

# Community Engagement Principles & Practices

PROPOSED BY CHOLLAS CREEK COALITION | MARCH 2022

For decades, the City of San Diego has failed to meaningfully and actively engage predominantly Black and brown communities in the planning and design of their communities. Chollas Creek Coalition members have shared countless experiences of how the City has made them feel excluded, ignored, or tokenized through current planning processes. Coalition members have also shared their vision and have collectively developed goals and action items that would be important to achieve meaningful community engagement.

The City of San Diego has no policy for equity-centered community engagement. The Chollas Creek Coalition and our allies wish to outreach to the City of San Diego with clearly-stated principles and practices for meaningful community engagement. A process of collaboration and co-development is envisioned through which mutually-agreed upon principles and practices will be codified in City policy. The themes and strategies outlined by the Cholla Creek Coalition emphasize the need for community voices to be heard, for trusting relationships to be developed between the City and community members, and for planning efforts to be co-developed with community members as the experts within their own communities.

This document represents a starting point for the conversation with the City and Community leaders that will be inclusive, with special consideration of youth and Indigenous Peoples voice, and collaborative; reflecting the goals, capacities, and constraints of all partners. The document will serve as the organizing framework for Listening Tours with both City staff and community members, with a final goal of a Policy adopted by the Mayor/City Council, that informs departmental objectives and practices.

## Principle 1

### Acknowledge the Historical Impacts of Planning & the Planner's Positionality

Prior to embarking on any project, planners and consultants must understand the project area's demographics, culture, and history; and they must acknowledge how planning decisions caused the injustices impacted by Staff and consultant bias stemming from privilege, race, and class. Acknowledging these impacts and conditions will allow planners to build empathy towards community members, prevent triggering the community further, and actively work with the community to repair harm. Good practices in relationship building need to include having staff with a genuine interest in the issues, and who are avid participants at events in the community, regardless of the benefits for projects they are explicitly working on. Additionally, staff should be a resource and support for the community outside of a project to extend the development of a trusting relationship.

### Practices

1. Wherever possible, include a statement of historic and existing conditions.
2. Ensure City staff diversity that reflects the demographic diversity of neighborhoods and that can increase understanding of community attitudes and needs.
3. Work with Community-Based Organizations to develop a trauma-informed approach that reflects the historic abuse suffered and helps to ensure trust.
4. Ensure City Departments are well equipped (training, budgets, timelines, resources, etc.) to conduct effective and meaningful community engagement.<sup>1</sup>
5. The planner acts as a facilitator rather than an expert.<sup>2</sup>
6. Center the voices of those who are directly impacted by the outcomes of the planning or design process.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Blueprint for Equitable Engagement \(Minneapolis\)](#)  
<sup>2,3</sup> [Design Justice Principles](#)

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## Principle 2

### Develop an Integrated Approach to Community Engagement

Effective community engagement will mean efficient, transparent, integrated contact with community stakeholders. Multiple and simultaneous City community engagement processes result in siloed, and ultimately confusing and burdensome, outcomes or “planning fatigue” (i.e. the City may be undergoing Climate Action Planning, a Park Master Plan Update, and Housing Element and Environmental Justice General Plan updates). Community members live an integrated life, meaning their experience with housing can be connected with access to economic opportunities, and transportation. When they share feedback on one particular type of project or planning issue, they may share important information relevant to other planning processes. City staff working on various projects and planning efforts can consolidate some community engagement efforts by improving communication, coordination, and collaboration to inform projects and plans across departments. Only departmental coordination and collaboration will deliver the multi-benefit projects and solutions communities seek.

#### Practices

1. Establish a coordination process within City departments to understand and consolidate City needs for feedback and input from the community.
2. Work with community members and Community-Based Organizations to co-develop information sharing and gathering tools (i.e. surveys, meetings, etc.).
3. Work with communities to establish metrics by which to gauge community engagement effectiveness and success (which neighborhoods, which organizations, who participates, etc.).
4. Provide easy-to-navigate online tools to ensure transparent project and planning updates that can be accessed by the community.

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## Principle 3

### Communicate Clear Intentions and Timeline for Engagement

It is important for the City to clearly communicate its intentions around an engagement effort, including when and how the community’s feedback will be used and which ways the community is able to influence a planning or project outcome. Ensure that community members have the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation.<sup>4</sup>

#### Practices

1. Work with community members at the outset of the planning process.
2. Be transparent in communicating with community members’ decision-making parameters (ignore, inform, consult, involve, collaborate, defer to) in the planning process by using a tool such as The Spectrum of Community Engagement to ownership developed by the organization Facilitating Power.<sup>5</sup>
3. Standardize amongst City departments the elements to be included in the request for community participation and a transparent feedback loop.

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<sup>4</sup> [Environmental Justice Principles](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#)

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## Principle 4

### Remove Engagement Barriers

A diverse set of resources is required to reach diverse communities. A one-size-fits-all approach will only bring those that are most privileged to engage. Language justice is to improve engagement accessibility and increase engagement quality and frequency.

#### Practices

1. Ensure language justice through translation and interpretation, the use of non-academic or planning jargon, and access for people for various literacy levels
2. Provide all necessary meeting support services to include translation, interpretation, childcare, food, stipends, strategies to bridge the digital divide, etc.
3. Acknowledge and respect the social capital, deep community relationships, and networks of CBOs through compensation.
4. Design and utilize community engagement tools that reflect the distinct needs of each neighborhood group, including activities such as door-to-door/neighbor-to-neighbor canvassing; faith-based events; pop-ups, school open houses, trusted neighborhood coordinators.
5. Ensure “out of community” consulting firms have a contracted relationship with “in-community” experts.
6. Address policies, such as ministerial vs. discretionary permitting to ensure community voice.

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## Principle 5

### Build Relationships and Establish Trust

Effective community engagement is accomplished through trust and reciprocity. Community members should understand the various mechanisms for communicating with the City, and the differences between short-term assistance and long-term policy/budget/capital improvement issues. “Get-it-Done” is an example of a short-term support opportunity; neighborhood flooding is a long-term issue.<sup>6</sup>

#### Practices

1. Meet with Council staff and CBOs to review ongoing neighborhood conditions and priorities with information to co-develop a pathway for action through budget allocations, Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), programmatic, or policy considerations.
2. Improve the City grants process with a goal of accelerating CBO external funding support.
3. Develop a proactive, neighborhood-scale communication process to share efforts and to address issues.
4. Treat community members as the experts they are in their community and provide compensation for participating in planning processes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [City of San Diego- Get-it-Done](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Design Justice Principles](#)

The following organizations and individuals are co-creators and supporters of these community engagement practices and principles:

- Groundwork San Diego
- Outdoor Outreach
- San Diego Canyonlands
- San Diego Coastkeeper
- Sierra Club
- Bayview Community Development Corporation
- City Heights Community Development Corporation
- Environmental Health Coalition
- Bike San Diego
- Richard Diaz, Elida Chavez, Oak Park Community Council
- Derryl Williams, Webster Community Council
- Linda Coffman, Derryl Williams, Kristen Hurst, Richard Diaz, Eastern Area Community Planning Group
- Myron Taylor, Diane Armenta, Southeastern San Diego Planning Group
- Sally Smull, Chollas Valley Planning Group
- Evelyn Smith, Emerald Hills Neighborhood Council, D4 Representative City Parks and Recreation Board

***Pueblo Planning supported the co-development of the Community Engagement Principles and Practices.***

**CHOLLAS CREEK COALITION**

**PUEBLO**

