

Community Engagement Guide
for State-Supported Regional Water Planning and Management

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Purpose of the Community Engagement Guide

The Community Engagement Guide is a set of guidelines and best practices for how to meaningfully engage communities in regional water planning. This is intended to be accessible to and used by Place-Based Planning groups, and everyone involved in building a successful regional water planning and management collaborative (e.g., state agency staff involved with regional water planning, communities, etc.) The guide is intended to be a tool to ensure that a diversity of voices are proactively and continuously included throughout a water planning effort and in ongoing management. It is intended to be accessible, flexible, and inclusive in order to support diverse regions and communities. The hope is that by providing this guide to Place-Based Planning and other regional water planning and management groups, it will provide support to ensure that no one is left out of processes.

Purpose of Community Engagement in Regional Water Planning and Management

Communities across Oregon are impacted by water planning decisions, whether local stakeholders who live within and use the water from a basin, or statewide stakeholders who share these resources through ORS 537.110. Informing, engaging and supporting the communities who may benefit from or experience the effects of regional water planning is an essential element of this work.

Community-centered processes build a shared understanding about challenges and opportunities, establish proactive spaces rather than convening to respond to a crisis, and build shared language, knowledge, and capacity for a diversity of stakeholders to engage around water. A transparent and inclusive process can help create trust amongst a group and build longevity for an effort. It can also help to identify potential benefits, burdens, and systemic issues that may interfere with intended outcomes, or point to unintended consequences of certain decisions to develop a more informed plan with better, more equitable and durable outcomes.

Bringing as many perspectives as possible into the planning process will incorporate an array of wisdom and experiences, create a deeper sense of ownership, and aim to avoid conflict or opposition to an effort down the line. Community engagement must begin at the onset of a process and may require meeting people where they are at physically or philosophically, rather than merely opening meetings or asking people to sign off on work products with little room for change. This is especially

important for communities who have been traditionally left out of the public process, such as environmental justice communities who are more likely to have broken trust in planning processes and require additional resources to help them to engage. Ultimately, work with communities is not a destination but must be ongoing, must evolve and adapt, and must help foster new leadership and capacity that can seed future processes.

Community Engagement Principles and Best Practices

Principle A) *Regional Planning Should Be Collaborative with Communities*

Best Practices

- 1) Community means: People who live, work, or play within the planning region; entities with an interest or obligation relative to water and ecosystems in the region; people or ecosystems impacted by water planning in the region or water impacted downstream of the region; and governments (federal, state, local, tribal).
- 2) Community Collaboration means: Community members impacted by a process are engaged at the outset, asked to define values and outcomes for a process, and empowered to take ownership to shape the process and its ultimate outcomes.
- 3) Communities engage to understand and articulate the purpose, goals, and needs for pursuing water planning, and self determine whether to pursue and commit to a regional planning process.
- 4) Community partners provide leadership in a regional planning process.
- 5) While collaborative, it should be clear that federal, state laws and rules govern the effort.

Principle B) *Participation in Regional Planning Should be Balanced and Inclusive, and Should Include both Instream and Out of Stream Interests*

Best Practices

- 1) Planning groups value broad, diverse engagement and recognize this leads to more effective, durable outcomes.
- 2) Engagement approaches are based on the scope and charter of the group (i.e. issues identified and different requirements for participation).
- 3) Historically marginalized people and individuals that may be impacted by the outcomes are considered at the outset, to help identify who should be invited to the table before the process starts.

Principle C) *Regional Planning Should Be Transparent and Accessible for All*

Best Practices

- 1) Create a welcoming environment for new representation and interests
- 2) Identify barriers to engagement and work to address those specific needs early on.
- 3) Offer incentives and resources to encourage and enable people to come to the table.
- 4) Create multiple platforms for engagement (e.g. virtual, in-person, written, field tours, etc).
- 5) Hold meetings in an open and participatory manner.
- 6) Establish a user friendly and accessible home for information, and a point of contact for access to the process.
- 7) Provide public materials and information in multiple languages.
- 8) Provide adequate time for review of materials.
- 9) Process should set clear and realistic expectations around how community feedback will be valued and incorporated throughout the process

Principle D) *Regional Planning must recognize that Tribal Engagement is not a monolith and each Tribe may have a different level of engagement in planning, different structures for communication and outreach, and different governmental departments engaged in planning and implementation*

Best Practices

- 1) Each tribe holds unique sovereign rights and has multiple avenues for achieving its goals for water planning and management, including consultation with federal and state governments.
- 2) Consultation between Oregon and tribal governments is a separate procedure from community or public engagement in regional water planning. (ORS 182.162 to 182.168). Outcomes of consultation may impact regional planning efforts.
- 3) Tribal engagement in regional planning is important and should be meaningfully supported by the state throughout the process. "Tribes" are not a monolith and cannot be generalized (see number 1 above). For regional planning efforts, each tribe should be engaged individually to determine an engagement approach that will work for their interests and needs.
- 4) Regional planning should be aware of and acknowledge tribal rights, both inherent as well as those explicitly defined through treaties and trusts, formal consultation, settlements and any completed or outstanding adjudication procedures that may impact the sideboards of a regional planning effort. It is only through consultation with tribes that all forms of tribal

rights and interests can be identified and understood, and included in planning efforts and plans.

Principle E) Regional Planning Should Foster Public Input Early in the Process and Ongoing

Best Practices

- 1) Engage communities and the public early and often in the process.
- 2) Develop an intentional plan for ongoing public input throughout the planning process, including strategies for identifying and reaching out to all impacted groups and people.
- 3) Create opportunities beyond ‘public notice and comment’ for public influence. Be clear about what the input space is within the process and document how public input is integrated into the effort.
- 4) Conduct regular communication and outreach to the broader public and interests throughout the process.
- 5) Support an ongoing two-way exchange of information that transparently communicates the feedback received, a clear review of that feedback, documentation of what feedback was received, what was integrated (how/where), and what wasn't (why).

Principle F) Regional Planning Should Sustain an Informed Public

Best Practices

- 1) Educate communities about regional water concerns and the sideboards of a planning process so that they can more confidently and effectively engage in water planning.
- 2) Establish a foundational understanding of the context (state and federal law, sovereign treaty rights, allocations, water budget, etc.) within which the regional planning effort sits.
- 3) Address knowledge gaps around water through shared learning, clear communications and approachable materials.
- 4) Engage the public, when possible, in regional data gathering and analysis review to make information more digestible and trusted.

Principle G) Regional Planning Should Support Trust Building Between All Participants, Community Members, and the State

Best Practices

- 1) Conduct community needs and assets assessments to address what's known and in existence, and where there may be gaps.

- 2) Provide time and resources to build a baseline of relationships before a process begins. Maintain momentum for sustained engagement.
- 3) Continue to build and maintain relationships along the way.
- 4) Consider opportunities to build trust within a regional group, including with state and federal governments and agencies.
- 5) Create opportunities for knowledge exchange between local communities and state agencies.
- 6) Coordinate public engagement with other efforts, when possible, to support capacity and broader participation, and to build upon existing efforts.
- 7) Establish a mechanism of accountability for partners, public, and decision-makers where agreements are reached in a collaborative planning process.

Principle H) *Regional Planning Should Demonstrate Accountability*

Best Practices

- 1) Work with participants in the process, and who are part of any external engagement, to create metrics and goals to measure the efficacy and implementation of Community Engagement guidelines in a regional planning effort.
- 2) Document and acknowledge how those guidelines were or were not achieved at multiple points throughout a planning process.
- 3) Capture both quantitative actions (e.g. specific activities, how many and how often) and qualitative feedback from participants (e.g. how has the process felt for them, how conflict was addressed, what did people value, etc.) to develop a better and more holistic understanding of community engagement.
- 4) Gather this information and feedback continuously along the way as a feedback mechanism. This iterative collection of information and reflection can help to improve efforts going forward.
- 5) Identify who will be responsible for this measurement, documentation, tracking, and reporting. Consider utilizing an advisory body or steering committee made up of members in a process to help steward accountability and ensure feedback and metrics have a purpose and impact. This body can help ensure that adjustments are made to the process in response to the information gathered.