



ACSI Sustainability Summit

Municipal and Community Engagement: Principles and Practices

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Municipal and Community Engagement

- Why Engagement?
- The Foundation of Engagement
- 3 Umbrella strategies for Engagement
- Tools for Engagement
- Questions and Answers

Why engagement?

- Because citizens need to be engaged
 - Practical innovations at municipal level
- Because citizens want to be engaged
 - To address concerns and be part of the solution
- Because citizens demands to be engaged
 - Changing patterns of governance



Elected officials, municipal staff and citizens alike are more apt to support community change when they themselves have been involved in shaping that change.

Engagement results in:

- Buy-in, to sustainability in general and the community effort in particular
- Trust, which is the assessment that the municipality has the commitment and capacity to deliver on what it says it will do and that it is being forthright in what it says
- Action, to help do the necessary work

- Find the “fire souls” and bring them into the process (but don’t become reliant on them!)
- Provide lots of education and outreach
- Engage the implementers
 - o Municipal
 - o Community

Target: Mayor, Council, Senior Staff

Awareness and education at the program outset

- Half-day session to introduce program, answer questions, and solicit ideas. A featured guest speaker from another community is a useful addition.
- Half-day session to review TNS framework and further discuss process and resources
- Work to gain official endorsement of program in terms of a “sustainability declaration” for the municipality
- Promote peer-to-peer learning opportunities: sustainability conferences, workshops
- Introduce municipality to organizations and initiatives promoting sustainability: ACSI, Cities Plus Network, EcoMunicipality Networks, and encourage participation and membership
- Keep leaders abreast of sustainability news that may be relevant to the municipality and community

Target: Municipal staff

- Sustainability training for all departments
- Involve staff in developing action plans for their own departments
- Sustainability suggestion boxes in municipal offices
- Recognition for staff and departments who propose outstanding ideas
- Special green workshops or lunch 'n learn sessions for municipal employees: household energy efficiency to vermiculture

Target: Citizen leaders who drive the process

Sustainability planning offers great opportunities for engagement:

- Citizens Advisory Groups
- Community Visioning Processes
- Strategy Area Task Forces
- Implementation and Monitoring Teams
- Municipal and community campaigns and programs

Target: All of the above, and all of the rest

Tools include:

1. The media

- Engage early, allowing you – and not the nay-sayers - to frame the story
- Keep the media up-to-date; suggest stories and photo opportunities
- Consider special inserts or paid editorial: “The Sustainability Times,” or “Sustainable Wolfville” etc.
- If you’ve got it, use local cable to get the word out

2. Internet-based communications

- Create a website, or a section of the municipal website that provides information and updates on the program, provides links to sustainability resources, etc.
- Use the internet to support various aspects of the process, from visioning to task force planning
- Consider hosting a listserv where citizens can ask questions, share information, and exchange ideas about making the community more sustainable

3. Public meetings and presentations

- Host a Town Hall meeting on sustainability and the AUMA initiative that features local leaders and a speaker from another community on a sustainable path
- Multiple 30- to 60-minute presentations on the initiative to service organizations, environmental groups, and other public institutions
- Sponsor a public speakers series:
 - o Practical “green” subjects from saving energy and dollars at home to rainwater capture
 - o Issues of local concern, e.g. climate change, water use, plastic bags

4. Other public events and offerings

- A one-day Sustainability Fair with speakers, workshops, poster sessions, and eco-efficient technology displays by local retailers and trades people
- One-off, hands-on workshops on topics ranging from sustainable gardening to winterizing your home
- Sustainability learning circles

5. A community-wide sustainability brand

- Create a logo for your initiative and apply it to any and all initiatives involving sustainability. Branding allows the community to associate what would otherwise be seen as one-off events as part of something larger



6. Create a community sustainability centre

- Can be a creation of the municipality or supported as an independent organization (if the latter, funding can be a challenge!)
- Acts as a clearing house for sustainability news and information
- Supports the municipality in its sustainability program
- Sponsors and hosts many of the previous offerings: public speakers and workshops, sustainability training for different community sectors
- Provides leadership for community sustainability initiatives: community bike share program, car-pooling, trash pick-ups, etc.

7. One-off Initiatives

- Programs for special audiences:
Communities of Faith
- Neighbourhood or community wide
community-based social marketing
initiatives: Sustainable Action Canmore

1. Progress towards sustainability takes time. The intensity of activity will vary, and periodic infusions of new energy will be needed. Patience rewards; perseverance furthers!
2. Progress towards sustainability moves along a continuum, through various phases, from a dawning awareness that reality isn't what it used to be and that help is needed, to embracing integrated sustainability planning as a different and more satisfying way of living, working, and governing.
3. Engagement often begins with a single project that initially may not have been identified as a sustainability project. An eco-efficient rec centre retrofit may open the door to long-term sustainability planning.

Communities with the greatest and most diverse citizen involvement are strong and resilient communities.

Engaging citizens is essential for innovative, flexible, smart decision-making on the path towards a new, sustainable future.

Thank You!