

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY



Municipality of the District of Lunenburg  
[modl.ca](http://modl.ca)

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## MODL's Vision Statement

We are a community of communities, each with a unique history representing a diversity of cultural backgrounds and a mix of suburban and rural opportunities. We enjoy healthy lifestyles rooted in unrestricted access to the natural beauty of our region's coastline, lakes and forests, a pristine environment and high-quality community services.

Our caring and tolerant communities, supported by a strong volunteer base, provide a rich mosaic of services to enhance the quality of life in our region offering a lifelong home.

We are a progressive community with a sustainable, diversified economy incorporating both traditional resource-based activities and a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship that capitalizes on new economic opportunities. Our success is built on a strong work ethic and productive working relationships with our community and regional partners. We are a vital economic and service centre for the region.

## MODL's Mission

The Municipality will maximize opportunities for social and economic development while retaining an attractive, sustainable and secure environment for the enjoyment of citizens and visitors. Through responsible and professional leadership and in partnership with others, the Municipality will strive to improve the quality of life for all citizens living and working in the larger community.

## What is Public Engagement?

Public engagement is a collection of actions that engage the public in decision-making. The public expects their elected representatives to make informed decisions around potentially competing priorities, issues, needs, or opportunities. Public engagement activities can improve this decision-making process.

At certain times, elected officials and staff will want to seek out and listen to input from citizens and stakeholders from all parts of the community, use this information to enhance their work, and communicate how the input influenced the final decision. However, not every activity or decision of local government can, or should, be the subject of a community-wide conversation.

The Municipality believes that inviting the public to participate in meaningful conversations about decisions that affect them results in better decision-making. In the past, the Municipality has used a variety of methods to inform and engage with the public, including Your Government, Your Ideas meetings, open houses, workshops, committees, surveys, focus groups, newspaper, radio, online, social media and one-on-one communication.

The Municipality recognizes a need to improve our public engagement efforts by engaging citizens earlier in projects, increasing the number of people who participate, developing new channels for distributing information and enhancing our transparency. This Public Engagement Strategy acts as a guide to the public consultation process and creates consistency throughout the organization.

## Public Engagement Vision

The Municipality is committed to shaping its future through listening, sharing ideas openly and working collaboratively with a knowledgeable and involved community.

## Guiding Principles

- Communicate using the right method and clear language
- Listen to everyone's issues, ideas and concerns
- Offer ways for citizens to inform public policy

## The Municipal Government Act

The Municipal Government Act (MGA) establishes a minimum legal requirement for notifying and involving the public about certain kinds of decisions. The Strategy does not replace existing processes legislated by the Municipal Government Act, but guides municipal staff in ways to meet or exceed legislated public engagement requirements.

The purpose of public engagement is to ensure that all voices are heard and considered in the decision-making process. However, it cannot ensure that all stakeholders will be satisfied with our decisions. The public consists of a range of stakeholders holding varying and often competing views on an issue. The Municipality seeks to balance these views and communicate the decisions back so that the public understands how its diverse concerns were considered in the final decision.

## Our Commitment

### The Municipality commits to:

1. **Inclusivity:** Diversity of opinions is desired, and we will utilize a range of tools to engage diverse subsections of the public.
2. **Early Involvement:** We will involve the public as early as possible and ensure information is available in a timely manner to assist the public in their planning, preparation and engagement.
3. **Respect:** We will be respectful of decision-making protocols and jurisdictions. We will ensure the process is respectful of diverse views, values and interests.
4. **Transparency:** We are committed to the efficient and effective use of taxpayer's dollars, and will clearly define roles, levels of engagement and outcomes of the process.
5. **Continuous Improvement:** We will conduct regular evaluations of our public engagement activities, identifying what is working well, and what areas can be modified or streamlined.

## Public Engagement Process

The Municipality manages multiple projects and day-to-day operations that require decision-making. It is not realistic or practical to engage the public on every matter. Our public engagement framework assists the Municipality in defining when and how the public should be engaged.

Many factors determine the level of public engagement required in a process, such as Council priorities, history and context of the issue, and potential impacts of the initiative (e.g., financial, quality of life, health and safety, environmental, lifestyle, etc.).

There are five steps the Municipality undertakes in the public engagement process:

**Step 1:** Determine the decision to be made

**Step 2:** Decide whether to engage the community

**Step 3:** Select the level of engagement

**Step 4:** Undertake engagement tactics appropriate for the level selected

**Step 5:** Evaluation and reporting

## Step 1: Determine the decision to be made

The decision statement clearly articulates what will be decided, by who, and when. It is a clear statement of the problem to be solved, the opportunity to be explored or the decision to be made. Once a clear decision statement has been developed, we ask:

- What is the role of the public, and how will we use the information they provide to influence the decision?
- What influence will we give the public over the final decision? What influence do they WANT or EXPECT to have over the final decision?
- What does success look like? (variety of views, number of people who provide feedback, quality of feedback)

## Step 2: Decide whether to engage the community

Public engagement is recommended in the following cases:

- Public notification and input are REQUIRED by law or for project development according to the Municipal Government Act.
- Council or administration requests public input prior to making the decision.
- The matter under consideration is a known concern of community members.
- The matter under consideration can have a significant impact on community members.
- The matter under consideration may be perceived to decrease property values or increase taxation levels.
- The matter under consideration may be perceived to create or increase any health or safety risk.
- The matter under consideration affects the lifestyle, quality of life or habits of citizens (i.e. loss of access, congestion, restriction of activity).
- The matter under consideration may be an emotional or moral issue for citizens.
- The matter under consideration will affect the natural environment including view, odour or noise.
- The matter under consideration requires trade-offs around core community values (i.e. a proposed business park in a pristine natural environment).
- The matter under consideration has multiple challenges and potential solutions.
- The matter under consideration is historically controversial in the community.

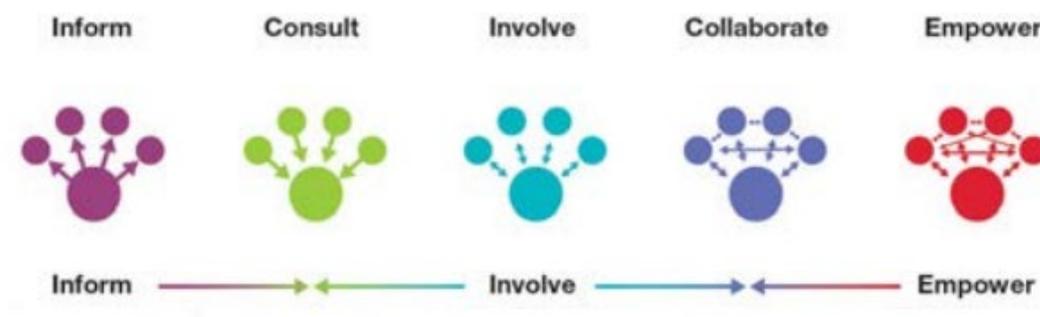
## Step 3: Select the level of engagement

**Public engagement takes** different forms, depending on the potential for public influence on a decision.

**Depending on the form of engagement sought, public engagement makes use of a variety of tools and techniques to inform the public, generate public input, and, in some cases, build consensus and reach agreement.**

The International Association of Public Engagement (IAP2) designed its Public Engagement Spectrum to assist agencies in establishing and communicating clear expectations regarding the intent of public engagement projects. The Spectrum is organized around the principle that the level of public engagement is directly tied to the level of potential public influence on the decision or action being considered.

## Public engagement continuum – level of engagement



The two ends of the spectrum identify extreme potential public influence on the decision to be made. At the Inform level there is no opportunity to influence, so there is no active public engagement effort. At this level, we aim to provide timely, accurate and easy to understand information to the public. The other end of the spectrum, Empower, offers an extreme level of influence that is only infrequently provided to the public. Typically, municipalities are not permitted to hand over their decision-making authority.

The middle three levels are where most public engagement occurs: Consult, Involve, and Collaborate. All three levels have a clearly identified goal, and a clear promise to the public.

### INFORM

The Inform level of public engagement does not provide the opportunity for public engagement but provides the public with balanced and objective information needed to understand the Municipality's decision-making process. At the Inform level of public engagement there is no effort to persuade the public in a certain direction. This level requires transparency and accuracy, giving the public what they need to fully understand the project and decision. This will allow the public to reach their own conclusions about the decisions made by the Municipality.

**Goal:** To keep the public informed.

**Promise to the Public:** The same as the goal, to keep the public informed.

### CONSULT

At the Consult level, the Municipality asks the public for their opinions and considers the input it receives as it makes the decision. Public input is accepted at set points in the process and there is no ongoing opportunity for input.

**Goal:** To obtain and consider public input.

**Promise to the Public:** To consider the public input received and to provide feedback as to how that input influenced the decision.

## INVOLVE

The Involve level of public engagement is more than a consultation. At the Involve level, the public is invited into the process, usually from the beginning, and is provided multiple or ongoing opportunities for input. However, the Municipality is still the decision-maker and there is no expectation of building consensus or providing the public with high-level influence over the decision.

**Goal:** To work directly with the public and consider their input throughout the decision-making process.

**Promise to the Public:** The public will have access to the decision process and decision makers and will be provided the opportunity to give input throughout the process. The public will receive direct feedback on how their input helped to influence the decision.

## COLLABORATE

At the Collaborate level, the public is directly engaged in decision-making. Collaborate often includes the stated objective of reaching consensus between all participants. However, as at Involve, the Municipality is still the ultimate decision-maker. The degree to which consensus will be sought and how much decision authority the Municipality is willing to share must be made explicit. In the end, the Municipality will take the input received and make the decision. This is a time-consuming and resource intensive level of public engagement and used sparingly in the Municipality.

**Goal:** To design a process that allows for effective partnering with the public on all aspects of the decision.

**Promise to the Public:** The public will be engaged in all key activities and decisions, and their input will be incorporated to the maximum extent possible. Consensus is not always sought at the collaborate level; the degree to which consensus will be sought should be an explicit part of the promise.

## EMPOWER

At the Empower level, the Municipality provides the public with the opportunity to make decisions for themselves. The most common activities at this level are public voting or ballots.

**Goal:** To create a program that allows the public to make an informed decision.

**Promise to the Public:** The Municipality will implement what the public decides.

When considering which level of public engagement is appropriate, the Municipality considers the following:

Resources	Need for Consensus/Common Purpose	Expectation for Coordinated Action	Expectations for Engagement	Level
Low	Not needed	Not Expected	Low	Inform
Low to Moderate	Low	Low or Not Expected	Low	Consult
Moderate to High	Moderate to High	Moderate to High	Moderate to High	Involve
High	High	High	High	Collaborate
High	High	High	High	Empower

## Step 4: Engagement Tactics

Level	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Methods for engagement	Council meetings Municipal Matters Facebook page Newspaper or radio ads Media coverage Flyers/brochures Email lists Website	Your Government, Your Ideas Comment forms Polls/surveys Digital Engagement Focus groups Interviews Open houses Councillor feedback Public hearings	Workshops	Advisory groups Committees	Elections Plebiscites Management Groups

## Step 5: Evaluation and reporting

Effective evaluation enables us to improve our public engagement programs and ensure that they are useful, cost-effective, and beneficial. Both the citizens that engaged in the public engagement process, and those who did not, are interested in knowing how a public engagement program impacted policy decisions. Through evaluation, we can determine if meaningful conversations were had, and if those conversations resulted in better decision-making.

Through qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools, each occurrence of public engagement will be evaluated and reported on to the public and Council in a timely manner.

# ROLES

## Council

Although Council is responsible for municipal decision-making, this responsibility is granted on the understanding that Council will represent the interests and values of the community. Public engagement offers the opportunity for Council members to deepen their role as community representatives.

In the public engagement process, each Council member's role is to:

1. Represent their constituents by staying in touch and working with citizens to determine top priorities for engagement. Options include attendance by Councillors at community meetings and events, providing open office hours for members of the public, and/or maintaining an email contact list of interested citizens.
2. Work with staff to identify areas where public input can and will make a meaningful difference to decisions that council must make, and help set engagement priorities for the Municipality.
3. Help raise the profile of the Municipality's engagement initiatives and input opportunities in order to ensure a high rate of engagement by a wide range of citizens.
4. Direct citizens to the established processes for garnering, monitoring and compiling input, and avoid circumventing these.
5. Allow staff to take the lead role in identifying best practices and methods for engaging the public on various issues.

## Staff

It is important to separate the role of Council from that of staff. While Councillors are well positioned to be leaders in communicating with citizens and identifying citizen priorities, municipal staff are well positioned to be leaders in planning, managing and reporting back from engagement initiatives. As trained professionals, staff are responsible for developing and applying professional expertise in the area of civic engagement.

In the public engagement process, the role of municipal staff is to:

1. Work with Council to identify areas and issues where public input can make a meaningful difference to council decisions, program development and service delivery.
2. Establish channels and processes to clearly identify community priorities for engagement and then ensure that the Municipality responds.
3. Establish and communicate on engagement priorities, then apply a consistent set of policies and procedures in designing and implementing engagement activities.
4. Consult with municipal Council, Council Advisory Committees, and stakeholder groups and members re: engagement priorities, process design, framing issues for productive input, effective communications, and increasing engagement over time.
5. Ensure timely and respectful communication with all those who engage, and show how their input has been used to influence decisions, programs and services.
6. Engage in ongoing learning and professional development about public engagement best practices.
7. Evaluate and report on the Municipality's public engagement process at regular intervals.

## Community Groups

Public engagement works well when community and stakeholder groups (such as businesses, environmental groups, arts groups, etc.) support civic engagement efforts. In particular, community associations have local knowledge, information and community networks that can be mobilized to make civic engagement meaningful and effective, and they have knowledge of community issues and assets.

Community or stakeholder groups can support public engagement by:

1. Ensuring that their advice and input is representative of a wide range of citizens in their community.
2. Providing advice about community priorities for engagement to municipal staff and Council.
3. Assisting municipal staff in establishing agendas and framing the issues in civic engagement initiatives.
4. Mobilizing their networks and communications tools to support and participate in civic engagement initiatives.
5. Engaging with municipal staff and Council members in a productive and respectful manner.
6. Assisting in communicating the results of civic engagement to local citizens.
7. Supporting municipal efforts to use input received from engagement efforts.

## Citizens

Citizens contribute to informed decision-making and the quality of life in their communities by raising their concerns and contributing their ideas and energy to various local initiatives. With this in mind, the recommended role of citizens is to:

1. Help identify community needs, priorities, and assets.
2. Participate in engagement initiatives and encourage others to participate.
3. Express their point of view and contribute their ideas.
4. Be willing to listen to and learn from other community members.
5. Recognize and weigh the trade-offs involved in any policy issue.
6. Support staff in their efforts to involve people in thoughtful discussions and informed decision-making.
7. Respect the efforts of staff and council to make wise decisions.
8. Vote in municipal elections.

## Summary

The Municipality believes that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process, and our commitment to open, transparent public engagement supports this belief.

The development of this Strategy relied on both international best practices and local engagement. Feedback from citizens, businesses, community groups, Council, committees and staff were essential in developing a comprehensive Public Engagement Strategy, Citizen Guide and Employee Toolkit. These documents establish clear processes and guidelines to improve and increase public engagement in the decision-making of the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg.