The City *of*

SAN DIEGO

Inclusive Public Engagement Guide

Summary of Changes

November 2025

Introduction

The Inclusive Public Engagement Guide (Engagement Guide) provides City staff with best practices for implementing inclusive public outreach and engagement so that more perspectives can be included in the City's decisions. [The Draft Engagement Guide was published online](#) on Sept. 10, 2025 and its public review period remained open until Oct. 19, 2025. Each webpage of the Engagement Guide included a comment form where users could share suggestions for changes to that page's content. In addition, three workshops were held during September and October 2025 (two in-person and one virtual) to share information about the Engagement Guide and gather detailed feedback on barriers to participation and effective engagement techniques.

This document summarizes the themes of the public input received and explains how that input was incorporated into the current version of the Engagement Guide.

History and Background of Public Participation

Public input specific to the History and Background of Public Participation section is summarized below.

Comment theme	How it was addressed
Community members' lack of trust in government is a barrier to participation	Added "Trust" as an additional barrier to Barriers to Participation. The barrier notes that people may have limited trust in the City and other government institutions, which affects their interest in participating
The public is not aware of the history of public participation in San Diego	The initial draft of the Guide included the History and Background of Public Participation section that covers historic and ongoing public participation in San Diego, structural exclusion in decision-making, existing regulations and traditional engagement platforms
Engagement should be welcoming and comfortable for people of all backgrounds	Added a consideration that creating a welcoming environment that invites diverse perspectives can increase participation within Barriers to Participation's Structural Exclusion subsection
Add information about Filipino immigrants' structural exclusion	Added a Filipino Immigrants subsection to Structural Exclusion in Decision-making

Implementing Public Engagement

Public input specific to the Implementing Public Engagement section is summarized below.

Comment theme	How it was addressed
Work with community leaders and engagement partners to further engagement efforts	- Added information on the importance of fostering ongoing relationships with engagement partners to the introduction - Added suggestion to coordinate with community organizations and leaders to engage stakeholders to Step 6: Create and Implement a Public Engagement Plan - Added a consideration of working with youth-focused summer activities to Engaging Children & Youth - Added information on working with community-based organizations that advocate or provide services to low-income communities in the Structural exclusion by income subsection of Engaging Groups Affected by Structural Exclusion
Engagement should be welcoming and comfortable for people of all backgrounds	The initial draft of the Guide included the Facilitation of Engagement Events page. The page covers how facilitators can welcome participants and use small group settings to foster more personal discussions. - Added a recommendation to provide options for sharing input in individual or group settings so participants can choose settings most comfortable to them, to Step 6: Create and Implement a Public Engagement Event - Added information on how community-level meetings could be opportunities to meet community members in a familiar environment to the following pages: - Working with Community-based Organizations - Working with Neighborhood Associations

Comment theme	How it was addressed
Work with engagement partners to co-develop engagement processes when possible	The initial draft of the Guide included a recommendation to work with community-based organizations to co-develop engagement strategies in Working with Community-based Organizations. Added a recommendation to co-develop engagement strategies with engagement partners to the following pages: • Working with the City's Boards and Commissions • Woking with Community Planning Groups and the Community Planners Committee • Working with Neighborhood Associations Added a recommendation to develop relationships with local leaders and organizations before initiating projects to the Structural exclusion by race/ethnicity subsection of Engaging Groups Affected by Structural Exclusion
Work with schools to reach and engage students and their families	A "Working with Schools, Colleges and Universities" page will be added in an upcoming update to the Engagement Guide. The page will cover how staff can partner with K-12 schools and colleges/universities to further project outreach and engagement
Enhance Engaging People Experiencing Homelessness page with additional background and considerations	Added categories of homelessness per the U.S. Office of the Federal Register as well as considerations for working with local organizations and taking sensitivity trainings to Engaging People Experiencing Homelessness and Those in Transitional Housing
Adopt direct communication with members of the military	Added recommendation to clearly specify project goals and outcomes to Engaging Veterans and Members of the Military

Comment theme	How it was addressed
The City should inform the public about the benefits of providing input and explain how input was used	The initial draft of the Guide included guidance on reporting back to explain how participant input was used in Step 7: Report Back • Added a recommendation to refine project alternatives using public input, share those for public review and repeat the process over time to Step 6: Create and Implement a Public Engagement Plan • Clarified that reporting back should also occur when staff are implementing a public engagement plan (as outlined in Step 6: Create and Implement a Public Engagement Plan) in Step 7: Report Back • Added recommendation to share the benefits of getting involved in a project to Step 5: Develop Project Communication Materials • Added emphasis on the importance of following up with stakeholders and showing how their input was used to Engaging Groups Affected by Structural Exclusion
Update links	Updated the links for contacting board and commission staff liaisons in Working with City Boards and Commissions
Engagement efforts should be transparent, consistent, and have clear reporting	The initial draft of the Guide included information about transparent and consistent engagement practices and the importance of clearly reporting to participants how input was used in the following pages: • Engagement Principles • The Steps for Conducting Effective Public Participation • Inclusive Engagement Techniques and Approaches section

Comment theme	How it was addressed
Data collection should be transparent and community-led	The initial draft of the Guide included guidance on how to work with different partners for engagement in the following pages: - Working with Businesses - Working with the City's Boards and Commissions - Working with Community Planning Groups and the Community Planners Committee - Working with Community-based Organizations - Working with Neighborhood Associations It also included information on data collection transparency in the following pages: - Step 6: Create and Implement a Public Engagement Plan - Step 7: Report Back - Inclusive Engagement Techniques and Approaches Introduction
Provide activities for youth and young adults at engagement events	The initial draft of the Guide included information on youth-specific activities on the following pages: - Engaging with Children and Youth - Participation Support
Recognize community councils and nontraditional structures	The initial draft of the Guide included information on working with neighborhood associations and informal community networks on the following pages: - Working with Community-based Organizations - Working with Neighborhood Associations

Inclusive Public Engagement Techniques & Approaches

Public input specific to the Inclusive Engagement Techniques & Approaches section is summarized below.

Comment theme	How it was addressed
Share information in well-frequented areas and in easily accessible ways	- Added guidance on how to distribute flyers to recreation centers and libraries, as well as posting to bulletin boards, to Flyers - Added recommendations to compress files as needed to allow the public to more easily download them, while still maintaining image/text quality, to Webpages and Social Media - Added recommendations to record meetings and share recordings with stakeholders who could not attend the briefing or meeting to Briefings and Web-based/Hybrid Meetings - Added a consideration of partnering with organizations to host pop-up events to Pop-up Events - Added a recommendation to hold mobile engagements during community events to reach diverse audiences to Mobile Engagement
Ensure that staff subject matter experts are available to answer questions	Added recommendations to have staff subject matter experts available to address questions from the public on the following pages: - Community Cafés - Community Office Hours - Focus Groups - Mobile Engagement - Open Houses - Pop-up Events - Project-specific Groups - Public Meetings - Tours and Field Trips - Web-based/Hybrid Meetings - Workshops

Comment theme	How it was addressed
Work with community leaders and community-level news outlets to further engagement efforts	• Added a suggestion to train community leaders on project topics to facilitate their own discussions to Meeting in a Box • Added a recommendation to share news releases with community-level newsletters to News Releases
Understand the change in public sentiment over time	Added a recommendation to use surveys to understand changes in participants' sentiment of projects before and after discussions to the following pages: • Appreciative Inquiry • Project-specific Groups
Update links and permit information	Clarified that large-scale engagement techniques in the public right-of-way may require special events permits, and updated links to permits on the following pages: • Pop-up Events • Project Models • Vision Walls
Transportation is a notable barrier to participation	The initial draft of the Guide included information on transportation constraints in Barriers to Participation. • Added examples of how to address transportation barriers to Participation Support
Show appreciation for participant input	The initial draft of the Guide included information on thanking participants for their input and clarifying next steps in Surveys and Polls. • Added guidance on thanking participants for their input and clarifying next steps in Comment Forms
Ensure techniques and approaches are clear and simple to understand	The initial draft of the Guide included a page about Charrettes, a technique that uses a series of design-focused workshops to gather feedback. Members of the public shared feedback expressing confusion about the term "charrette," so the page's content was merged with Workshops, and references to charrettes throughout the Guide were revised to say "design-focused workshop".

Comment theme	How it was addressed
Additional miscellaneous suggested edits to Techniques	- Added guidance on using flyers, QR codes and buttons/name tags to encourage conversations to Community Cafes - Added guidance on using group email accounts to Fact Sheets and Flyers - Added recommendation to conduct tours when locations are active to Tours and Field Trips

Miscellaneous

Public input that was not specific to an existing Guide section is summarized below.

Comment theme	How it was addressed
The public and members of community-based organizations may have constraints in how they can participate	The initial draft of the Guide included information on community members' time limitations, and guidance on providing options that acknowledge differing abilities for investment of time when implementing public engagement on the following pages: • Barriers to Participation • Step 6: Create and Implement a Public Engagement Plan • Inclusive Engagement Techniques and Approaches section
Engagement events should be interesting for participants of all ages	The initial draft of the Guide included tip sheets with interactive approaches to engagement, and information on how to facilitate engagement events for participants of all ages on the following pages: • Engaging with Children and Youth • Game-based Approaches • Participation Support • Facilitation of Engagement Events
Establish a community ambassador program	The Framework for Improvement section in the Guide's staff report includes a recommendation to strengthen engagement with underrepresented groups by establishing a Community Connectors program. Community Connectors would serve as liaisons between the City and communities to advise on and conduct public engagement.
Provide a central location for information on public participation opportunities and project updates	The Framework for Improvement section in the Guide's staff report includes a recommendation to provide information on public participation opportunities in an online centralized hub. The hub could help the public stay up to date with opportunities to provide input by creating a single place to find information.
Use text messaging services to share information	The Framework for Improvement section in the Guide's staff report includes a recommendation to use two-way text messaging services to send community members project updates or opportunities to share input with the City. This can be an effective way to reach people because most households in the city of San Diego have access to a smartphone.

Comment theme	How it was addressed
Provide civic education to understand how to engage with the City	The Framework for Improvement section in the Guide's staff report includes a recommendation to create additional civic education opportunities that build the public's capacity to engage effectively. Civic education can help the public understand how the City works and provide more relevant and informed input to the City.
Increase staff presence in communities	The Framework for Improvement section in the Guide's staff report includes a recommendation to seek funding opportunities to expand staffing and resources for public outreach and engagement.
Concern and feedback on effectiveness of past City engagement processes	Several comments were received regarding the effectiveness of past City engagement processes. In 2021, the Inclusive Public Engagement Guide was identified as an implementation action in the Parks Master Plan and Climate Resilient SD Plan, both of which called for consistent and inclusive public engagement practices across the City. The aim of developing, publishing and implementing the Guide is to enhance previous engagement processes and better serve the public by involving more voices in City decision-making.
Make public engagement guidance mandatory	Several comments were received for City policies and processes to "require" certain items for engagement. The Guide is not required by law and does not affect other applicable federal, state or local requirements. The Guide was developed as a resource to support City departments in engaging the public in effective and inclusive ways but does not require specific actions. Requirements are addressed separately through regulations.
Guide usability	Several comments were received about preferring the Guide to be formatted as a single PDF document. While the Guide was intentionally formatted as a living document on the City's website that can be updated as any needs to refine are identified, a PDF document was created for the City Council Rules Committee informational item and will be made available for download on the Guide website.