboration-being able to depend on each other)
- Volunteers
- Corps work
- Summoning the energy and creating response structures so that we have to respond to unexpected episodic challenges to our routine work
- Citywide and neighborhood issues
- Hiring for collaboration

Community Engagement Office Functions:

Assessment evaluation and analysis. How will we know if we are successful? Creating a Feedback system	Community Investments	Community building	Supporting neighborhood organizations
Create community engagement metrics	Administration and management of Neighborhood Improvement Fund programs	Building community pride and stewardship	Create and lead a Community Engagement Commission and the Community Engagement Core team
Implement a continuous improvement system	Neighborhood Innovation Funds	Special events Community celebrations	Neighborhood Liaisons/Ambassadors
Assessing the psychic and economic value of our investment	Seek outside funding to support community engagement activities	Routine and episodic community gatherings	Using the already existing mechanisms CAC's, functions, existing Boards and Commissions etc.
		Kinship- programs Foster Grandparent	

Supplemental workforce	Appropriate technology engagement-	Collaboration	Constituent innovation system
Design and lead the City's Volunteer program Design and conduct and episodic volunteer opportunities and special events i.e. Block Parties, neighborhood clean-ups	Digital inclusion	Work with all City Departments to create and implement community engagement work plans workplans	Create and operate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A community engagement ideation system • An idea evaluation system, and, • An idea implementation system
Summer Youth Employment	Virtual Engagement Tool kit	Interagency	
Youth Corps Work	Increasing constituent access to appropriate technology	Community Organizations	

Collaboration	Continuous learning and leadership development	City and constituent Communications Communication is a strategy and commitment	Engagement in policy decisions
City Departments CE workplans	Internal and constituent capacity building/	Stakeholder communication's strategy- -	Create opportunities for constituents to engage in the early stages of policy development
Interagency	Neighborhood Learning Centers	Publications	
Community Organizations	Citizen Leadership Academy	Community Engagement Calendar	
Hiring for collaboration Ensuring that staff we engage in this work have collaboration in their DNA	Information and experiences for new residents	311 information system	
	On-going learning events and activities		

Equity and inclusion	Youth engagement “Big Citizenship” <i>We can't assume that young people don't have the knowledge nor interest with which to engage</i>	Supplemental workforce Programs that enable us to extend service while minimizing impact on general fund resources
Create and sustain an ongoing operational relationship with the Office of Equity and inclusion	Civics and democracy in	Design and lead the City's Volunteer program Design and conduct episodic volunteer opportunities and special events i.e. Block Parties, neighborhood clean-ups
	Collaborate with appropriate City departments, external partners and young people to design and implement civic experiences and service projects, and civic stewardship opportunities	Expansion of Summer Youth Employment Expand youth Corps work
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leveraging each other's expertise (that means collaboration-being able to depend on each other)

Staffing

There is clearly not adequate budget or enough staff to accomplish these tasks/strategies.

Even though it needs a structure and needs to fit within the existing hierarchy our work will only be accomplished through highly interactive, interdependent, collaborative social networks.

Creative, innovative, flexible, approaches to using staff in other department to supplement the work of the Community Engagement Staff:

- Existing staff Community staff
- Work enrichment assignments
- Temporary details
- Core Team
- Staff from other departments with direct community engagement responsibilities
- Task force with clear responsibilities and time limit