



City of Seattle

Frequently Asked Questions

Executive Order 2016-06: Achieving Equitable Outreach and Engagement for All

What is an Executive Order and what does it do?

Executive orders are official directives from the Mayor to agencies within the executive branch of city government. These orders generally concern the implementation or enforcement of rules, policies, and procedures which have the force of law.

What will this Executive Order do?

This Executive Order directs city departments, including and under the guidance of the Department of Neighborhoods, to implement more inclusive and equitable outreach and engagement practices.

Why is this Executive Order needed?

The City of Seattle's current community engagement system, created in 1987, has not been significantly updated for more than 20 years. While steps have been taken to improve inclusive community engagement across the City, the need persists for more equitable and accessible community engagement processes within City departments.

As Seattle's population continues to change, the City needs to continually revisit and expand its public engagement efforts in order to ensure growing demographic groups are represented in City decision-making processes and that barriers discouraging people from participating are eliminated.

Equitable engagement is essential to any community involvement process, especially for under-represented and under-served communities, including, but not limited to, renters, immigrants and refugees, communities of color, people experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ, low-income households, youth, and seniors.

Why is this happening now?

Mayor Murray has stated that doing outreach and engagement differently is a top priority. One reason why he created the Office of Planning and Community Development was to break down silos as far as development and implementation. He wants to continue breaking down silos, this time on the community engagement front.

When City Council passed SLI 18-2-A-1 last fall, the Mayor saw this as an opportune time to reflect and rethink our current systems and bring equity into the equation. This has been DON's focus for the last six months. Now is the time for DON to make changes that continue to improve and build upon the successes of the last 30 years.

How does this impact current operations?

This Executive Order calls for five action steps:

1. All city departments must now collaborate with the Department of Neighborhoods to develop community involvement plans that make information and opportunities for participation more accessible to the public.
2. The Department of Neighborhoods will reallocate staff resources to prioritize the creation of more equitable outreach and engagement practices and enable the department to effectively provide ongoing consulting services to City departments as they develop new community involvement plans.
3. The Department of Neighborhoods, in partnership with the Seattle Office for Civil Rights and the City Budget Office, will draft a resolution for City Council consideration detailing the community outreach and engagement principles and ending the City's official ties to District Councils and the City Neighborhood Council.
4. The Department of Neighborhoods will prepare an ordinance outlining a new citywide framework for community engagement, including the creation of a Seattle Community Involvement Commission.
5. The Department of Neighborhoods will work directly with Seattle Information Technology on digital engagement to explore, identify, and develop tools that broaden access points for all residents.

What is the timeline?

- By August 15, 2016, all city departments must begin working with the Department of Neighborhoods on developing community involvement plans.
- On or before September 26, 2016, the Department of Neighborhoods will submit a resolution to City Council that details a new framework for outreach and engagement, dissolving the City's official ties to District Councils and the City Neighborhood Council.
- On or before September 26, 2016, the Department of Neighborhoods will submit a proposed ordinance outlining the new community engagement framework for the city.

What are the District Councils?

The city is divided into 13 neighborhood districts that grew out of a 1987 Seattle City Council resolution to promote, support, and involve citizen participation at the neighborhood level. Each district has a District Council which is comprised of representatives from community councils, nonprofit organizations, and business districts. The councils provide a forum for consideration of concerns and for the sharing of ideas for solutions to common problems.

What is the City Neighborhood Council?

The City Neighborhood Council (CNC) is a citizen-led advisory group comprised of elected members from each of the City's 13 Neighborhood District Councils. As originally sanctioned, its purpose was to provide city-wide coordination for the Neighborhood Matching Fund, Neighborhood Budget Prioritization, and Neighborhood Planning programs. Some of these responsibilities have become less of a priority over the years.

How will the 13 District Councils and the City Neighborhood Council be impacted?

The staff support that the District Councils have received will be the most profound impact. For many years, the District Councils have been staffed by District Coordinators. DON will step back and shift its focus and concentrate on capacity building and helping mobilize communities on the more grass-roots level (community councils, business associations, nonprofit organizations). We are going back to basics and honoring the principles that created DON almost 30 years ago.

The District Councils can continue to exist and operate “as is” whether there is an official city tie to them or not. District Councils may continue to interact with the City as any other neighborhood organization would. In return, City staff will provide District Councils with the same level of service they would provide to any other community group seeking action or assistance from the City. District Councils are just like other volunteer-based organizations throughout the city. They are just as important as other organizations, but not more important.

A new resolution and ordinance will be drafted, superseding Resolution 27709, and updating existing municipal codes relating to the Department of Neighborhoods and moving responsibility for grant review from the City Neighborhood Council to a newly created City Involvement Commission.

Will the District Councils and City Neighborhood Council be disbanded?

No. Neither the Executive Order nor the SLI response is disbanding the District Councils or the City Neighborhood Council. The focus is not on the organizations themselves but rather the focus is about the level of staff support that is provided.

District Councils can continue to participate/advocate/inform as they do now even if not formally supported by City. They don’t need to be formally recognized by statute to exist or to be valued.

Will the boundaries the District Councils change?

No. Since we will be writing a Resolution and Ordinance creating a new systems or framework, we will no longer be providing staffing exclusively to the District Councils. Because we are taking on a new role and will no longer be tied to the system, District Councils can operate as they so desire and they can determine their own boundaries. The city will not be making those decisions.

Will the Neighborhood District Coordinators still exist?

Yes. Should the City dissolve its official ties to the District Council and City Neighborhood Council systems, the Neighborhood District Coordinators will have more time to work with and respond to concerns raised by other community groups operating within their assigned service areas. Consistent with past practice, any changes to Neighborhood District Coordinators’ job descriptions will be negotiated with their labor union representatives. These discussions could take place over the next several months.

Why create a Community Involvement Commission?

Creating a commission is a more consistent approach. The city currently has 44 Boards and Commissions which reflect a wide variety of topics. A commission will bring needed diversity and equitable representation to the decision-making table. While details regarding the commission have not been worked out, it is a step toward creating a more inclusive and representative process for decision-making.

What is the role of the new Community Involvement Commission?

Details are still under consideration so roles and responsibilities are being considered as well. It will be a city-wide body involved in civic process and communication, and may be involved in city grant review.

Who will be on the Community Involvement Commission?

The details of formation and composition have not been determined at this time. We have ideas and know there will be community involvement in the development of the charter and membership of the Committee.

We also know that in order for this Commission to be successful, it needs a well-defined role and clarity in purpose.

Why sever ties instead of trying to fix the current system?

The very nature of having a structure geared toward geographic areas does not lend itself to fair and equitable representation of other communities that identify around culture, language, issues, needs, or other non-geographical concepts. Achieving fair and equitable outreach to the many diverse communities here in Seattle is a job that no council system, government, or agency can do by itself.

How will DON work with other departments through this Executive Order?

This Executive Order requires that all departments now work collaboratively with the Department of Neighborhoods on creating equitable community involvement plans. The Department of Neighborhoods will facilitate this by providing consultation, support, and oversight on each department's outreach and engagement efforts in order to ensure that the City is providing consistent and accessible information that:

- Is easily understandable by all residents;
- Encourages and provides clear opportunities for public response;
- Provides a wide range of opportunities for public participation;
- And, achieves greater involvement of under-served and under-represented communities.

How will outreach and engagement look differently?

First, status quo is not an option. In order to do things differently, we need to recognize that not everyone has the same resources or time to commit to engagement. Not everyone can attend a community meeting and that should not bar people from participating.

What best practices have been identified?

Cities across the country are working to improve community outreach and engagement in a variety of ways. The one overriding best practice is tailoring outreach and engagement to each individual community in a culturally literate and sensitive manner.

How will equity be achieved?

When everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to achieve their full potential, and improve their quality of life. A focus on equity in any community involvement process is essential to improve outcomes for all communities, especially under-represented and under-served communities.

What is digital engagement?

Digital engagement is the use of digital tools and channels to find, listen to, and mobilize citizens in order to enhance public participation and civic engagement. Digital engagement methods can include social media, webinars, online forums, chat, gaming, crowdsourcing, and everything in-between. Increasing our use of digital engagement tools will allow us to reach more people, provide a platform for more voices, and empower more community participation.

What are next steps?

The Department of Neighborhoods will conduct focus groups inviting community input on a new outreach and engagement framework.

DON will also work with the Office for Civil Rights and the City Budget Office to draft a resolution and ordinance outlining a new community engagement framework and creating the Community Involvement Council. It is expected that both will be delivered to the Council in late September.