

A GUIDE TO PLANNING

Inclusive COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS



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This guide will be regularly updated. Future versions will be available online at: www.turnerconsultinggroup.ca.

Please contact us to share any suggestions for how we can improve this guide or let us know whether this guide has been useful.



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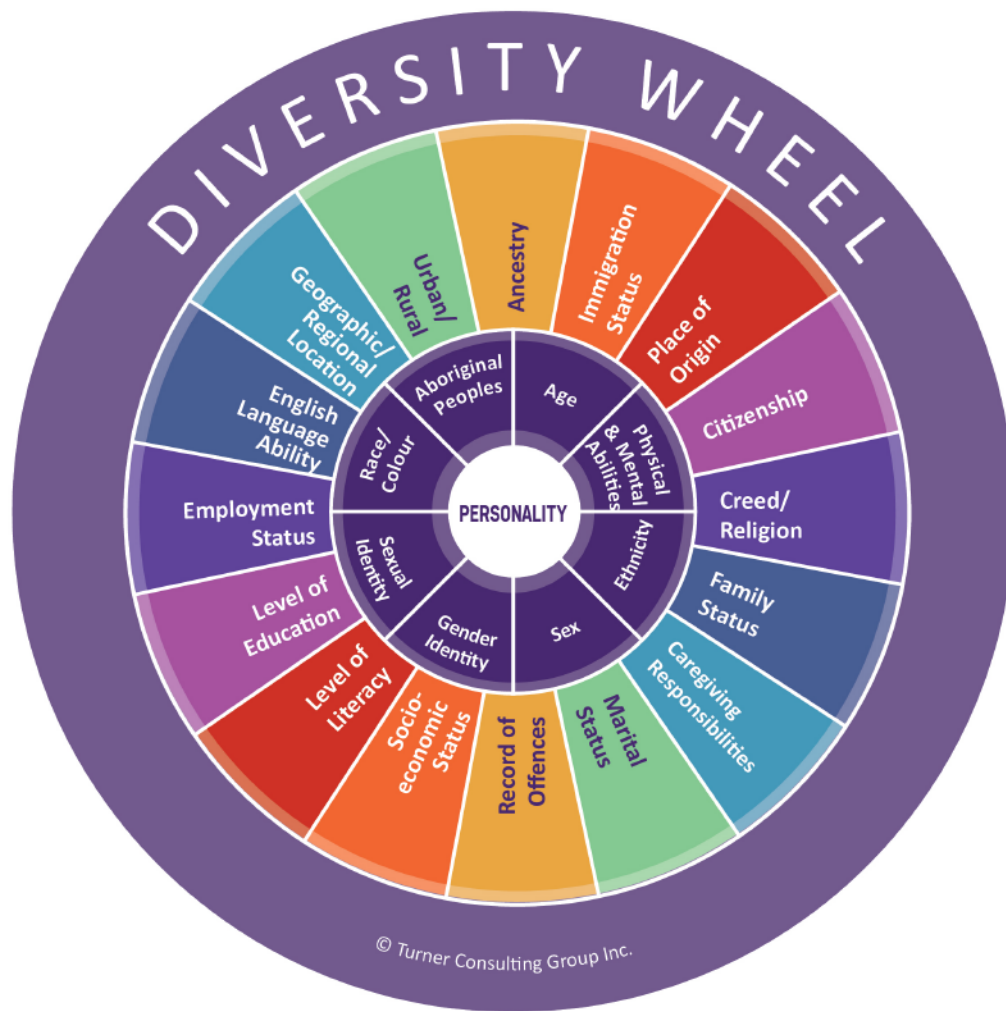
INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, we at the Turner Consulting Group have had the pleasure of conducting several community consultations as part of project work for various organizations. These projects have provided us with numerous opportunities to travel throughout the province, meet hundreds of people, and engage in important conversations. Doing this work has also challenged us to pay close attention to the needs of communities, specifically how to ensure that these meetings are accessible to everyone and inclusive of various voices and perspectives.

When thinking about making consultation meetings accessible, many organizers immediately think about physical accessibility for persons with disabilities. They may not think about making the meeting accessible to people from a range of backgrounds. So, while they might ensure the physical accessibility of the building, they might not ensure that the location is accessible by public transit. Or organizers might not consider the format of the consultation. Consequently, youth might attend a consultation session, but might not feel comfortable participating in the conversations.

Given the diversity of our society, there are many issues to consider when planning community consultations. As an organizer, you want a broad range of people to hear about the consultation. You also want people to feel welcome to attend, feel comfortable enough and supported to share their perspectives during the meeting, and feel good about the process. When people leave, you want them talking about the issues, not the process itself!

We have started to use our diversity wheel as a way to consider participants' needs based on the various dimensions of diversity. The wheel helps us to think beyond the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities as we start to consider how to make the meeting inclusive of people who are marginalized, those whose first language isn't English, young people, parents, low-income residents, people who work shift work, and others.



Over the years, we have learned a lot from the challenges we've experienced organizing and facilitating community consultations. We have also learned a great deal from the missteps of others. Here are a few examples that remind us of the importance of being inclusive when consulting with the community.

A municipality organized a public meeting to discuss accessible and affordable housing. The venue they booked was a legion hall that can only be entered by climbing a staircase. When the issue was identified, they moved the meeting to a café down the street. The problem? The washrooms were in the basement of the café, down a flight of stairs. The meeting was rescheduled so that a fully accessible location could be found.

Another public sector organization was holding consultations to help it plan how to modernize and deliver more cost-effective services. The flyer they created included a summary of the issue and the date, time, location, and address of the sessions. It did not include a contact email or phone number, information on accessibility of the venue, information on whether accommodation would be provided, or information on how to provide input if you weren't able to attend one of the consultation sessions.

At the first of a series of consultation meetings, we were surprised that a number of participants brought young children with them. After having someone run to the Dollar Store, we ensured that we had art supplies, playing cards, and colouring books on hand for the other consultation sessions. We learned that not everyone will register to attend the meetings and not everyone will let us know if they will require child minding.

An individual who uses a wheelchair was invited to give a keynote address at a conference. She was told that the venue was accessible. Prior to her keynote, she went to the washroom. While the washroom had an automatic door opener to allow entry, there wasn't one to allow exit. She had to wait until someone came into the washroom before she could leave.

Still another public sector organization was holding consultations in communities across the province. They experienced a number of stumbles along the way. One session was held far out of the city centre, virtually inaccessible to people who use public transit. They held a town hall style forum, which required individuals to go up to a microphone in front of hundreds of people to share their input. This meant that youth and others were intimidated and did not participate. The town hall style also meant that only a fraction of those in attendance were able to provide input, which focused the discussions on the issues rather than their suggested solutions. Rather than feeling happy that they were able to participate in these consultations, many participants left frustrated and unhappy with the process.

One public sector organization was holding consultations on an issue of concern to people across the province. However, it organized consultations in only four cities. After an uproar from other communities, additional sessions were scheduled.

You might also want to think about other ways to gather community input. The City of Toronto's Planning Department did just that. They noticed that those coming to their community meetings were generally White, affluent homeowners. Recognizing the importance of hearing from the full diversity of the city's residents, they considered a different approach to consulting and created the Toronto Planning Review Panel. Panel members were selected after sending out 12,000 invitations and using a lottery process to pick 28 applicants who reflect the diversity of the city. The department has used this panel to review proposed policies and guidelines. This approach has been so successful that other cities have contacted the City of Toronto learn more about the model.

We've created this guide of things to consider when organizing and holding community consultations. While it might not address all potential issues, this guide provides a solid foundation for planning your community consultations.

While there is a lot to consider, remember that it takes less time to plan for inclusion than it does to deal with issues that arise afterward or to recover from the reputational damage that can occur.

A. THE FORMAT OF THE CONSULTATION SESSION

When developing your consultation plan, think about the best approach to getting the information you want from participants. What you want from the session should drive the format of the session. For example, if you want feedback on a community plan, how can you share the plan with the community, allow opportunities for discussion, and gather input from participants? Alternatively, if you want the community to discuss road safety and associated issues, this session might be structured differently, such as having small group conversations.



You should also think about the topic, the input you are seeking, and whether it is important to hear from particular segments of the community. We would suggest that whatever the issue, it is important to hear from a cross-section of the community. So, depending on the topic you might consider holding separate sessions to ensure that you also hear from marginalized communities, e.g., queer youth, racialized communities, etc. This helps to create a safer space for participants to share their opinions. Working with community agencies that already have relationships with marginalized communities will help you reach out to these communities.

When designing the consultation session, consider the following:

- ☐ What information do you want to provide to participants so that they understand the context and background of the consultation and the issues?
- ☐ Do you need to provide any of that information to participants in advance, and how will they access it?
- ☐ Are there specific questions that you want participants to answer?
- ☐ How can you structure the consultation so that everyone can participate in the discussions?
- ☐ How can you structure the consultation so that you receive the feedback and input that you want?

B. COMMUNICATING WITH THE COMMUNITY

The flyer or website used to advertise the community consultations should inform the public about the purpose of the consultation, provide dates and locations for the meetings, encourage participation, allow individuals to identify whether they need accommodation, and let them know how to register.



A best practice to facilitate greater participation is to ask participants what accommodation they need to participate in the consultation. That means that the flyers should go out well before the meeting date (4 weeks minimum) so that you have time to arrange for accommodation.

Asking participants to identify their needs ensures that you pay only for the services needed and helps avoid extra charges for last-minute requests.

The flyer or website should:

- ☐ Provide the community with a shared understanding of the consultation, such as the reasons for the meeting, what you want to achieve by the end of the meeting, and what will happen afterwards.
- ☐ Identify someone to contact with questions.
- ☐ Specify whether the venue is physically accessible.
- ☐ Identify who to contact should accommodation to participate in the consultation be needed.
- ☐ Specify whether ASL, real-time captioning, and/or language interpretation will be available (or will be made available upon request).
- ☐ Specify whether child minding will be available (or will be made available upon request).
- ☐ Specify if a meal or refreshments will be available.

- ☐ Identify if there is free, onsite parking.
- ☐ Specify if participants will be reimbursed for the cost of public transportation.
- ☐ Provide a deadline for submitting accommodation requests (e.g. 2 weeks prior to the event) to allow you the time to arrange for the accommodation.
- ☐ Provide the opportunity for individuals to register for the consultation.
- ☐ Provide an opportunity for those who can't attend the consultation session to provide feedback. This can be done by providing them with a consultation workbook or an email address to which they can submit their input. But remember you should provide the consultation questions so that they are able to provide focused input.

Also consider promoting the consultations to encourage participation from a cross-section of society. Your strategy should include more than one promotion approach:

- ☐ Share the flyer with community organizations and libraries. They can post the flyer on their bulletin boards. Community organizations may also email the flyer out to their contacts.
- ☐ Send out a press release to local newspapers and radio stations, including ethnic and alternative media.
- ☐ Use social media to share information about the consultation and engage the community in a conversation about the topic.

TIPS

Your budget should include funds to cover accommodation costs. Estimating these costs can be difficult, since they vary depending on time, location, availability of service providers, and the type of services needed.

Communicating about the consultations early also gives participants enough time to arrange for their transportation, child care, and other needs.

C. EVENT REGISTRATION

Asking participants to register for the session will give you a sense of the number of participants and provides participants with the opportunity to tell you whether they require any accommodation. Using online event registration tools such as Eventbrite also allows you to send automatic reminders to your participants.



Keep in mind that not everyone who will attend your consultation meeting will register, so plan for a larger group than the number registered.

When requiring participants to register to attend your consultation session, consider the following:

- ☐ Ask for their name and email address, particularly if you will be providing feedback to them or other follow-up information.
- ☐ Allow participants to identify any accommodation needs they might have such as documents in large print, ASL or language interpreters, real-time captioning, prayer space, etc.
- ☐ If you are providing refreshments, you should also ask about dietary requirements and allergies.
- ☐ Request that participants respect the scent-free policy of your meetings.

D. THE VENUE

When booking a venue for your consultation meeting, consider the following:



- ☐ The venue should be physically accessible to people who use mobility devices; this includes ramps to enter the building, automatic door openers, accessible rooms, and accessible washrooms.
- ☐ Choose a location that is easily accessible to people who use public transit.
- ☐ If the event is held in the evening, consider how well lit the immediate area is as well as the walk to public transit. This is a key consideration, particularly for people who may feel vulnerable when leaving the consultation in the dark.
- ☐ Ensure there is accessible parking close to the main door of the building.
- ☐ Check to ensure routes to the meeting are accessible, e.g., that there are no construction barricades.
- ☐ Put up appropriate signage to direct participants from the building entrance to the meeting room. Ensure signage is located at a height visible to all, including those using mobility devices.
- ☐ Select a room that is spacious enough to accommodate participants, the registration table, refreshments, and a table for any hand outs.
- ☐ If possible, select a room equipped with microphones and speakers.
- ☐ Consider the size of the room and any potential noise from ventilation systems to determine whether you require a portable audio system and microphones.

- ☐ Ensure there is assistive listening technology for those with hearing impairments.
- ☐ Ensure room setup allows freedom of movement using mobility aids such as guide dogs, wheelchairs, and motorized scooters.
- ☐ Ensure space for sign language interpreters and/or simultaneous interpreters.
- ☐ Ensure the location has gender-inclusive washrooms.
- ☐ Provide signage to indicate where accessible seating and washrooms are located.

TIPS

Regardless of how accessible the venue says it is, it is important to do a thorough check of the physical site before booking the location. Sometimes just the entry to the building is accessible and the washrooms and meeting rooms are not. The only way to be sure of full accessibility is to visit the site and do a full walkthrough.

E. SCHEDULING CONSIDERATIONS

When selecting the date and time for the consultation, consider the following:



- ☐ Think about the time and day of the week to allow for maximum participation. For example, if the meeting is held on a weekday evening, consider whether those with children have enough time to travel from work, pick up children, take them home, and come to the meeting. If the meeting is scheduled during the day, consider who will and won't be able to attend.
- ☐ Where possible, hold several meetings on different days of the week and/or weekend to accommodate people with various schedules.
- ☐ Do a Google search to ensure you aren't competing with other events scheduled at the same time.
- ☐ Check a religious calendar to ensure you don't schedule consultations on important religious holy days or on days of cultural significance.
- ☐ Notify the community well in advance so participants can arrange for transportation, childcare, and other needs.
- ☐ Think about reimbursing transportation costs for those who use public transit. If your budget does allow this, include this information in your communications materials.
- ☐ Also consider reimbursing participants for childcare costs. Again, include this information in your communications materials.

F. DOCUMENTS

When providing materials to participants, consider the following:

- ☐ If there is a presentation, ensure that any overhead slides are in a large font and use high-contrast colours.
- ☐ If there is a presentation, consider offering participants the presentation in print.
- ☐ Ensure that documents are accessible to those with visual impairments by offering large-print versions. If having a consultation with seniors, you should plan for this rather than waiting for accommodation requests.
- ☐ When possible, provide materials in the predominant language spoken in the community, as well as in English.



G. THE AGENDA

When designing the agenda, consider the following:

- ☐ Recognizing Indigenous people as traditional stewards of the land is a critical part of any meeting held, particularly by public sector organizations. An acknowledgement should be made at the beginning of the event. This can be done by.



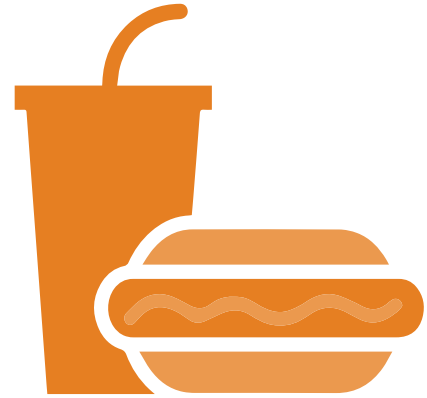
- Having an elder conduct a formal welcome to participants. An honourarium and/or a gift is customarily offered to the elder.
- Having the host or facilitator acknowledge the traditional territory on which the meeting is being held.

- ☐ Share the agenda with participants. This helps them know when issues will be discussed. This also encourages people to focus on the current agenda item, especially if they are keen to discuss an issue that falls later on the agenda.
- ☐ Prepare the agenda with adequate meal breaks and health breaks.
- ☐ Review guidelines which outline the ways participants will treat each other during the consultation. Include, for example, respectful listening, one person speaks at a time, it is OK to disagree.
- ☐ Try to keep the meeting focused on the agenda, but do not dismiss people's concerns out of hand. Consider using a flipchart to keep note of issues that arise which are not directly relevant to the consultation questions.
- ☐ Be clear on the outcome of the meeting. Participants want to know that you've heard them. Let them know if and how you will be reporting back to them about what you heard during the consultations.

- ☐ Think about who will be taking notes of participants' input. You want to ensure that you are capturing their input, and participants want to know that what they are saying is important to you.
- ☐ Not everyone will be able to say everything they want to say on the topic during the consultation. Provide a feedback mechanism, such as an e-mail address, to all participants at the start of the meeting or in the meeting materials so that people can provide additional input.

H. REFRESHMENTS

If you are holding the consultations on a weekday evening, consider serving refreshments or a meal for those who are coming directly from work. If serving food, consider the following:



- ☐ Don't just serve coffee; consider also serving tea and non-caffeinated beverages.
- ☐ When serving cold beverages, think about juice as well as pop.
- ☐ When serving water, think about the environment. Avoid bottled water and serve tap water.
- ☐ When serving food, consider serving culturally appropriate food instead of commonly served cold options like sandwiches and wraps.
- ☐ Consider using community caterers to provide the meal.
- ☐ When serving food, ensure there is a vegetarian option. If serving meat, avoid pork and ensure there are halal and kosher options.
- ☐ Serve vegetarian and meat dishes on separate tables, and ensure trays come with separate serving utensils.
- ☐ If cost or space is an issue, serve only vegetarian food.
- ☐ Have clear and detailed food labels. Identify dishes as vegetarian, halal, kosher, etc.

I. CONSULTING WITH DIVERSE POPULATIONS

When consulting with the community, it is important to hear from the full diversity of the population. Various groups have unique experiences, and including them ensures that the data collected reflects the experiences of all community members. Consider holding separate sessions for these groups to ensure they are fully able to participate and that you can capture their input and unique experiences. These groups might include young people, seniors, Indigenous people, new Canadians, and Francophones and other linguistic communities.



You should also consider how the issues and concerns of individuals are affected by their intersecting identities. For example, the experiences of low income, racialized (or visible minority) seniors who live in rental apartments will be different from that of middle income, White seniors who own their homes. Similarly, the experiences of queer youth will be different from straight youth. Use this information to think about how to create a safe space so that the unique experiences of diverse groups can be explored.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

When consulting with Indigenous peoples, consider the following:

- ☐ Consider any legal duty you may have to consult with Indigenous people, e.g. regarding environmental issues. If there is a legal duty to consult, your organization may have developed consultation protocols to follow.
- ☐ Identify if there are specific Indigenous communities that might be affected by the issue on which you are consulting, and should be invited to attend the consultation session.
- ☐ Identify if there are any Indigenous communities which have asserted or hold Aboriginal or Treaty rights in the area you will be holding the consultation session, and should be invited to attend the consultation session.

- ☐ Work with community organizations or others from the community to organize, advertise and facilitate the consultation session.
- ☐ Serve culturally appropriate food.
- ☐ Hold the meeting in locations Indigenous people typically visit and feel comfortable in.
- ☐ Provide incentives such as gift cards to encourage participation.

YOUNG PEOPLE

When consulting with young people, consider the following:

- ☐ Work with youth or someone who works with youth to organize, host, and facilitate the consultation session.
- ☐ Meet with youth at a location they typically visit and feel comfortable in, such as a community organization or a meeting room in a mall.
- ☐ Ensure the meeting is not scheduled during school hours or in the early morning.
- ☐ Make sure the meeting is advertised to young people in ways that appeal to them, in places where they will see it, and through trusted community partners such as youth programs, youth workers, and community agencies.
- ☐ Provide incentives such as gift cards to encourage their participation.
- ☐ If your budget allows it, consider reimbursing them for their transit cost to and from the consultation session.

SENIORS

When consulting with seniors, consider the following:

- ☐ Provide senior-friendly print materials. This includes using large print and high contrast colours.
- ☐ When arranging seating, ensure that the lanes are large enough to accommodate walkers, wheelchairs, and electric scooters.
- ☐ Consider the size of the room and any potential noise from ventilation systems to determine whether you require a portable audio system and microphones.
- ☐ Ensure there is assistive listening technology for those with hearing impairments.
- ☐ Meet with seniors at locations they typically visit and feel comfortable in, such as community centres.
- ☐ Make sure the meeting is advertised to seniors in ways that appeal to them, in places where they will see it, and through trusted community partners such as seniors' programs and community agencies.

NEW CANADIANS

When consulting with new Canadians, consider the following:

- ☐ Work with community organizations and/or religious institutions to organize, host, and facilitate the consultation session.
- ☐ Hire translators if no one facilitating the consultation speaks the languages prominently spoken in the community.
- ☐ Serve culturally appropriate food.

- ☐ Meet with new Canadians at locations they typically visit and feel comfortable in, such as a community centre, community agency, or place of worship.
- ☐ Make sure the meeting is advertised to new Canadians in English and in the languages predominantly spoken in the community, in places where they will see it, and through trusted community partners such as community agencies and religious institutions.
- ☐ Provide incentives such as gift cards to encourage their participation.

FRANCOPHONES AND OTHER LINGUISTIC COMMUNITIES

When consulting with Francophones and other linguistic communities, consider the following:

- ☐ Where there is a large Francophone or other linguistic community, advertise and facilitate the consultation sessions in those languages.

ALL GROUPS

You can make sure the meeting is inclusive of all groups by:

- ☐ Providing a meal.
- ☐ Keeping the language simple, avoiding jargon and technical terminology, but do not talk down to them.
- ☐ Allowing participants to provide input in smaller groups, as this might feel less intimidating.





Turner Consulting Group advances equity, diversity and inclusion through research, training and consulting.

Founded in 2002, we bring a systems analysis and an innovative approach to support organizations to understand and better respond to Canada's increasingly diverse population.

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