

Making Ottawa's Municipal Governance Equitable & Inclusive: Peach Paper 2011



This Peach Paper is CAWI's (City for All Women Initiative) response to the 2011 Governance Review, in which FEDCO (Finance and Economic Development Committee) has been tasked with assessing the City of Ottawa's governance structures and processes, and making recommendations for improving resident engagement.

Why a Peach Paper?

CAWI contributed to the previous Governance Review processes in 2007 and 2009 by producing our version of White Papers, called Peach Papers. These Peach Papers provided the City with the perspectives of the diversity of women on how to make City decision-making and governance structures more inclusive. The focus of this Peach Paper is to provide input into the 2011 Governance Review, and to inform the review of the City of Ottawa Public Participation Policy as mandated by Council.

City Council has also recently established its 2011-2014 Strategic priorities, in which the City has stated that it will strive to *“put into place business practices that are democratic, engaging and visible by encouraging citizens to participate in decision-making and community life, by informing them in a timely manner of decisions that affect them, and by providing reasons for decisions.”* This paper is designed to help Council achieve this strategic priority, by offering guidelines for making the City’s governance more equitable and inclusive.

Why Equitable & Inclusive Municipal Governance?

It’s Financially Responsible. In a time of limited revenues, it is imperative that the City of Ottawa make the most effective use of human and financial resources. By drawing upon the knowledge, expertise and networks of the full diversity of residents and community organizations, the City is better positioned to identify where to invest funds and leverage additional resources.

It’s More Effective. Municipal government, without a party system, depends upon ongoing, meaningful resident input to be effective. As the level of government closest to residents’ daily lives, municipalities are in the best position to receive input from a diversity of residents so as to be proactive in addressing emerging problems. By engaging those who rely the most on City services, the City is better able to create effective policies, programs, and services.

It’s Good Governance. In part due to this being the first year of a new term of council, meaningful input from residents has been limited. Many decisions have been made prior to going to Standing Committees, residents have been given little time to respond, and few amendments have been made following public input. When the diversity of residents are informed, and see their input incorporated into decisions, this meets the public’s expectations for an open and transparent local government. Ultimately, trust and understanding are built between elected representatives and residents.

In a local democracy, equitable and inclusive governance engages the full diversity of residents by addressing barriers to participation, particularly for groups and individuals whose voices are least likely to be heard.

City of Ottawa Commitments

Public Participation Policy (2003)

In 2003, the City of Ottawa developed a Public Participation Policy (PPP) based on extensive consultation with the community and best practices across Canada and internationally. This policy made a commitment to residents that the City's administrative and policy processes would be open and accessible, responsive to the public's need to be informed, and respectful of the public's right to be involved in the decisions that directly affect their lives. The policy is a good starting point for making the City's governance more inclusive. However, it has never been fully implemented. Steps still need to be taken to ensure that best practices in resident engagement are consistently used throughout the corporation. City of Ottawa staff have now been given a mandate by the Finance and Economic Development Committee to update this policy.

<http://www.ottawa.ca/calendar/ottawa/citycouncil/csedc/2003/10-07/ACS2003-CRS-SEC-0016englishFINAL.htm>

Equity and Inclusion Lens (2010)

The City is currently in the process of implementing its Equity and Inclusion Lens, developed in collaboration with CAWI in 2010. At the heart of inclusion is ensuring that barriers are removed so that everyone can participate in the full range of activities, programs, and services offered in our city. The Lens provides guiding questions that enable inclusive decision making, in the areas of policy and program development, communication, consultation, research, human resources and evaluation.

http://ottawa.ca/doc_repository/guides/equity_inclusion_en.pdf

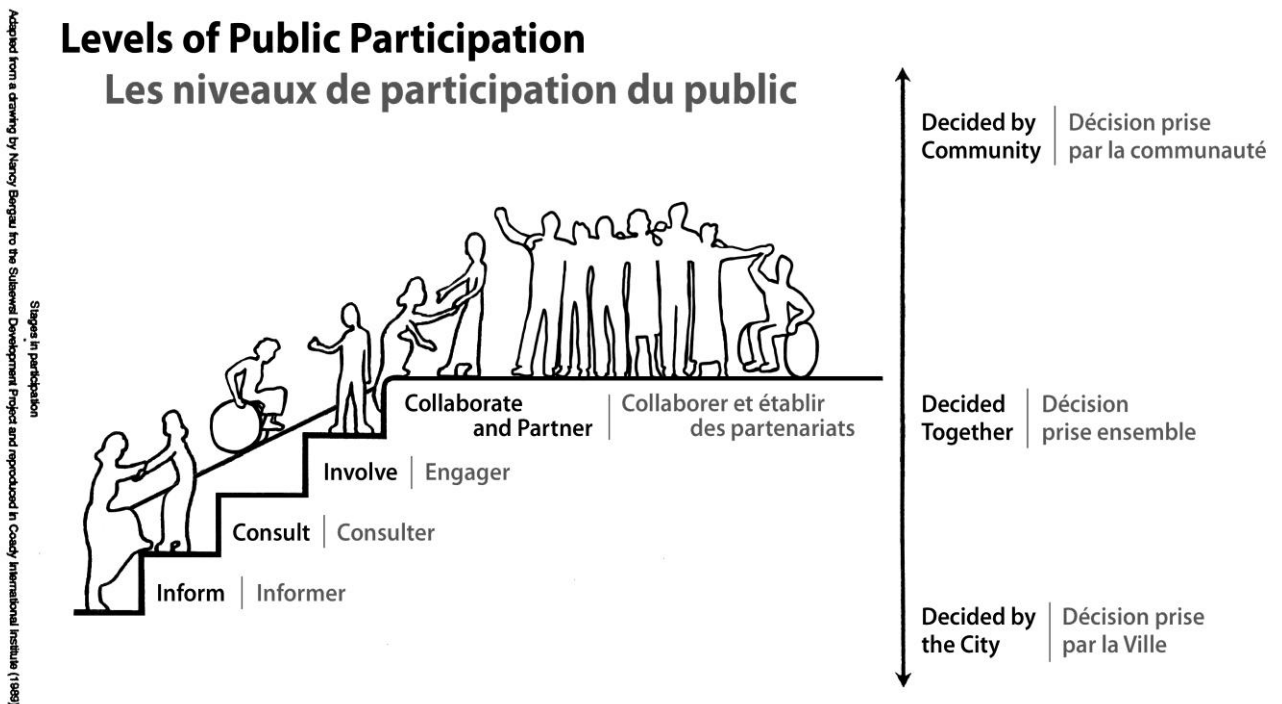


As the Public Participation Policy is updated, elements from the Equity and Inclusion Lens can be used to enrich the policy. Once implemented, the policy can help actualize equitable and inclusive municipal governance in the City of Ottawa.

Public Participation

In a truly inclusive City, the full diversity of residents would be involved in the decisions affecting their lives. Everyone would feel that their perspectives are heard and valued. To make this a reality, residents can be engaged at different levels of participation, ranging from sharing information all the way to partnerships and beyond.

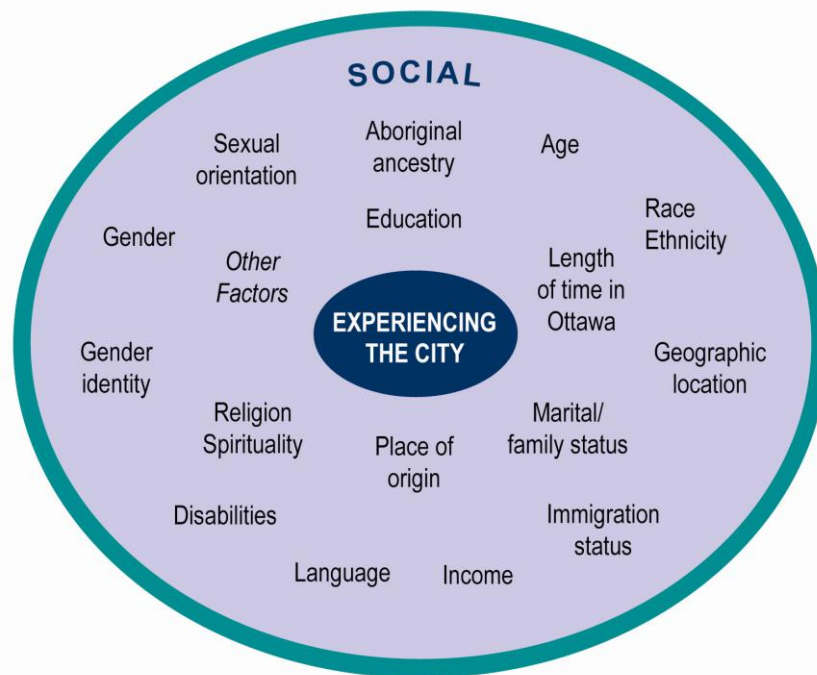
Each level has its own importance, depending upon the kind of engagement that will best benefit a specific process. In order for each of these levels to be inclusive, certain conditions must be met. Be aware and explicit about which level of participation you are using and create conditions for inclusion.



In a large, complex city with a diverse and changing population, a mix of different tools and approaches are needed to engage residents and elicit meaningful participation in decision-making. For example, new innovative IT communication must be mixed with relationship-based information sharing. This means engaging residents through person-to-person contact, and making use of the social spaces where specific communities engage.

Consider Diversity

We all experience the city differently in relation to social factors in our lives. By paying attention to this diversity, we can be more attentive to who risks exclusion and take steps to engage those specific populations.



Consider Barriers to Inclusion

For example:

- Lack of knowledge or understanding of systems
- Expectation that everyone understands English
- French/English translation underutilized
- Cost of transportation and childcare
- Unpredictability of time to present at Committees when juggling family and work responsibilities
- Key documents not available to everyone on screen or print at meetings
- Decision makers failing to see an issue from someone else's perspective
- Advisory Committees and general public not given enough time to respond to City processes

Inform

For governance to be equitable and inclusive, the first step is to provide residents with balanced and objective information in a timely fashion to help them understand problems, alternatives, and/or solutions.

To be Equitable & Inclusive:

- Consider all possible target audiences - who might be at risk of exclusion and what specific communication strategies are needed to reach them (e.g., working with community leaders, bulletin boards, community newspapers).
- Provide reports and other information well in advance so that residents have time to process the information and respond.
- Provide information in both official languages, and additional languages where possible.
- Connect with community organizations and networks that serve the diverse populations that you need to reach.
- Use multiple methods of sharing information (e.g relationship-based information sharing, in addition to print, and electronic)
- Information should be easily accessible and understood by the full diversity of target audiences – use plain language, accessible formats, graphics, multiple languages, and multiple mediums including online, print and voicemail.
- Messages and images should help foster inclusion, respect and equity
- To be inclusive, assess materials for biases and make changes if needed
- Provide feedback on all input that has been given. What input influenced decisions? What input was not used? Why and why not?

Example: Strengthening Recruitment for Advisory Committees

The City Clerk's office realized that in order to enhance the role of the Advisory Committees, it was important to ensure that their membership was inclusive of the diversity of residents. In 2009, this led to a number of measures to strengthen the recruitment process:

- *Development of an application form to give applicants a simpler, more accessible option for applying.*
- *Included a question to invite applicants to share experiences that would help them be sensitive to the needs of people from diverse backgrounds.*
- *Lengthened the application period.*
- *Sent outreach letters and made presentations to community organizations that work with people who are under-represented.*
- *Distributed bilingual flyers to places frequented by people under-represented.*
- *Encouraged City Councilors to recruit from their urban, suburban and rural wards.*
- *Advertised in a range of community and specialty publications.*

(Equity and Inclusion Lens 2010, p.24)

Consult

Meaningful consultation is key to improving governance, which will in turn make policies, programs, and services more effective. Residents need to be kept informed, and the City must listen to and acknowledge residents concerns. Feedback should also be provided on how the public's input has influenced decisions.

To be Equitable and Inclusive:

- Ensure the process includes a balance of information sharing and listening to residents that allows for genuine input
- Ensure information is easy to understand for diverse audiences
- Take steps to remove barriers to people's full participation in the consultation (e.g., childcare, transportation, safety, language, accessible location, time, multiple formats, avoid religious and cultural holidays, culturally appropriate)
- Consider if there are populations that may be excluded by only using conventional methods of consultation (e.g., online feedback only, general public consultation meeting)
- Determine what outreach strategies are needed to engage specific communities or groups of people that are least likely to participate.
- Is the medium or environment being used welcoming to participants who may be reluctant to share their views? If not, what can we do to change this?
- Consider if there are power dynamics or history – between staff and the participants, or among participants themselves – that prevent some people from sharing their views. How will you lessen or change this power dynamic?
- Are the insights from groups who face systemic barriers and inequities reflected in the consultation report and the final product?
- Report back to the full diversity of residents who were involved in the consultation, on how their input influenced things *(Equity and Inclusion Lens 2010)*

Example: The Recreation Master Plan

In 2009, City staff met with 45-50 organizations, including City Advisory Committees, city-wide coalitions, community associations and service agencies, totaling approximately 500 people, representing thousands of residents from a variety of backgrounds and areas of the City.

- *Organizations were invited to hold their own focus groups, or reach out to their constituencies.*
- *Staff provided organizations with information and tools for reaching their constituency.*
- *In meeting with specific populations, staff and organizations selected and adjusted questions so as to draw out unique perspectives and insights.*
- *In undertaking the data analysis, care was taken to ensure the diversity of views would be reflected in the final report.*

(Equity and Inclusion Lens 2010, p. 16)

Involve

In some instances it will be appropriate to go beyond consultation, and directly involve the public in the development of City policies and programs. This means ensuring that the issues and concerns raised by residents are consistently understood and taken into consideration as alternatives are developed.

To be Equitable and Inclusive:

- Meet in places that are accessible for the target population being engaged
- Demonstrate a commitment to implementing recommendations
- Recruit the diversity of residents who are most affected by the issue(s) being addressed
- Address barriers to participation (i.e. childcare, transportation, physical accessibility, translation)
- Hold meetings at a time that enables the targeted populations to attend
- Work with community organization(s) or residents to develop the agenda and questions to be explored
- Keep participants informed about outcomes

Involvement can take many forms, including Reference/Working groups, Task forces and Steering Committees. Such groups have the advantage of engaging people for a specific timeframe and task; however, care must be taken to ensure the involvement is real.

Example: Recreation Master Plan

In 2009 and 2011, City of Ottawa Parks and Recreation Services involved CAWI in the facilitation of focus groups to inform the Recreation Master Plan. City staff and CAWI worked together to develop a process to elicit input from specific communities. This involved the design of a guidebook and questions so that facilitators could speak to what was most relevant for their communities. By working together both CAWI and the City were able to make the best use of their resources to elicit input.

- Focus groups engaged women and men from communities who may not have been heard otherwise (First Nations, Inuit, immigrant, low-income, people with disabilities, African-francophone, racialized, seniors, rural).
- Focus group facilitators were leaders in those specific communities, so they could adapt the discussion to fit the cultures and languages (i.e. Somali, Chinese, French).
- Facilitators were able to use their networks to do outreach into their communities.
- Focus groups were held at a location most accessible to participants.
- The final report and their contributions were presented back to the communities and they were invited to continue informing the process.

Collaborate and Partner

Decision-making can be more equitably shared with residents by collaborating and partnering in the development of alternatives and the selection of preferred solutions. By eliciting innovation and recommendations from residents to the maximum extent possible, this will help ensure that the City addresses the needs of the full diversity of residents.

To be Equitable and Inclusive:

- Intentionally reach out to partners that represent groups and communities who have the expertise on the issues at hand, but may not be heard otherwise.
- Recognize there may be a history of marginalization to overcome before trust can be built.
- Intentionally build trust so as to enable joint decision-making.
- Be responsive, transparent, and allocate sufficient staff and/or management time.
- Check throughout the process to be sure that everyone is really being heard and that the expertise of each community is being incorporated in discussions and decisions.
- Create an equal playing field that will enable both City and community representatives in the partnership to really learn from each other and be open to change (i.e. meeting place, seating arrangement, who sets agenda and chairs meeting, be clear on who has what decision making power).
- Explore together the financial and human resources that can be leveraged from other levels of government and the wider community.

Benefits for the City

Working in partnerships can have many benefits for the City, including: (1) opportunities to have greater impact on established priorities and targeted outcomes; (2) garnering greater influence with other levels of government; (3) attracting resources to the city to help tackle persistent challenges; (4) leveraging partners' expertise to improve efficiency.

Example: Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP)

The Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP) is a collaborative, community initiative designed to strengthen Ottawa's capacity to attract, settle, and integrate immigrants.

- The City worked with local universities and colleges, school boards, the chamber of commerce, settlement service providers, health and resource centres, social service agencies, and regional planning bodies to develop the Ottawa Immigration Strategy.
- The partnership provides a mechanism for collaborative governance in the implementation of the Strategy, and for continued planning and adjustment.
- The governance model is based on the principles of equity and inclusion, with a strategic and intentional focus on transparency and development of trust between the partners.

Other examples of City-community partnerships: the Aboriginal Working Committee Age Friendly Ottawa, Youth University, and the CAWI- City partnership to develop the E & I Lens.

Summary

- Equitable and inclusive governance engages the full diversity of residents by addressing barriers to participation, particularly for groups and individuals whose voices are least likely to be heard.
- When governance is equitable and inclusive, it contributes to financial responsibility, more effective decision-making, and good governance.
- Updating and implementing the Public Participation Policy (2003) with elements of the Equity and Inclusion Lens (2010) in mind can help make this a reality.
- There are various levels of participation, each with its own importance depending on the kind of engagement that will best suite a specific process. In order for each of these levels to be inclusive, be conscious of our city's full diversity and create the conditions necessary to encourage resident engagement.

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