



Community Engagement Guidelines for Project Applicants

Summary

Project applicants should engage with the community concerning proposed development projects. Community engagement during the project planning process often leads to better projects, with improved outcomes for both project applicants and community members. Applicants should engage with the community during the preliminary design phase of the project and results should be summarized in the project's development application to the City of Oakland.

These guidelines describe recommended activities and processes to engage affected community stakeholders of a proposed development project.¹ Ongoing engagement efforts throughout project consideration, construction, and occupancy are highly encouraged. The suggested outreach efforts in this document are intended to generate open dialogue between the project applicant and community members, provide a platform for both parties to understand the benefits and impacts of the proposed project, and assist the applicant in designing a successful project.²

Although community engagement is important for all development projects, it is especially important for larger projects, controversial projects, and projects with the potential to cause substantial community impacts, particularly to under-represented communities such as low-income residents, people of color, and non-English speakers. Project applicants proposing the following projects **will be required to submit a written statement to the City**, along with the project's development application, describing the community engagement efforts undertaken to date:

- New residential projects with 50 or more residential units;
- New or modified non-residential activities of 10,000 square feet or more floor area, including changes of use or occupants; or
- New or modified industrial activities located within 1,500 feet of a residential zone, including changes of use or occupants.

¹ The Planning and Building Department, in partnership with the Alameda County Public Health Department and community-based organizations East Oakland Building Healthy Communities, Causa Justa::Just Cause, Communities for a Better Environment, East Bay Housing Organizations, and HOPE Collaborative, developed these guidelines as a part of the Healthy Development Guidelines, which are a framework to promote healthy and equitable development in Oakland.

² The community engagement efforts described in this document are in addition to the public notification and engagement required by the Oakland Planning Code and administered by City staff.

Although project applicants are not *required* to sponsor community engagement efforts for the above types of projects, the Planning Commission, City staff, and community stakeholders expect that community engagement will occur and project applicants **will be required to submit a written statement to the City** describing community engagement efforts. The requirement to submit a written statement only applies to the above projects when a discretionary planning or zoning permit application is required.³ Applicants proposing projects other than the above types are encouraged to conduct community engagement efforts and submit a written statement to the City but will not be required to unless requested by City staff.

The recommended engagement process includes the following five steps, each of which is described in more detail in the remainder of this document:

- **Step 1.** Prepare an inclusive community engagement plan and identify the outcomes, measures, and deliverables for your engagement efforts;
- **Step 2.** Identify and partner with a community-based organization that has experience working with nearby stakeholders who will be affected by the proposed development project;
- **Step 3.** Identify and contact existing residents, employees, business owners, neighbors, and other stakeholders;
- **Step 4.** Conduct community engagement activities; and
- **Step 5.** Evaluate, summarize, present, and implement.

Step 1. Prepare an inclusive community engagement plan and identify the outcomes, measures, and deliverables for your engagement efforts.

(a) Prepare an inclusive community engagement plan. The plan should include key activities, milestones, and products on the project timeline. Develop a detailed work plan that includes specific engagement activities based on an overall strategy with clear outcomes, measures, and deliverables. Identify and make use of appropriate tools consistent with the defined roles, issues, audience, and resources. It is helpful to follow the following six principles for effective inclusive engagement: (i) identify and plan to build relationships with the community, particularly low-income communities, communities of color, and non-English speakers; (ii) create a welcoming atmosphere at all activities and events; (iii) ensure accessibility for all participants; (iv) develop alternative and culturally appropriate methods for engagement; (v) maintain an ongoing presence in the community; and (vi) develop partnerships with organizations of color.

(b) Identify the outcomes, measures, and deliverables for your engagement efforts. Potential outcomes, measures, and deliverables to consider include the following: (i) number of people attending engagement activities or contacted about the project; (ii) demographic mix of people reached by engagement activities; (iii) level of community understanding about the project; (iv) community attitudes and opinions about the project; and (v) degree of project design change in response to community input.

³ Projects that are exempt from a zoning permit/approval or only require an “over-the-counter” non-discretionary zoning permit/approval are not required to submit a written statement describing community engagement efforts.

Step 2. Identify and partner with a community-based organization that has experience working with nearby stakeholders who will be affected by the proposed development project.

(a) If most stakeholders are residents or neighbors, consider partnering with a community-based organization that is already experienced and equipped in reaching out and hosting community meetings and would be interested in informing the development project.

(b) If most stakeholders are businesses or other non-residential organizations, consider partnering with a community-based organization that focuses on work with business associations, business improvement districts, arts organizations, trade organizations, or other non-residential stakeholders.

(c) Project applicants can consult the City of Oakland Planning and Building Department for further guidance on identifying stakeholders by issue area and geography.

(d) Special effort should be made to reach stakeholders traditionally marginalized or under-represented in the planning process, such as low-income residents, people of color, and non-English speakers. Considerations for maximizing under-represented groups in the engagement approach should include things such as the location and time of day for scheduled meetings, childcare, and translation/interpretation needs.

Step 3. Identify and contact impacted residents, employees, business owners, neighbors, and other stakeholders.

(a) Conduct a good faith effort to identify and contact stakeholders within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of the project boundary, including residents, neighbors, employers, and community and business organizations, such as community-based organizations, recreation centers, libraries, places of worship, and business associations. Stakeholders can be contacted through various paths, including mailing flyers to each address, posting flyers within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of the project boundary, calling surrounding businesses and residents, and/or attending public events, such as farmers' markets, fairs, street festivals, neighborhood meetings, etc.

(b) When contacting stakeholders, the project representative should include relevant information about the project, including:

- Project address and project website, if applicable;
- Contact information for the project developer;
- Date, time, and location of planned project outreach event (as described in Step 4 below);
- Date, time, and location of any related public hearings or meetings for the project, if scheduled; and
- Description of basic project features and relevant details, such as:
 - proposed use(s) and changes from current use(s), if applicable;
 - proposed project size, square footage, and height;
 - illustrative graphics (such as a site plan or rendering);
 - proposed tenants (if known); and
 - anticipated project benefits, impacts, and mitigations.

(c) Contact should occur at least two weeks prior to the community outreach event (as described in Step 4 below). Flyers and written information should be offered in multiple languages, based on the proposed project's neighborhood demographics. For more information on identifying language needs and pertinent local policy, consult with the City of Oakland Planning and Building Department.

Step 4. Conduct community engagement activities.

There are many ways to engage the community and establish a successful relationship with project stakeholders. Activities vary widely; a list of example activities is provided below.

- **Design charrette:** A planning session with designers, developers, stakeholders, and interested community members to discuss preliminary designs and the program of the proposed development. Participants are presented with conceptual designs and invited to comment and work through any concerns or opportunities of the proposed project.
- **Workshop:** A public meeting to exchange information with the community members. Participants are presented with information about the proposed project and invited to provide input through facilitated small group discussions, survey worksheets, or public comment boards / dot exercises.
- **'Pop-up' or mobile workshop:** A 'pop-up' workshop brings the project representatives to places of interest and local gathering spots in the community. Pop-up workshops may occur in front of grocery stores, at retail centers, near schools, at the project site, at a local event by hosting a booth, or a mix of places and events within ½ mile of the project site. This type of targeted outreach can be used to conduct surveys, distribute flyers, and achieve face-to-face engagement with the community.
- **Living room or focus group chats:** Smaller 'living room' events or focus groups held in community spaces (e.g., coffee shop, residents' homes, school classrooms) allow community members to provide input and exchange ideas, and can also be used to have focused follow-up discussions after a large event. These types of smaller events can be used to connect with community members in an intimate, safe space and gain meaningful input around key issues or concerns.
- **Endorsement program:** Public endorsement should be gained by first educating community members about the proposed project, asking for their feedback and opinion, and addressing their feedback and opinions, followed by an invitation to support the project (e.g., sign a letter of support, pledge support on a project website, or submit their own endorsement statement to be included in the project application).

Regardless of the type of engagement activity, project applicants should follow the following principles:

- Have a sign-in sheet** or other type of means for contacting interested parties about the project or follow-up activities.
- Collect demographic information** of the attendees.⁴

⁴ Collecting demographic information of attendees of community engagement activities is important so that project applicants know if they are successfully reaching traditionally marginalized or under-represented stakeholders, such as low-income residents, people of color, and non-English speakers. Since attendees may not always feel comfortable providing this type of information, it is important for project applicants to collect this information anonymously (separate from sign-in sheets) and to inform attendees

- ❑ **Take careful notes** from any event for reference in follow-up discussions with community members or City staff.
- ❑ To determine the best platform for the community outreach event, first **identify relevant characteristics of the target stakeholders**, such as whether they live or work in the project area, what languages they speak, recent controversies in the neighborhood, and other important issues.
- ❑ **Consider hosting the meeting during the evening or weekend** when stakeholders are more likely to be home, choose a location close to the project site, offer food, and if possible, childcare. If most stakeholders are employees, a morning meeting may be more appropriate.
- ❑ **Decide if you need a language interpreter** and if it is best to **meet with the community in their own trusted gathering place**, such as a local community center, place of worship, or library, and identify what the platform should be.
- ❑ **Always provide an opportunity for community members to submit written comments on the project** at the event and after the event for those who do not feel comfortable speaking up at a large event or did not have the opportunity to participate.
- ❑ **Have an evaluation form** for attendees to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the engagement activity.

Step 5. Evaluate, summarize, present, and implement.

(a) Following each community engagement activity (Step 4 outlined above), the developer or project representative should evaluate the effectiveness of the engagement efforts, including whether engagement goals were achieved. Use evaluation forms at engagement events or through other venues to receive feedback from stakeholders and participants in the process. Include evaluation results in your report to the City.

(b) When submitting the development application to the City, include a statement to the Planning and Building Department that summarizes the following:

- Summary of the community engagement plan, outcomes, and measures (Step 1);
- Summary of stakeholders contacted and methods of doing so (Steps 2 and 3);
- Summary of community engagement activities (Step 4), including notes and summary of stakeholder and community input, numbers of participants, demographic information of attendees, and copies of any printed materials related to the event(s) (flyers, postcards, emails, sign-in sheets, presentations, etc.); and

that the information is being collected anonymously, participation is voluntary, and the collected information will assist the project applicant and the City in understanding who is attending so that the best effort can be made to reach all people of the community. It is recommended that open-ended questions, such as the following, be asked: (i) what type of stakeholder are you (resident, employee, business owner, property owner, organization representative, etc.)?; (ii) what is your race?; (iii) what language do you speak at home?; (iv) what is your gender?; (v) how old are you?; and (vi) what is your annual household income?

- Explanation of how stakeholder and community input has been or will be incorporated into the project and explanation of any input that has not or will not be incorporated into the project. Consider providing the following details:
 - Bulleted list of stakeholder comments, even if contradictory, organized by topic;
 - Response to stakeholder comments; and
 - Where applicable, references to the project plans to identify project design features corresponding to stakeholder comments.