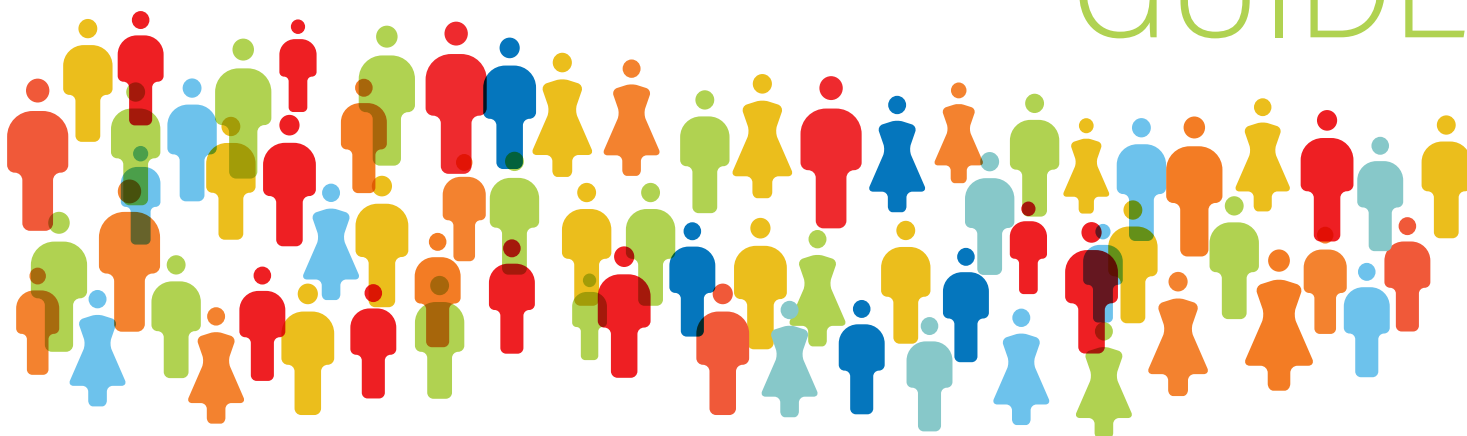




Community Engagement

GUIDE



|| Welcome



Greetings,

The City of Columbia is committed to fostering a vibrant and inclusive community. We view local residents as experts with valuable, unique insights needed to make our city a place where everyone can thrive. And we feel it is important to include those most impacted by the City's actions in the decision-making process.

By prioritizing robust engagement opportunities, we can better ensure all residents have an opportunity to be heard. It is my hope that this Guide will provide our staff with useful tools, resources and thought-provoking questions for reflection, ultimately leading to an active engagement culture and strong community trust.

Sincerely,


De'Carlton Seewood
City Manager

|| TABLE OF CONTENTS

Some Visions for the Future _____	3
Guiding Principles _____	4
Definitions _____	5
The Difference Between Transparency and Engagement _____	6
When Transparency and Engagement Work in Harmony _____	7
Stakeholders _____	7, 8
Culture of Engagement _____	9, 10
Spectrum of Community Engagement _____	11, 12
Goals, Spectrum & Tactics _____	13
Summary and Reflection _____	14

|| Guiding Principles

These principles are to be used as a guide to developing an engagement process that is authentic and inclusive.

- **RIGHT TO BE INVOLVED**
All people affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
- **CAPACITY**
Individual people have diverse needs and interests, requiring different levels of support to participate.
- **CO-DESIGN**
Residents are valuable stakeholders in decision-making processes, providing knowledge and insight unique to their individual perspectives.
- **TRANSPARENCY**
Everyone should have access to all relevant information and understand how their contributions will influence final decisions.
- **FEEDBACK**
People deserve to know how their contribution affected decisions and outcomes.
- **EMPOWERMENT**
People can assess and act in their own interest by drawing and building on their personal skills and interests.
- **TIMELINESS**
Allow appropriate time for people to participate on their own terms, provide meaningful input and build connections with community members.
- **SELF-AWARENESS**
Recognize your own values, interests and biases when engaging with other people.
- **COMPASSION**
Show empathy and care towards others, particularly those who may have a different point of view.



|| Definitions

Residents' trust in local government is dependent on two different yet necessary pillars: transparency and engagement. For this Guide, we will utilize the following definitions:

TRANSPARENCY is conveying information and decisions in ways that can be accessed and understood by everyone.

TRANSPARENCY: **Openness That Fosters Confidence**

Sharing information and decisions with residents:

- Boosts trust by equipping residents with accurate information about things that affect them
- Supports operational efficiency by saving time and resources for both residents and government staff
- Builds a perception of competence and reliability by providing easier access to forms, agendas and data
- Ensures leaders take ownership of their decisions by creating accountability and removing hidden agendas

ENGAGEMENT is involving people in the decision-making process, with the goal of fostering mutual understanding and accountability.

ENGAGEMENT: **Shared Voice, Shared Ownership**

Involving residents in decision-making:

- Fosters a sense of mutual understanding by co-creating solutions
- Demonstrates that all voices matter by creating safe spaces for them to be heard
- Addresses long-standing mistrust by developing authentic relationships with community partners
- Prevents arbitrary, unfair decisions by prioritizing the input of those most impacted

|| The Difference Between Transparency and Engagement

Traditional public meetings held by municipalities emphasize transparency by making information publicly available through established channels, but their reliance on formal processes like Robert's Rules often limits active participation. In today's evolving media and civic environments, residents have access to more information than ever and increasingly want a role in shaping the decisions that impact them. The City's goal is to move beyond simply sharing information, using it instead as a foundation for collaboration and co-creation with our community members.



|| How do these two terms compare and differ?

|| Which are you most comfortable with, and why?

|| When Transparency and Engagement Work in Harmony

In essence, transparency shows residents that government is fair and understandable; engagement shows them that their perspectives matter. Together, they nurture a trusting, empowered relationship between citizens and local government.

- Ensures residents have both the information they need and the opportunities to shape outcomes
- Builds reciprocal trust, as the City shares openly and residents respond with constructive participation
- Aligns policy decisions with lived experiences, combining data with community insight
- Reduces misinformation and conflict by pairing clear communication with authentic dialogue
- Creates a system of shared accountability, where both officials and residents recognize their roles in successful outcomes

|| Stakeholders



|| Stakeholders

Effectively identifying and prioritizing stakeholders is a cornerstone of successful engagement. This Guide aims to do this by examining three key attributes: agency, legitimacy and urgency. By assessing stakeholders against these dimensions, teams can better understand not only who holds influence, but also why their perspectives matter and when their needs require attention. This process is reflected in the model on the previous page.

- **Agency (influence):** The degree of control or leverage an individual or group has over project outcomes.
- **Legitimacy (impact):** The extent to which stakeholders are directly affected, whether through proximity, financial ties or historical context.
- **Urgency (need):** The importance of time-sensitive concerns that could shape engagement priorities.

Stakeholders may reflect one of these attributes or sit at the overlap of two or more, which increases their importance and shapes how they should be engaged. Those with all three – agency, legitimacy and urgency – carry the greatest salience and require the highest level of attention.

The categories below outline how different stakeholders map these attributes:

- **(Legitimacy) Prospective stakeholders:** These stakeholders have little urgency or power and are unlikely to exert much pressure.
- **(Agency) Prospective stakeholders:** These stakeholders have much power but no legitimacy or urgency and therefore are not likely to become heavily involved.
- **Critical stakeholders:** These stakeholders have little power or legitimacy but can make much "noise" because they want things to be addressed immediately.
 - **Advisory stakeholders:** These stakeholders have both formal power and legitimacy but little urgency. They tend to have certain expectations that must be met.
 - **Influential stakeholders:** These stakeholders have power and urgency but are not really pertinent to the project.
 - **Dependent stakeholders:** These stakeholders have urgent and legitimate stakes in the project but little power. These stakeholders may lean on another stakeholder group to have their voices heard.
 - **Decider stakeholders:** These stakeholders have power, legitimacy and urgency and therefore have the highest salience.

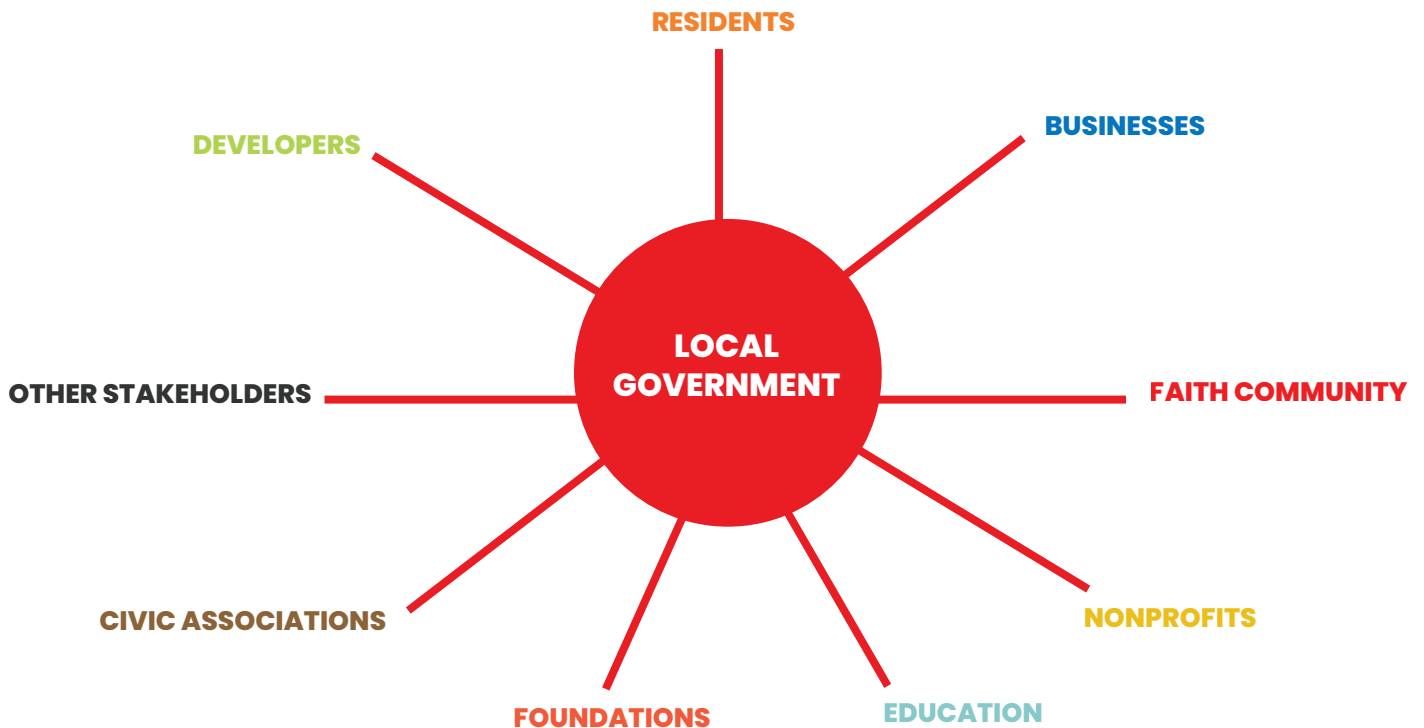
|| Culture of Engagement

Next, let's think about the "how" and the "why" of this process. Remember those principles on Page 4. Those remind us that each person is important and that, collectively, we can work to find solutions together. To do this effectively, we have to approach this process differently than we've done before.

Historically, local governments have assumed the responsibility for solving big problems. We have relied on key stakeholders to provide input and perspective, and applied that input to our decision-making. This is illustrated in Figure 1, as the Stakeholder Model:

Stakeholder Model

Local Government in the Center



Source: Ray Patchett, ICMA-CM (retired) PM Magazine Feb. 2024, p. 31

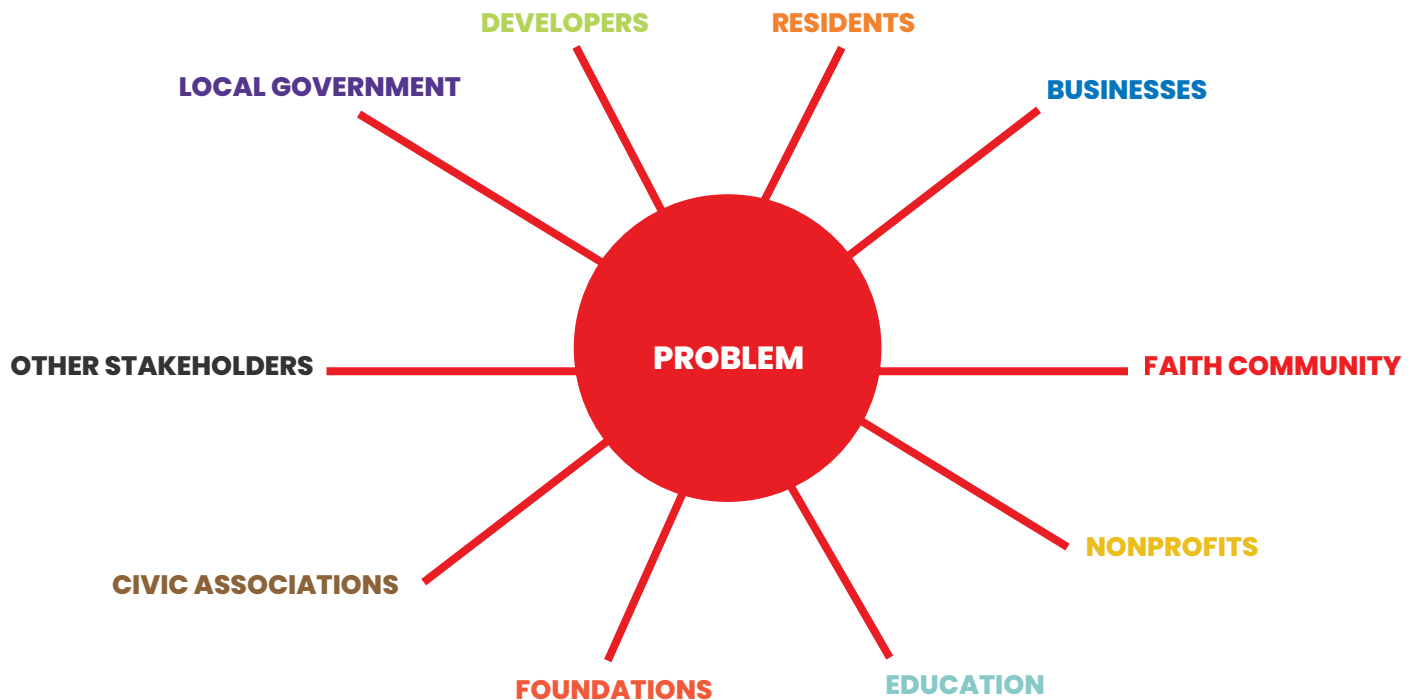
By putting ourselves in the center of the diagram, we are indicating to our residents that we are the responsible party. They see us in the center and assume that they have no responsibility or accountability to help resolve problems. This approach encourages people to observe and pass judgment, but does not enable them to truly collaborate with us to find solutions.

To help our residents understand that they have a shared responsibility and role to play in affecting change, we must shift to a Partnership Model, as shown in Figure 2:

|| Culture of Engagement

Partnership Model

Problem in the Center



Source: Ray Patchett, ICMA-CM (retired) PM Magazine Feb. 2024, p. 31

In the Partnership Model, local government is just one of the many stakeholders. The “problem/issue” is in the middle, not local government. This model shifts the focus of all stakeholders to the problem and encourages all to share in the responsibility and take ownership of determining how to move forward. This is ultimately the goal of engagement.

|| **How does shifting to a Partnership Model change your perspective on community engagement? What new opportunities and challenges does this present?**

|| The Spectrum of Community Engagement

Once you identify the problem you're addressing and the community partners and stakeholders who are involved, the next step is clarifying what responsibility lies with the City and the community, respectively. For this, we utilize the Spectrum of Community Engagement.

The Spectrum was created by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) and has been adapted and modified by many organizations, including the City of Columbia. The Spectrum serves as a guide for staff and leadership to determine the appropriate level of public participation for any given project or issue.

The Levels of Engagement

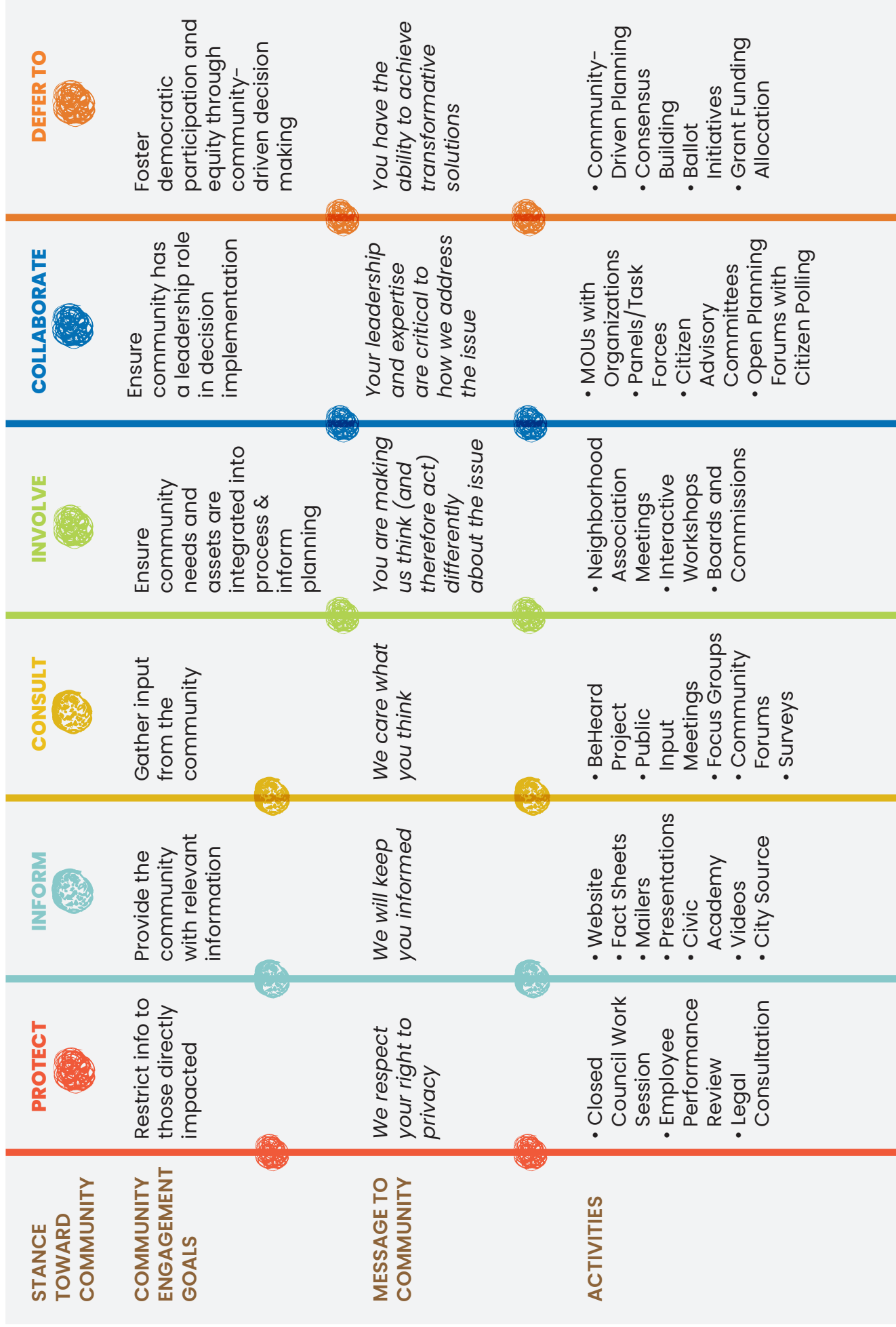
The further along the Spectrum (to the right), the greater the level of influence members of the public have over the planning, process, and decision.

- It is important to recognize that these are **levels of engagement, not steps**. Each level is important, and the specific context of any community engagement will help staff and leadership determine which is most appropriate.

By utilizing this framework, the City ensures that we are consistently considering and integrating the community's perspective, creating a stronger and more representative city for everyone.

|| Why is it important to approach each project uniquely, instead of having the same, uniform set of tasks for all of them?

||| The Spectrum Of Community Engagement for the City of Columbia



Adapted from International Association for Public Participation

Goal, Spectrum & Tactics Chart

Some projects may only require a communication plan. Others will be more successful if we implement public engagement tactics. This diagram can help you determine which strategies to use.

