EQUITABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

For the City & County of Honolulu
V.6, June 2021

The Resilience Office is required to coordinate actions and policies of City departments and agencies to advance procedural, distributional, structural, intergenerational, and cultural equity.[1] One of those actions is inclusive, community-centered engagement practices and decision-making processes related to increasing community access, participation, and representation in programs and policies. This commitment to equity is not expressed by the Resilience Office alone, but at City Council with Resolution 20-206, in response to COVID-19 in Resolution 21-50, and City-wide with the General Plan's policy to "Ensure that government attitudes, actions, and services are sensitive to community needs and concerns".

This document provides practical guidance for the City and County of Honolulu to employ more equitable community engagement practices for the development of plans, strategies, and policies that address immediate concerns of impacted communities. This guide is a resource to assist in designing community engagement procedures that align the City's goals to be representative of and in service to the socially and culturally diverse communities that reside on O'ahu.

Equity work is accountable to impacted communities and requires **intentional investments in relationship-building** and **undoing past harms**, ideally resulting in broader constituencies of support and more productive cross-sector working relationships. Central to the work is restoring power to these communities over time so they are able to self-determine their future.

> *Equity goes beyond simply "not making things worse."*
> *It's about making things better and contributing to actual improvements*
> *in the lives of historically marginalized communities.*

I. PLANNING

II. EXECUTION

III. EVALUATION

The guide is organized into three sections: planning, execution, and evaluation. The planning section offers a step-by-step framework for creating a community engagement roadmap that best suits a project's purpose while orienting around communities' priorities, abilities and concerns. The execution section reviews best practices to follow in the pre-engagement and engagement period that ensure appropriate and effective engagement activities. Finally, the evaluation section provides questions to reflect on the outcomes and impact of the engagement process.

Equitable engagement takes a lot of time and capacity in both the planning and execution stages to adequately address the structural systems that have marginalized communities for generations. **These investments don't come quick, easy, or cheap.** Sustained investments will be required for both the City and local partners.

This time and resource investment is well worth it: by involving communities more intentionally, and by centering their perspectives and lived experiences into the project, program, or policy goals, relationships are ultimately strengthened to support implementation and long-term viability. Building capacity for community coalitions will also improve efficiency, effectiveness, fiscal responsibility, and long-term sustainability. Cultivating trust, understanding, mutual respect, and community stewardship upfront lessens pushback during implementation.

The evaluation stage is ongoing, iterative and woven into the entire community engagement process, starting from pre-project assessment, co-creation of evaluation measures with community members, consistent monitoring, and thorough post-project reflection. This guide itself is an evolving document that is subject to this process. There should be continual assessment to identify where it succeeds and where it can be improved upon by both internal stakeholders and external community representatives.

> *Trust always affects two measurable outcomes: speed and cost. When trust goes down [...] speed decreases with it. Everything takes longer. Simultaneously, costs increase.*
>
> *– Stephen M.R. Covey, author of the book* The Speed of Trust

I. PLANNING

This section of the guide focuses on critical elements of the community engagement plan step by step, from stakeholder mapping through detailing a plan for engagement—a plan that creates processes for accountability, informed decision-making, equitable outcomes and measures for successes with the community.
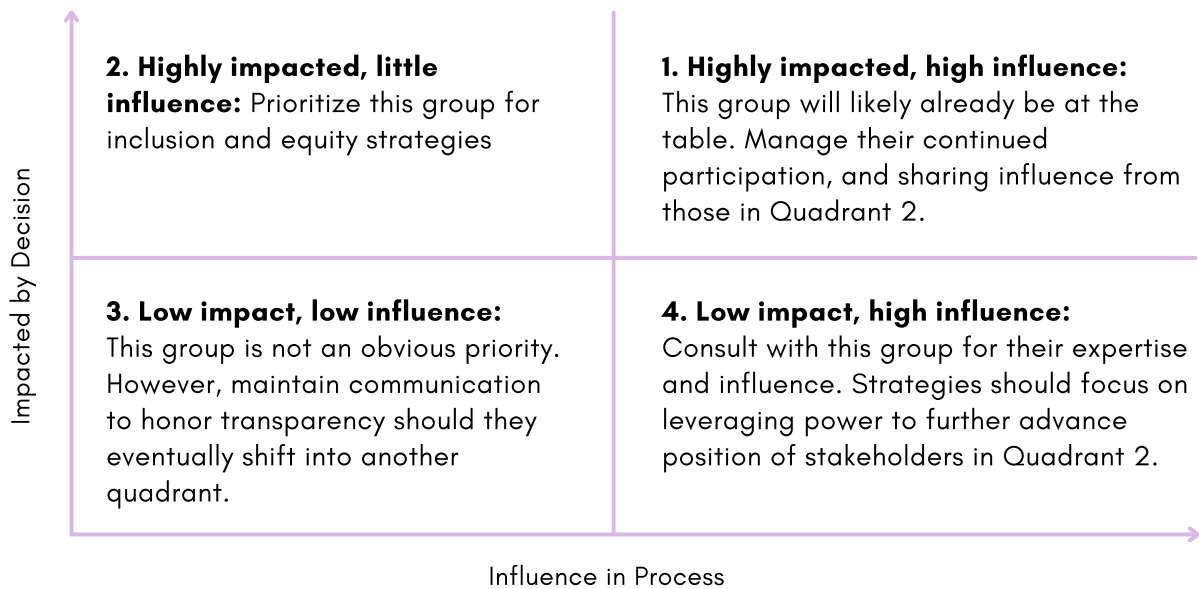
Step 1: Identifying Key Stakeholders

When designing community engagement, it is important to start by identifying how individuals, communities, and groups are most likely to be impacted by the project through a benefits and burdens analysis. Understanding which groups could advocate for the project in becoming co-equal partners in planning, development, and implementation, will help to determine the priority engagement audience.

This is also a time to be reflective. As the organizers of this program, policy, or project, the City is a key stakeholder and also has limitations of experiences, assumptions and biases, implicit or explicit. This will ultimately affect the outcome of the work, including who to engage with in the decision-making process and how. How might these conditions impact the way the questions are answered below? It is important to consider how biases influence understanding and perception of people and place.

Use **Section I. People and Places Impacted** from the **Equity Check Form**[2] to answer the questions below:

- What are the demographics of residents and organizations who will be impacted? What about the population at large? Demographics include: age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, renter/owner, houseless, race/ethnicity, income, education level, and language.
- Which groups are most likely to be vulnerable to negative impacts? Which groups have been traditionally disenfranchised and are less likely to participate in engagement?
- What is the historical, cultural, political and social context of the peoples and places impacted? How have past actions (by the City or otherwise) impacted these communities?

A useful tool for understanding which stakeholders are important to include, their relationship to the project, and the power they have is the stakeholder power analysis chart. Engagement should represent at least three of the four quadrants below:

Impacted by Decision (vertical axis label)

2. Highly impacted, little influence: Prioritize this group for inclusion and equity strategies

1. Highly impacted, high influence: This group will likely already be at the table. Manage their continued participation, and sharing influence from those in Quadrant 2.

3. Low impact, low influence: This group is not an obvious priority. However, maintain communication to honor transparency should they eventually shift into another quadrant.

4. Low impact, high influence: Consult with this group for their expertise and influence. Strategies should focus on leveraging power to further advance position of stakeholders in Quadrant 2.

Influence in Process (horizontal axis label)

Record the discussion that comes from answering the above questions and using the stakeholder power analysis chart. This will be valuable for the evaluation stage (part III). If questions can't be answered or the chart is incomplete, identify these gaps and see how partnerships in this work might support finding those answers.

Step 2: Partnering with Community

Contracting with Community-Based Organizations

Communities have deep knowledge and expertise to lead and design equitable outcomes. Meaningful collaboration with community groups and members is needed to ensure more equitable policies, projects, and programs. Meaningful collaboration means orienting around communities' priorities and concerns, creating structures for accountability, and including community in refining the project's process and implementation to meet shared goals.

Partnering with a Community-Based Organization (CBO) is key to a more inclusive and effective community engagement plan, particularly when working with historically marginalized or disenfranchised communities who might lack access to government planning processes or have had negative experiences participating in the past. CBOs are often trusted pillars of a community, and possess expertise and relationships that the government or institutions do not have, such as deeper and more localized understanding of cultural norms, community assets and challenges, credible and trusted community relationships, and substantive networks with certain populations. Some CBOs might meet different needs of the community that fall under the project area. If that is the case, it might be appropriate to contract with more than one CBO.

> **EXAMPLE**
>
> Affordable housing and housing justice organizations have worked to improve living conditions in communities for years and could be potential partners.

Contracting with a CBO is not a silver bullet to addressing all possible inequities, but rather one of many tools in the toolbox. When identifying community-based partners, it is important to ask if the organizations being considered are:

- experienced in representing, advocating for, and working with impacted groups;
- rooted in the local community (physically located there);
- trusted by and accountable to members in that community;
- and connected with other relevant networks.

When partnering, it is important to create the right conditions for developing a trusting and effective relationship between the project team and the CBO.

- Conduct dialogue in advance to determine mutual interests, capacity, values and benefits to the partnership. The desired community engagement needs to align with the organization's as well as with the Office's project priorities.
- Establish mutual respect for what each party brings. For example, the CBO can provide insight into what barriers certain populations within the community may have about interacting with local government. If there is a history of mistrust, it is important to be aware of and understand it.
- Participate in meetings/events already set up by the CBO, if invited and when appropriate, to use their time wisely. Maintain consistent attendance before, during and after the project partnership.
- Set clearly defined roles and expectations for each other, and revisit as needed.
- Set shared goals and planned outcomes that can be assessed later on.

Convening Advisory Groups

One key tool for engagement is the advisory group. Looking at the chart on page 8, if the level of engagement is at "involve" or more, convening an advisory group is recommended to assist with developing and executing community engagement processes.

Advisory group members should include those who are representative of the communities the project will be impacted by, and have experience working with, representing, and advocating for groups that are:

- Low income or socioeconomically disadvantaged
- Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander and communities of color
- Geographically diverse
- Multigenerational
- Limited English proficiency (LEP) and/or immigrant communities

Compensation

Compensating members of an advisory group or a CBO for their time and expertise is a strongly recommended best practice. This can be in the form of stipends for one-time, short duration activities (such as an interview panel, focus or discussion group, etc.) or regular compensation provided for activities where an extended term of service is requested.

Factors to consider for compensation rates include the current living wage, market rate for contractors the City would otherwise hire, emotional labor, and the recommendation for the compensation amount from the community member or CBO.

Participatory support (such as transportation reimbursement, child care, food, and other services) that are critical components to reducing barriers to participation, are NOT considered compensation. Whether or not financial compensation is feasible, it is critical to articulate the burden of labor asked of all partners and consider other mechanisms and resources (in-kind) to compensate for community's time, expertise and labor contributed.

Step 3: Preparing an Inclusive Community Engagement Plan that Identifies Outcomes, Metrics, and Deliverables

The community engagement plan should be proactive and targeted. It should reflect the diversity and demographics of the communities you are working in, and build opportunities for decision-making and partnerships with community members and community-based organizations. The plan should include multiple forms of engagement to accomplish different goals. Engage early on at the beginning of a project and start with an information-sharing period to build awareness of the project, cultivate a level of foundational understanding and a co-creative process, e.g. community-driven planning. The table (on page 8) can help to determine what types of engagement are best for which engagement goal.

Here are some questions to consider while designing the inclusive community engagement plan:

- What decisions about the project have already been made? What aspects of the project can the community influence, assist with, or be valuable for?
- Who has already been part of the discussion?
- Where is there still room for communities to influence the project?
- What is the timeline?
- Is there any funding to allocate to community partners for engagement facilitation and communication?

When making the community engagement plan, it is best practice to:

- Design a project timeline with **key activities** including **clear communication channels** that are both synchronous and asynchronous;
- Include **milestones and deliverables** along the project timeline, with baseline projections for how these activities will affect the arc of the project, as well as projections of what the project outcome would be with few to no engagement activities;
- **Identify and build relationships with the community**, particularly traditionally disenfranchised groups and frontline communities, most often best done through CBO partnerships (plan how to maintain an ongoing presence in the community);
- Consider **barriers to participation for all participants** (e.g. visual/hearing impairment, physical accessibility, translation services, childcare needs, technology access for virtual engagements, etc.);
- Develop **alternative and culturally appropriate methods for engagement**, such as holding a community meeting at a church or cultural center where many of the identified community members gather, seeking out a translator for ESL communities, or responding to culturally appropriate reciprocity practices such as providing food. Seek guidance on this from a CBO or community liaison as needed;
- If engaging virtually, choose the **technology that best suits the needs of the community**, considering user-friendliness, accessibility, familiarity, and cost.
- Track, demonstrate, assess and share how **community input will be incorporated into the project** (consider how new information could impact the overall arc of the engagement or project timeline and be ready to correct course if needed);
- Include **outcomes, metrics, and deliverables** for the engagement plan, such as:
  - number of people attending engagement
  - demographic data of people reached by engagement
  - level of community understanding about the project
  - community attitudes and opinions about the project
  - degree of project design change in response to community input

TIPS

- The engagement plan should consist of both digital and physical forms of engagement. For example, if conducting a survey, consider mailing physical copies to households in addition to distributing digital versions through email and websites.

- If the project requires a request for comments period, the engagement plan should prioritize key community stakeholders (in addition to advisory group members and technical advisors) to receive direct communication from the project lead soliciting requests for comment. It is best practice to send an additional direct communication soliciting requests for comment on the plan to everyone that engaged during the community engagement process.

Indicators for Engagement Level

Level	Indicators	Tools
INFORM **Hōʻike** "We will keep you informed"	Project **would not** interrupt service and/or traffic for an extended period of time Residents and/or businesses **would not** be disrupted for an extended period of time Project is a direct replacement of infrastructure, materials, or other in the same location	Fact sheets Website Open houses
CONSULT **Kūkā** "We will listen to & acknowledge your concerns"	Project addresses a public health and/or safety concern Project **would not** cause loss of or significant change to facility, program or service to community Project changes may be triggered by legislative, regulatory, or policy requirements	Public comment Focus groups Surveys Public meetings
INVOLVE **Kāwili kāʻekā** "We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the decisions made"	Project included in approved City Plan Project would fundamentally change the size, capacity, and/or intensity of use of space, roadways, other public facilities Project would cause loss of or significant change to a facility/program/service Project could have significant impacts on nearby residents and/or businesses (e.g. health/safety, traffic, loss of green infrastructure, increased costs, adverse construction impacts) Strong community interests (support, concern, different views, opposition) anticipated for the project	Citizen advisory groups Interactive workshops Community forums Participatory decision-making
COLLABORATE **Hana pū** "We will look to you for advice and innovation and incorporate this in decisions *as much as possible*"	Project **not** a capital maintenance or operations project Multiple commissions and/or advisory boards would typically provide input on this type of project Project **did not** originate from a previously approved City Plan City Board/City Manager has provided high-level direction (e.g. construction of public building, studies)	MOUS with CBOs Advisory groups Open planning forums Participatory decision-making Ideas charrette
EMPOWER **Hoʻāmana** "We will implement what you decide"	Guiding City documents including Community Plans, Community Development Plans, and other guiding policy documents and plans (Climate Action Plans, LHMP, etc) Large-scale projects with significant proportion of office/City budgeting Any policy, project, or program that would significantly and/or fundamentally reshape communities' lived experience	Community-driven planning Consensus-building & community advocacy Participatory action research Participatory budgeting Cooperative models & delegated decision-making

Adapted from *The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership*, Movement Strategy Center and the original Arnstein's Ladder (1969) Degrees of Citizen Participation

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

The table above will assist in deciding what type of engagement activity best suits the communities identified to engage with; for instance, if the community has a large percentage of keiki, that could be an indicator that an in-person, weekend engagement at a school that also includes kids activities or childcare options would be appropriate.

Engagement in the Time of COVID-19

While in-person, face-to-face engagement activities are always ideal, they might not be permitted or safe during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Pivoting to virtual formats may be necessary. However, if able to meet in person, here are actions to take to ensure all participants' safety:

- Provide personal protective equipment such as masks, face shields and hand sanitizer
- Choose outdoor spaces or indoor with windows/air flow
- Remind participants ahead of the event to stay home if feeling ill
- Limit the number of participants to maintain safe physical distances

II. EXECUTION

Below are some best practice tips for the engagement itself, including the lead-up to engagement sessions.

Pre-Engagement Best Practices

Conduct a **good-faith effort to contact stakeholders and community members** via email, phone, site visit, social media, mailer communication, etc. Pre-engagement outreach should include the following:

- Basic description of the project, including anticipated benefits, impacts, and mitigations
- Date, time, and location
- Office point-of-contact, including contact information
- Online or physical location to send questions/concerns/comments

Consider **potential barriers for inclusive engagement** and plan around these. Potential barriers include:

- Lack of childcare – how can the time of engagement events account for childcare needs? Can childcare be offered for the event?
- Lack of transportation – what is the location of the engagement event? Is it easily accessed via public transportation?
- Varying work schedules – how many engagement opportunities are being hosted and are they offered at different times of day/week?

- Lack of trust in government - can community members who are often not in a position of power be invited to take a leadership role in a community meeting and/or assist with creating the agenda for the next meeting? Alternatively, if engaging through a CBO, how can their position be best utilized as a more trusted representative in the community?
- Technological barriers - is the event hosted virtually? What platform is being used? Is it free, accessible, familiar, and user-friendly? Are there pathways to access the event for community members without computers/internet (such as calling in)? Is there a way to combine virtual and in-person options for a single meeting?

Engagement Best Practices

- Lead by **listening** to the needs expressed by communities and do not come with the answers in hand. Listening to what was shared is key to equitable engagement. (Provide staff with professional development in facilitation training to build these skills.)
- **Meet communities where they're at**, particularly in spaces where they feel most comfortable: schools, farmers' markets, churches, community centers, cultural spaces, malls, etc.
- Introduce yourself and others on the team as **individuals**. For example, share who you are, where you are from, and what motivates you in being a part of the project, not just your professional title or role.
- If this is a virtual event, have **grace and patience for technical difficulties**. Be prepared with troubleshooting tips for both hosts and attendees. Make time to explain how to use the platform. Create multiple avenues for participation other than speaking, such as the chat function, polling, reactions and annotation tools.
- Observe who is dominating the conversation and politely **give space** for those who haven't shared. If possible, speak in rounds so that everyone has a turn.
- Inform on the project fundamentals in a **digestible, relatable way** and be very transparent with the project/program intent at the onset of the event. Many may not be familiar with governmental planning processes and technical language, or may come from different perspectives. Can the issue be approached from an alternative, less technical perspective (e.g. cost-saving, public health, cultural preservation, economic or social benefit etc.)? Is there an upbeat activity that relays the project details in an accessible and engaging way?
- Provide **handouts** (printed or digital) with relevant information in a digestible, inviting format, in addition to presentations or online resources.
- Have a **sign-in sheet** (digital or physical copy) to further engage the community with follow-up activities and ongoing communication about the project's status.
- Collect **anonymized demographic information** to gauge whether or not the engagement is successfully reaching a genuine representation of the community.
- Have an **evaluation form** in both digital and paper format for attendees to provide feedback on the effectiveness of engagement. A sample feedback survey can be found [here][3] to evaluate and adjust engagement over the course of the process.

- Take **detailed notes** of the engagement event that goes beyond recording what was said. For example, take note of how people respond non-verbally, how and when they arrive and leave the event, and how attendants interact with the space.
- Provide **point-of-contact information** so attendees can reach out with additional questions or feedback.
- Make appropriate time for **Q&A** within the agenda.
- **Ask the participants** who they think should be participating if not already involved, and how participation can be improved.
- At the end of the event, **de-brief** on what was heard and allow for participants to react. (Later in the process, dedicate a session to report back on how community input informed the project/program/policy.)

TIPS

Tips for conflict resolution:

- adopt a mindset of inquiry
- be comfortable with silence
- preserve the relationship
- be consistent
- use 'I' statements
- focus on the issue, not on the person
- use affirming responses

ROLES

Roles and responsibilities to cover at the engagement event:

- Facilitator
- Presenter
- Tech assistant
- Note taker/record keeper

III. EVALUATION

The evaluation process should be conceptualized, implemented, and utilized in a manner that promotes equity. The project or program should already have assessment, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place to measure its success or areas of improvement, balancing community priorities and project goals. The evaluation paradigm should include definitions and expectations around validity, rigor, bias, and objectivity that honors particular types of knowledge, evidence, and truth as well as measure the effectiveness of the community engagement activities conducted.

Evaluation is an ongoing process and is integral to equitable community engagement. When setting up the engagement plan, record baseline projections of what community engagement will look like with intervention and without (intervention being the engagement activities to be deployed to best reach all stakeholders). Set up monitoring tools such as sign-in sheets, surveys, observational note-taking, digital sound or video recording, etc., which will measure engagement data such as attendance, retention, demographics, and feedback from participants. This will better equip the end-of-project phase to reflect on the engagement process. Questions to consider throughout the process:

- How is the effectiveness of engagement being evaluated? What are the success indicators? How will success be defined by community?
- How was community input integrated into the final project design? If input solicited wasn't incorporated into the project, interrogate why and give an explanation as to the reasoning.
- Was outreach successful in representing the audience defined in step 1 of section 1?
- How was the engagement process received by the community (as informed by the evaluation form)?
- How will those that participated and provided input know the impact they had on the project?
- What strategies were put in place to continually build impacted and prioritized communities' capacity to engage in the project/program long term?
- What improvements can be made to the execution of the community engagement process?

Record discussions on these points for reference—the information gleaned from these tools and questions will be invaluable for an effective evaluation of engagement and ultimately improving upon these practices for future projects. This information should also inform how to conduct follow up engagement later down the road to measure long term impact and sustainability.

The results of the evaluation are context-specific. What might be successful for one project might not be for another. Move beyond methodological approaches and evaluator demographics to address culture and context. Definitions of evidence, knowledge, and truth should be grounded in time, place, and place-based values, which will assist in quality evaluations that reflect an inclusive, accessible and overall equitable community engagement.

Reporting

At the end of the project, it is best practice to attach a **Community Engagement Technical Report** to the final project report, which summarizes:

- The engagement plan
- The audience reached at each engagement event
- The feedback received
- What changes to the plan were made in light of community feedback
- The evaluation results

In addition to this technical report, **share the project's outcomes and impacts** with participating community members, organizations and the greater community. This might also include a link to the anonymized raw data as well as the findings. When a quote or story is used in a public report, get approval from the person who provided the quote or story to ensure that they consent to it being publicly shared and they approve the way in which their words are being interpreted.

REFERENCES

Community Engagement Guidelines for Project Applicants
City of Oakland
http://www2.oaklandnet.com/oakca1/groups/ceda/documents/agenda/oak070194.pdf

Conflict Management and Public Participation
International Association for Public Participation
https://iap2usa.org/resources/Documents/Research/WHITE%20PAPER%20-%20P2%20AND%20CONFLICT%20MANAGEMENT%20-%20NELISCHER.pdf

Effective Communication: Barriers and Strategies
University of Waterloo Center for Teaching Excellence
https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/communicating-students/telling/effective-communication-barriers-and-strategies

Equitable Community Engagement Blueprint
Neighborhood Improvement Services, City of Durham
https://www.durhamcommunityengagement.org/equitable_engagement

Equity in Sustainability, An Equity Scan of Local Government Sustainability Programs
Angela Park – Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN)
https://www.usdn.org/uploads/cms/documents/usdn_equity_scan_sept_2014_final.pdf

Evaluation with Aloha, A Framework for Working in Native Hawaiian Contexts
Culturally Relevant Evaluation and Assessment Hawai'i (CREA-HI)
https://www.creahawaii.com/resources

Indigenous Evaluation Framework
Joan LaFrance, Richard Nichols – American Indian Higher Education Consortium
https://portalcentral.aihec.org/Indigeval/Pages/default.aspx

Process Guide for City-Community Partnerships
Rosa González, Minna Toloui – Greenlink Equity Map
https://www.equitymap.org/process-guide

The Community Engagement Guide for Sustainable Communities
Danielle Bergstrom, Kalima Rose, Jillian Olinger, Kip Holley – PolicyLink and Kirwan Institute
https://www.policylink.org/resources-tools/community-engagement-guide-for-sustainable-communities

The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership
Movement Strategy Center
https://movementstrategy.org/directory/spectrum/

Helpful Links:

[1] **Ordinance 20-47. Section on Climate Resilience and Equity (December 23, 2020):** https://bit.ly/ordinance20-47

[2] **Equity Check Form:** https://bit.ly/equitycheckinform

[3] **Sample Engagement Feedback Survey:** https://bit.ly/SampleEngagementFeedbackSurvey