



City of
Gainesville

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDEBOOK

Developed by Public Participation Partners in partnership with the City of Gainesville, FL

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INTRODUCTION



I. INTRODUCTION

The City of Gainesville seeks to foster collaboration with local community members through equitable and inclusive community engagement. Departments throughout the City of Gainesville share a commitment to center the needs and perspectives of community members in all we do. We can improve our community-centered mission by connecting it to a set of core values for engagement.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

This guidebook offers a shared framework for defining engagement, tips on how and when to engage, and guidelines for promoting mutually beneficial engagement with communities and community partners. It contains resources for the design, planning, review, and evaluation of community engagement efforts.

“The engagement professional’s role is often to identify barriers to participation and help people to overcome them. Professionals face increasing responsibility to make it easier for the public to become engaged and stay engaged in a way that is meaningful and convenient for them.”

(Source: Planning for Effective Public Participation, Foundations in Public Engagement, IAP2 International Federation 2016, p.21)



WHAT IS ENGAGEMENT?

Public engagement is a critical tool for building trust between residents and the City. Public engagement is a **continual process** that involves residents in city problem solving or decision-making and uses their input to make sustainable decisions that affect their communities. It is a two-way dialogue between an agency and the community that is continued throughout individual projects and across the City.

All meaningful engagement is rooted in trust and requires time and resources. With that said, there is a spectrum of engagement ranging from outreach efforts to inform communities, to deep engagement efforts aimed at empowering community members to make decisions.

ENGAGEMENT GOALS: THE T.R.U.S.T. MODEL

Engagement goals should be the foundation of every public engagement effort. The T.R.U.S.T. Gainesville's Promise for Community Engagement was developed as an easy-to-remember model for engagement goals. Every project should use the TRUST model as its engagement foundation and expand upon this model to create a successful engagement plan.



Each goal in the TRUST model represents a promise being made by the City of Gainesville to the public. This promise can be achieved by implementing the objectives listed beneath each goal throughout the engagement process.

Transparent.

The City will be transparent with the public. This can be achieved by...

- ◇ providing early and ongoing engagement opportunities
- ◇ closing the feedback loop to let participants know how their feedback impacted project decisions

Reliable.

The City will be a reliable source of information. This can be achieved by...

- ◇ communicating in an authentic, easy-to-understand, and comprehensive way
- ◇ creating easy and equitable opportunities for the public to learn more about projects
- ◇ including the perspectives of those who are traditionally underrepresented

Useful.

The City will create useful opportunities for community engagement. This can be achieved by...

- ◇ asking for feedback only when it can reasonably be used in project decisions

Sustainable.

The City will engage the public in a sustainable way. This can be achieved by...

- ◇ implementing measures to prevent participation fatigue, including coordinating between projects and only engaging the public when it is necessary
- ◇ planning methods to engage those who are traditionally underrepresented

Timely.

The City will provide timely notification of engagement opportunities. This can be achieved by...

- ◇ notifying the community of engagement opportunities with enough time to plan to participate
- ◇ conducting targeted outreach to help notify community members who are not reached through traditional methods

PLANNING FOR ENGAGEMENT



II. PLANNING FOR ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Public engagement planning is the process by which staff determine if a public process is needed for a particular project or initiative, when and how to include the public in project decisions, and what methods to use to involve the public in the project development process. Ideally, public engagement planning should begin at the concept and initiation stage of a project or initiative. This will ensure that adequate staff time and financial resources are allocated to support the desired engagement process. Planning for engagement helps staff to focus outreach efforts by outlining a clear plan of action for conducting engagement at each point of the process.

Planning for engagement helps agencies

- ✓ Define engagement goals
- ✓ Identify the community's needs
- ✓ Determine key audiences
- ✓ Develop a method for measuring success
- ✓ Ensure that a public participation process:
 - ✓ is needed
 - ✓ fits the context of the project
 - ✓ is based on a clear understanding of the challenge or problem

Demographic Profile Engagement Considerations

Race



If there is a notable presence of people of color and/ or immigrant groups, then consider the following:

- Are there any cultural, religious, political, or historical factors that may influence or serve as barriers to their engagement? (ex: appropriate meeting venues, meeting times/dates, perception of safety in government interactions, etc.). If possible, consider contacting community leaders to identify best methods to engage these groups.
- Is it possible that these groups could be disproportionately or adversely impacted by the final decision? If yes, consider conducting small group meetings with these groups to identify ways to avoid or mitigate potential negative or adverse impacts.

Poverty



If there is a notable presence of low-income and/or zero car households, consider:

- Holding meetings at multiple times of day and on weekends to accommodate shift workers.
- Holding meetings in geographically accessible locations and/or providing transportation to/from meetings.
- Offering child care and refreshments.
- Ensuring that all online outreach uses mobile-friendly platforms and does not require application downloads to view.

LEP



- According to N.C. Department of Transportation standards, if at least 50 adults of a Block Group’s population within a language group speak English less than very well, then it is recommended that oral interpreters be provided at meetings and targeted media advertising be used to reach these individuals.
- Federal guidelines state that if a language group that speaks English less than very well exists within the outreach area that either has 1,000 adults or makes up 5% of the aggregate population (with at least 50 adults), then translated meeting and notification materials should be provided.

Education



If there is a notable presence of residents with less than a high school education, consider

- Lowering the reading level of all outreach materials.

Demographic Profile Engagement Considerations

Disability



After reviewing disability status data, if there are residents with disabilities within the project outreach area, consider:

- Providing American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters at public meetings by participant request (see the access to language services and disability accommodations statement on p. 5).
- Following ADA accessible recommendations for print and visual materials.
- Providing phone-in lines or video conferencing sessions for public meetings.
- Providing staff to assist disabled participants.
- Holding meetings in accessible venues.
- Including a request for accommodations statement on all meeting notices.
- Following Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG 2.0) for all online meeting content.

Age



If there is a notable presence of senior residents, consider:

- Limiting the use of online or social media outreach and instead use direct mailers.
- Following ADA accessible recommendations for print and visual materials.

If there is a notable presence of youth, consider:

- Incorporating methods to obtain their input through essays, poster contests, video submissions, or interactive visioning exercises during public meetings.

Housing



If there are renters living in the project outreach area, consider:

- Ensuring that all mailed notices are sent to the property owner AND physical address.
- Asking apartment property managers to distribute notices using their communication channels and/or to host popup events to allow the project team to engage residents.

Data Collection Methods

There are various methods for collecting input data from groups and individuals. In order to collect feedback from a diverse group of residents, it may be necessary to use a combination of techniques including face-to-face, written, and online feedback.

What type of data is needed?

In order to select the right method of data collection, you must consider the information you want to collect, at what point in the decision-making process it is needed, and the timeframe it is needed.

Step 1: Determine what information is needed

Based on the selected level of public participation, identify which aspects of the decision that the public can influence. For example, if the chosen level of participation asks the public to react to a predetermined option, it is unproductive to structure the input approach to ask the public to develop alternatives. When determining the type of information needed, do not ask the public to make decisions that are outside of their authority or level of understanding.

Step 2: Determine when the information is needed

It is always important to involve the public early on and throughout a decision-making process; however, it is necessary to know when to seek public input and when to make the needed decision. Based on the selected level of public participation and level of public influence, determine at which points in the decision-making process can the public most usefully contribute.

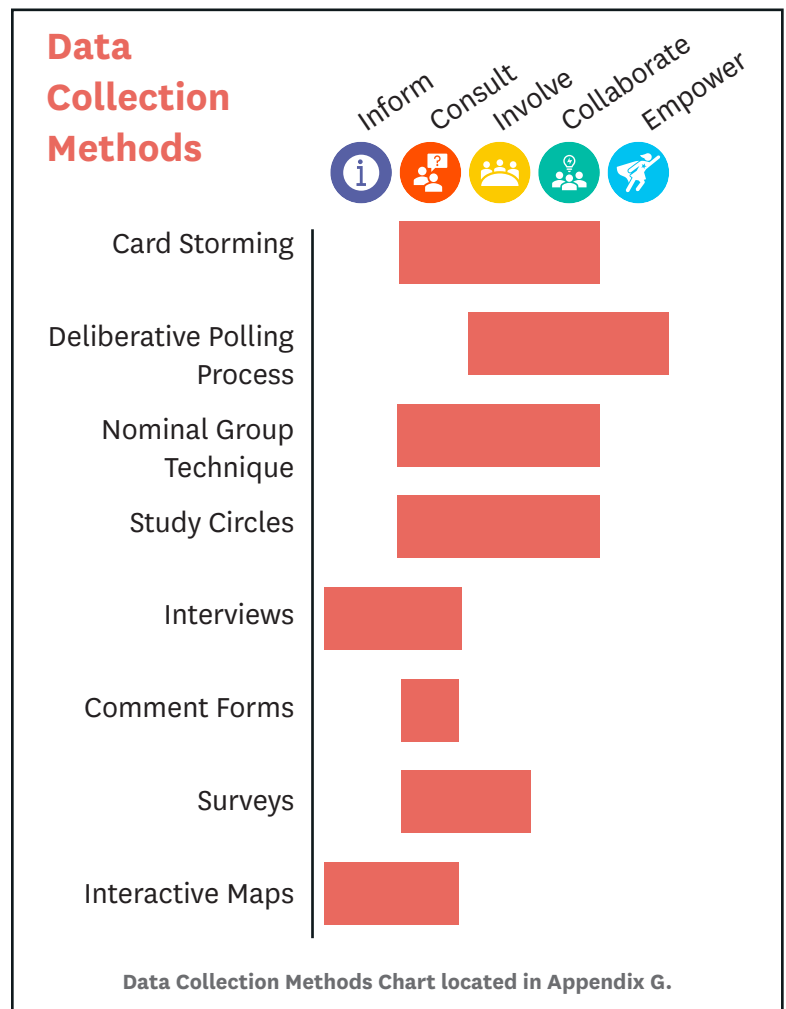
Based on the proposed project timeline, determine the timeframe in which public input is needed in order to be considered.

Step 3: Identify which data collection methods fit the context

Different techniques are needed at different points in the decision-making process. For example, data collection methods that are best used in visioning processes may not be effective in collecting data for final recommendations. And not all techniques will be effective in collecting data from all stakeholders. Once you have determined the type of information

needed and the timeframe that it is needed by, identify which data collection methods will support each stage of the decision-making process and will be effective based on the targeted audience.

Feedback can be collected through interactive group methods or individual data collection. Group methods include card storming, deliberative polling process, nominal group technique, or study circles. These processes rely on collaboration as a group and discussion and interaction to develop feedback. Individual feedback can be collected through interviews, comment forms, surveys, or interactive maps. These feedback methods rely on the solo participation of a member of the community and gather individual input. Refer to **Appendix G** for a list of group and individual data collection methods.



Using and Managing Public Input

The next step in the public engagement planning process is to determine how the data collected from the public will be used in the decision-making process, how the data will be managed, and how results will be communicated to the public.

Useful.

Sustainable.

Step 1: Based on the selected level of public participation, determine and document how public input will be considered in the decision process.

Step 2: Develop a method for compiling and managing public comments.

Prior to collecting information, create a comment management system to track and analyze the data. Identifying a comment management system and the appropriate data fields during the planning process will provide a consistent method for collecting data and will simplify the data entry and analysis process.

Transparent.

Step 3: Determine how and when results will be communicated with the public.

Communicate to participants how their input affected the decision, a process for reporting on the participation and feedback received and how the decision-maker will address comments is needed. To develop an appropriate process, consider the following:

- How will participant questions be responded to? (ex. Individually in writing, FAQ lists, etc.)
- How will the feedback loop be closed? (ex. Comment summaries, newsletters, etc.)

Survey Ethics

Transparent.

Reliable.

Useful.

Sustainable.

It's crucial that surveys adhere to ethics to receive higher quality data. Without this consideration, survey responses may be skewed or biased and therefore not an accurate representation of the population's perspective. Using an ethical approach to survey writing ensures each participant has a fair opportunity to provide feedback without misrepresentation. Ethical surveys help capture accurate data and therefore make participation not only fairer, but more worthwhile for the participant and agency.

Here are some tips to consider for writing an ethical survey.

Clearly state the survey's purpose.

A critical part in writing an ethical survey is letting the participant know what the survey is for and how their feedback will be incorporated into the decision-making process. This statement should not be unreasonably long, but should clearly state the survey's intent and how the input will be used.

This is also a good time to mention confidentiality and guarantee that respondent's personal information will not be shared in any summaries or reports without their permission. You may also choose to let participants remain anonymous throughout the survey.

Ask specific and unbiased questions.

Asking specific questions is a key part of creating relevant survey content. Specific questions will adhere to a particular issue you are looking for feedback on and this will provide the high-quality input that will guide project decisions. Additionally, questions that clearly address a topic are more effective than vague questions as the survey team will not have to infer what was meant by a particular response.

One of the hardest parts of survey writing is formulating questions that are unbiased. However, this is also one of the most important parts of survey writing. Biased questions skew data and produce unreliable results that cannot accurately be used to draw conclusions. The below chart includes question types to avoid in survey writing:

Chart 3: Survey Questions to Use

USE	Description	Example
Mutually exclusive, exhaustive options for close-ended questions	Answer choices should cover all possible options without overlap so the respondent's answer is clear.	Ex: What is your age? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 18 years old • 18-25 years old • 26-34 years old • 35-44 years old • 45-54 years old • 55 years old or older
Close-ended questions	If there are limited alternatives for a decision, do not ask open-ended questions for what the respondent would like to see. Keeping the responses relevant and closed will eliminate confusion and irrelevant answers.	Ex: Which proposed community center design do you prefer? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A • B • No Preference • Neither
Comments after questions	This allows participants to include additional information to supplement close-ended questions.	Ex: Please provide any comments about question 2 below.

Chart 4: Survey Questions to Avoid

AVOID	Description	Example
Double-barreled questions	These ask about two things in one question. Respondents may feel differently about the two options, but this type of question makes their perspective unclear.	Ex: Do you like the proposed sidewalk and the creation of a bike lane? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
Leading questions	These questions use overtly positive or negative language to encourage a respondent to answer a particular way. These questions will create biased results.	Ex: Do you support the beautiful new addition to the parkway? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
Loaded questions	These questions include assumptions about the participant and require them to answer in a way that may not align with their actual opinions.	Ex: What do you love about the new median design?

Communicating with Diverse Groups

Effective communication strategies consider the diversity of the audiences that they attempt to reach. To ensure that your message reaches and is received by all members of the community, it is necessary to use multiple communication tools and channels that are tailored to diverse residents. Consider using the following methods and strategies to reach each identified group:

Communication Method	People of Color and/or Immigrant Groups	Low-Literacy	Senior Citizens	Youth
Using minority media sources (newspapers, radio and television stations) to distribute information	✓			
Using traditional media sources (newspapers, radio, and television stations) to distribute information		✓	✓	
Limiting the use of technical jargon and use simple language and graphics that are clear and easy to understand	✓	✓	✓	✓
Providing materials and notices in languages that are most common to the outreach area	✓			
Providing printed materials and surveys			✓	
Using photos that are representative of the targeted groups in materials	✓			✓
Asking schools, local businesses, faith-based and community organizations to distribute notices, surveys and newsletters	✓	✓	✓	✓
Using direct mailers or door hangers	✓	✓	✓	
Placing placards and digital advertising inside buses	✓			✓
Using short videos and social media to convey information	✓	✓		✓
Using large font and clear graphics in all materials			✓	

ENGAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION



III. ENGAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION

Once a public engagement plan has been created, it can be implemented through outreach efforts like public meetings and surveys. These efforts provide crucial public input through community participation that shapes decision-making. However, engagement planning does not stop once in the implementation stage. Collaborating with other departments, coordinating logistics of public meetings, and developing a survey all require consistent planning to ensure the community is effectively reached through opportunities for public participation and feedback.

MEETING PLAN(S)

A meeting plan is an internal document that outlines how a meeting will be conducted and what resources will be needed. It serves as the meeting agenda and instructional guide for carrying out the meeting. Meeting plans should be created prior to each event and used to provide instructions for meeting setup, staff roles, and group activities.

Why is it Important?

Developing meeting plans prior to each engagement activity gets everyone on the same page, provides instructions for activities, and details the materials and staffing needed. It is critical to ensure that activities are well-organized and planned ahead of time as to be beneficial to the participants. A meeting plan is important because it helps to ensure that a meeting is:

- **Useful** because it makes sure that a meeting has a purpose in the decision-making process
- **Sustainable** because it helps prevent having unnecessary meetings
- And **timely** because respects the time of the participants who attend.

MEETING LOGISTICS - WHAT TO CONSIDER?

Considering meeting logistics well in advance of a public meeting can help create easy opportunities for the public to learn more about projects and implement measures to prevent participation fatigue. Incorporate meeting logistics in the meeting plan, such as location, resources, refreshments, time, budget, and staffing. This will help prepare for an engaging, comprehensive, and effective public engagement opportunity.

Meeting Logistics Considerations

LOCATION

Hold meetings in locations that are geographically close and familiar to communities or stakeholders. If possible, choosing a location within the project area is best because it creates a convenient, relevant location for residents to get to and makes travel easier.

RESOURCES

Consider what types of resources are needed for successful engagement. Depending on the stakeholders, you may need language services, refreshments, or childcare. Depending on your meeting type, you may have venue fees or need additional or specialized staff. Also determine what outreach supplies and equipment are needed to effectively advertise and conduct outreach activities, and to collect feedback.

REFRESHMENTS

Refreshments foster a more relaxed setting. Providing food at a meeting can be a way to increase meeting attendance. It allows parents to pick up their child and come directly to the meeting. When people go home first to eat, their willingness to attend a meeting may wane and they may remain at home. Often having a meal at a meeting provides neighbors an opportunity to get together and becomes a reason to attend the event. When choosing refreshments, make sure that the refreshments offered are appropriate for the time of day, and fit the budget.

TIME

Consider holidays (especially non-Christian holidays), other community events and activities, day of the week, and time of day when planning meeting dates and times to best accommodate the diverse socio-cultural characteristics within any given community. For example, evening meetings may not suit young families and the elderly, and Wednesday evening meetings may conflict with religious services. It is important to provide alternatives to ensure representative participation of any community.

BUDGET

When choosing an engagement method, you conduct an honest assessment of available resources and funding that can be allocated to outreach and engagement activities. Is your budget adequate to provide resources for materials printing, advertising, communication, venue and/or equipment fees, refreshments, translation/ interpretation, and childcare?

STAFFING

Consider staffing availability when scheduling meetings. Who will provide staffing to help with meeting setup and breakdown, station management, and/or meeting facilitation? Do you have available staff that can attend weekend or evening meetings?

EVALUATION & REPORTING



IV. EVALUATION & REPORTING

WHAT IS EVALUATION

Engagement evaluation is an important part of successful engagement. Success measures outlined in the PEP should be monitored during each engagement activity and documented after each phase of the project. This will help you determine whether outreach goals are being met and if any targeted outreach is needed to reach a more representative sample of the project area.

Why is Evaluation Important?

While the purpose of evaluation is mainly to aid in the creation of successful engagement, it also can help build trust with the public. Evaluation can be included as part of outreach, meeting, or survey summaries in order to be transparent about what efforts were made to reach the public, who was ultimately reached, and what methods can be tried in the future to improve participation.

In addition to assessing the success measures established in the PEP, performing an equity outreach analysis during and after each engagement activity can help determine the success of engagement.

What is an Equity Outreach Analysis?

An equity outreach analysis is an evaluation of the demographics collected during a particular phase of a project. It compares the demographics of survey or meeting participants to the demographics of the project area. Once compared, one is able to see what groups are underrepresented and can begin developing targeted outreach for future engagement activities.

A formal equity outreach analysis should be conducted after each phase of a project, if not after each engagement activity. At the end of the project, each phase's equity outreach analysis should be compiled into one document for review. This can help determine what worked well and what did not work well during the engagement of the project to inform future projects.

An informal review of equity can be useful during a particular engagement activity, such as a survey, to monitor who is being reached and who is not. By following the same process as a formal equity outreach analysis, you can implement targeted outreach during the engagement activity to try to improve your equitable outreach during that engagement activity.

The first and most important step to completing an equity outreach analysis is preparing for one. Voluntary demographic surveys should be available at all public events and on every project survey. This voluntary demographic survey should contain consistent questions with consistent ranges of answers (i.e. for an age question, the ranges of ages for each answer should be the same on each survey). Refer to **Appendix E** for a full list of voluntary demographic questions and a standard set of answers to use in future surveys.

An equity outreach analysis worksheet can be found in **Appendix K** for use during your projects.

Questions to Ask During an Equity Outreach Analysis

- Which demographic groups participated the most?
- Which demographic groups were underrepresented?
- What outreach activities were conducted during this activity or phase?
- What communications were distributed during this activity or phase?
- What outreach and communication methods can be used to reach the underrepresented populations in the next activity or phase of the project?

SOURCES



V. SOURCES

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L. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Glossary of Terms	
Term	Definition
Advisory groups	Provide oversight over the project planning process to ensure decisions have broad representation of the community. Advisory groups serve as an information channel between the project agency and the community. Members are selected to represent various project stakeholder groups. Advisory groups are best utilized for projects with numerous decisions needing public input or controversial projects.
Ambassadors	Individuals who are dedicated liaisons between communities and the project agency to assist in notifying, education, and involving residents in the public engagement process. As a best practice, ambassadors are typically compensated for their time and efforts through stipends and transportation fare.
Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990	Ensures the rights of disabled individuals to participate and benefit from the services, programs, or activities of any public entity regardless of funding sources.
Awareness campaign	An engagement method used to bring the public's attention to a specific project or event through various communication modes.
Card storming	A data collection method used in small groups to capture key ideas and issues and then organizing those ideas/issues into clusters.
Community	A group of people who share goals, values, or sense of identity.
Community Capacity-Building	Processes and actions that build a community's ability to solve problems. This might be the result of increased access to information, networks and social capital, and/or resources.
Community conversations	Impromptu conversations between project staff and community members that help to establish relationships and openness. Informal conversations can reveal unknown knowledge or opinions about the project and allows project staff to remain proactive in reducing conflict or tension.
Community engagement	Methods to collaborate with local communities to ensure that decisions represent the interests of diverse stakeholders.
Community leader	An individual who is deeply connected and trusted by other residents, business owners, religious leaders, community advocates and organizers to prioritize the wellbeing of their community. Community leaders are typically also long-term residents of their neighborhood community.
Community leader groups	Special interest groups that represent their communities and/or neighborhoods.

Glossary of Terms	
Term	Definition
Community outreach	Methods to inform members of the community about a particular issue through Public Service Announcements, social media, newspapers, flyers, and videos.
Decision makers	Individuals in the project process who have the authority to make decisions related to budget, procurement, project direction, engagement methods and locations, etc.
Deliberative polling process	A structured process that allows participants to explore a specific issue or topic and then present their opinion after considering the pros and cons. A representative sample of the population fills out a questionnaire on their opinions on the issue, are provided with unbiased background material and information provided by subject matter experts and/or policy makers, and then asked to discuss the issues in small groups with trained facilitators. After this deliberation, participants fill out the original questionnaire again. The process is intended to last for a few days.
Demographic profile	An informational overview of race, gender, income, education, language, poverty level, housing tenure, age, disability, and zero car household data of a community. The data is typically obtained through the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey.
Digital literacy	The proficiency of an individual to utilize digital tools and technology with ease.
Education program	An engagement method that is focused on relaying information to the public about project updates or new amenities, facilities, and services.
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation, an international organization focused on the developing and implementing public participation processes to help inform better decisions that reflect the interests and concerns of potentially affected people and entities.
Interactive map	A spatial depiction of an area that allows individuals to select and engage with features in the map. Some interactive maps allow individuals to create and/or edit features.
Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individual	Any person who does not speak English as their primary language and who has limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English. Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals are entitled to fair treatment by agencies receiving federal funding for any program or activity through Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Public engagement activities and events for federally funded projects where more than 50 LEP individuals are residents are required to have language assistance with translated written material and translation services.
Meeting in a box	A conversation kit with discussion questions, worksheets, feedback questionnaires, and directions for recording and returning responses about projects or plans.
Meeting plan	An internal document that outlines how and what resources will be needed to conduct a meeting, including a meeting agenda and instructional guide for carrying out the meeting.

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Mobile tours	Site visits to a community to get firsthand experience of community features, assets, and areas of concern.
Nominal group technique	Structured small-group discussion to develop a set of prioritized solutions or recommendations that represent the group's preferences.
Outreach area	A focused spatial area of residences, religious institutions, public institutions, businesses, and other community centers surrounding a project or study area who will be included in project mailing lists and geotargeted social media.
Outreach summary	A short, concise document that provides an overview of survey results, survey demographics, and meeting summaries.
Participatory Decision-Making	An approach to making decisions that enables stakeholders with multiple perspectives to develop shared-priorities and to offer contributions that influence outcomes.
Performance measure	Metric used to evaluate outreach methods and tools such as reach, social media impressions, etc.
Pop-up outreach	A method of outreach that involves attending community events with informational project materials and surveys
S-M-A-R-T	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time sensitive. An acronym used to guide the creation and development of public engagement goals and objectives.
Stakeholders	Individuals, groups, or communities who may be impacted by the outcome of a project or decision.
Study circles	A small group process where a diversity of participants from a particular geographic location meet as separate groups several times to discuss critical issues using a structured process where each session builds on the one before it.
Social Capital	Economic, social and political benefits people and communities gain from having a strong network of social relationships.
Universalism	The assumption that a single perspective can represent the needs, desires and priorities of everyone.
Virtual public meetings	A digital mode of public meetings hosted as an alternative to in-person sessions. They take place over the internet allowing participants to view project information and/ or updates on their own schedule.

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Materials developed as a collaboration between Public Participation Partners and the City of Gainesville Communications and Engagement staff.

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