

Every Voice Matters: Citizen Engagement Plan



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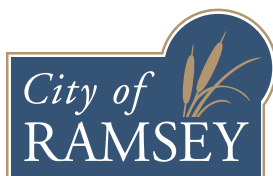
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Resilient Communities Project

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Building community-university partnerships for sustainability

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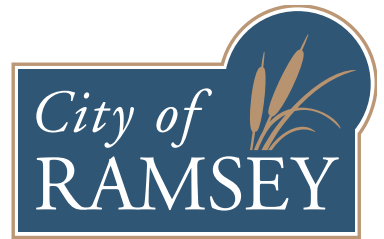
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Citizen Engagement Plan

December 19, 2017



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Table of Contents

● Executive Summary.....	3
● Introduction.....	4
● Section 1: Current Engagement in Ramsey.....	4
● Current Engagement Strategies	5
● Ramsey Demographics	8
● Overlooked Populations	8
● Section 2: Principles and Practices for Engagement.....	9
● Guiding Principles for Developing an Engagement Process	9
● Evaluation and Reflective Practice	10
● Sharing Information Back to Community	11
● Engaging Underrepresented Groups	12
● Case Studies Exploring How Principles Shape Engagement	14
● Be Proactive, Not Reactive	14
● Case Study: Proactive Engagement through Tactical Urbanism in Minneapolis	14
● Case Study: Intentional Engagement Seward, Minneapolis	15
● Bring the Meeting to the People	15
● Case Study: Bringing the Meeting to the People for Walkability in Minnesota Walks	16
● Section 3: Tools and Methods for Engagement.....	17
● Community Engagement Assessment Tool	17
● Place It!	18
● World Cafe	20
● Sticky Note Boards	21
● Leave Behind Boards	23
● Open Space Technology	24
● Social Media	25
● Participatory Budgeting	26
● Participatory Asset Mapping	27
● Tactical Urbanism	28
● Open House	29
● Online Mapping	30
● Minnesota Walks Community Engagement Toolkit	31
● Section 4: Recommendations.....	32
● Leveraging Community-wide Events	32
● Welcome Packet	32
● COR Model	32
● Small Project Engagement/Road Reconstruction	33
● Tactical Urbanism and Creative Placemaking	33
● Information Access and use of City of Ramsey Website	34
● Overall Planning Engagement and Lesson from the 2040 Comprehensive Plan	35
● Conversational Social Media	36
● Provide a Mix of Short-term and Long-term Engagement Opportunities	37
● Endnotes.....	38

Executive Summary

In the last decade the City of Ramsey in Minnesota has placed a greater emphasis on community engagement. In 2006 the city overhauled their engagement efforts with the Ramsey3 Plan. This effort has seen more energy focused on community engagement and city staff are optimistic about the engagement that has happened between the community and city. While engagement has improved it is still focused on meetings and tabling at events. This report intends to build on the current engagement happening in Ramsey and create a framework that can be used to take engagement further and address existing gaps in the engagement.

In this report, several remaining gaps in Ramsey's engagement are identified. These include a need for more proactive engagement across projects and programs, a need to engage a larger and more diverse group of residents, and a need for better tracking and evaluation of engagement practices. This report builds on the existing engagement in Ramsey to address these gaps.

While the City of Ramsey has focused on improving community engagement there is a lot they can do to create a "culture of engagement." This report identifies key principles critical to creating a culture of engagement including identifying the purpose and objectives, designing a transparent process in which it is clear how input is used, and creating an iterative process in which the city reports input back to residents and seeks additional feedback. Evaluation of engagement should be incorporated throughout this process. Engagement should be proactive rather than reactive, considerations should be made to promote equity, and meetings and engagements should be brought directly to people throughout the community. Finally, engagement builds on engagement. Engagement cannot be limited to individual projects. A long-term commitment to community engagement creates a culture of participation. Making a more thoughtful effort to implement engagement will improve the input from the community. This report includes more detailed descriptions of these principles to build quality community engagement efforts in any situation.

In the second section of this report, case studies are reviewed and a variety of specific methods and tools to build engagement activities are described. These tools provide a mix of engagement methods from activities that can be implemented at large community events to stand alone engagements that engage residents in deep conversations on a single subject. Suggestions for best uses of each are provided. In the final section of this report, recommendations are made for specific engagement activities based on Ramsey's current projects and priorities. These include suggestions for engaging currently underrepresented groups, opportunities to leverage existing community events, an updated welcome packet, opportunities for small project engagement such as on road reconstruction work, use of tactical urbanism and creative placemaking, enhancements to the website, a model of the COR development, new uses of social media, enhancements to the comprehensive plan process, and suggestions to better track engagement.

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Introduction

Like many communities, the City of Ramsey is seeking better ways to engage members of the community. This report examines current engagement practices at the city, identifies strengths and weaknesses of those practices, and offers recommendations to help improve the city's engagement processes. The first section provides an overview of existing conditions and identifies strengths and weaknesses in the city's engagement efforts. The following section examines best practices and effective tools from communities and organizations around the country. The final section offers recommendations for the city to improve their engagement, taking into account the successes and shortcomings of current efforts as well as best practices from peer communities and organizations. Ultimately, this report provides the City of Ramsey with several ways to build and expand on their engagement efforts in an effort to more effectively engage residents of the community.

Section 1: Current Engagement in Ramsey

In the last decade, the City of Ramsey has worked hard to improve engagement with their community. In 2006 Ramsey implemented an overhaul of their engagement process through the Ramsey3 plan. This overhaul focused on grassroots engagement through existing events and activities. While this engagement has been very successful in gathering feedback from the community on some land-use and planning issues it has not been successful in engaging the community on all issues important to the city.

City of Ramsey staff¹ is optimistic about the direction of the community engagement the current community engagement surrounding the 2040 comprehensive plan is a great example of where the City of Ramsey is looking to take community engagement. This process seeks to integrate residents into the design and decision making process from the beginning. Highlighted at the 2017 APA conference, the community engagement around the Ramsey 2040 master plan has been recognized by outside Planning Professionals and Ramsey City Staff as an innovative and creative approach to collaborating with residents on a comprehensive plan process.

However, the city recognizes that there are also several gaps and opportunities for improvement. First, there is a need for more proactive, ongoing engagement across city projects and programs. Second, there is a need to engage a larger and more diverse group of residents. Finally, currently there is insufficient tracking and evaluation of engagement practices and events.

City of Ramsey staff has identified a need for more continual and proactive engagement practices outside of large city projects and plans. As mentioned previously, the City of Ramsey has found success in some of its larger engagement processes but needs to translate these processes down to smaller projects and daily resident interactions. Engagement and communication processes around road maintenance is one area that the city has identified as a need for better engagement with its residents. Currently residents are notified of upcoming projects and invited to comment on finalized plans for the roads. By not including residents in the initial assessment and design process, city staff has experienced push back from residents who feel like plans and projects are being pushed onto them. For Example: Since bonded road projects must include at least 20% assessment of the property owners and engagement with the residents about these project happens after the designs have been completed, residents are immediately reluctant to agree with plans they have not helped develop but for which they will need to pay.

A biennial survey² has found that residents of Ramsey continue to feel that they have not been engaged on enough projects. The city has several tools that they use to communicate with the community. However, the

primary method to gather input continues to be meetings or tabling at events. These methods efficiently gather input, but only from the people who attend those events. In 2016, only 11% of residents reported attending a public meeting.³ Additionally, because these meetings generally ask residents to react to an existing proposal, effectiveness of citizen input at this stage may be limited.

Currently the city does very little tracking and evaluation of engagement practices. Anecdotally, city staff is able to identify specific programs, notifications and communication strategies that have worked in the past but do not have the systems in place to be able to track and record data on these efforts. FOR EXAMPLE: The Ramsey Resident has been one of the main communication tools used by City Staff to share important information to its residents. While staff hears from residents that this tool is useful for getting important information about city and community event there is no way to track the impact, response, or feedback to specific stories and pieces of information. By gathering more information and data on current engagement/communication practices city staff believe they will be able to better design better processes moving forward.

While Ramsey staff report enhancements in community engagement in recent years, such as increased participation in comprehensive plan sessions and increased interest in joining the Planning Commission, the current report arose out of an identified need for additional improvements. By following the direction of their 2040 comprehensive plan engagement process and other community engagement best practices, the City of Ramsey will strengthen the community's investment in the city and build trust between the community and the city.

Current Engagement Strategies

General Notices and Information

Currently the City of Ramsey puts out notices of its public meetings, minutes and other required documents both online on the City of Ramsey's webpage and in print in the Ramsey Resident, the Anoka County Union Herald, and through individual mailers to residents. Minimal tracking of information is gathered on the feedback/response to these notifications and information. City Staff sees value in gathering more information on both who is responding to information and the information/type of media to which they are responding.

Much of this information is stored on Ramsey's archive site. While this site is a rich resource, the ability to maneuver and find information quickly is not ideal. City staff has noticed that they receive many calls and questions on or about information that can be found online. One of these resources is the 'Weekly Update' produced on Thursday every week by city staff. This update provides information on city council meetings and agenda items along with weekly reports on upcoming events and other city notifications. This report would be an invaluable resource to residents looking to keep up with city information and events. The location and positioning of the 'weekly update' on the City of Ramsey's website does not do justice to this valuable resource.

The City of Ramsey also engages with residents on a daily basis around city services like snow plowing, tree removals and other maintenance tasks. Currently there is not a centralized source for this information so residents will often reach out to the city seeking information on basic information like snow plow schedules or tree removals. City staff has identified this as an area of need and are looking to streamline communication and engagement with residents around city maintenance services.

Development Projects

The City of Ramsey provides a website with information about current development projects that are happening. This is the basic information about each project and provides a location for residents to find out what development is happening in the city. Additional information and updates on development projects are sent out by city staff to interested residents and invested parties on an individual basis. Staff has identified providing additional information and engaging with residents around potential development projects as an area of need.

Ramsey Resident Newsletter

Every other month the City of Ramsey puts together a newsletter called the Ramsey Resident. This newsletter is mailed to every resident and available online through the City of Ramsey archive database. It includes information about city police and fire services and events that are happening in the city. As identified by the biannual community survey, the Ramsey Resident is the #1 source of information on City events and government notices for residents of Ramsey.⁴ City Staff sees the Ramsey Resident as an essential tool in reaching a large segment of Ramsey's population and is interested in engaging residents in different and unique ways through the newsletter.

Ramsey Business Outreach

The City of Ramsey puts on three main events to connect and engage with businesses in the community. The fall Economic Development Authority (EDA) breakfast, a summer golf/dinner event and the spring business expo. These events are intended to connect city staff with business leaders in the community and build engagement for upcoming projects in the City of Ramsey. In addition to these events, City staff conducts 20-30 informal one-on-one business visits to different businesses in Ramsey each year.

Comprehensive Plan 2040 Citizen Engagement

This plan establishes a citizen engagement general framework for the comprehensive plan. It defines the process to take community ideas and turn them into strategies to be included in the plan. It can be generalized to three steps-- scoping meetings, developing ideas and solutions, and agreeing on preferred ideas and solutions. This strategy is based primarily on public meetings, but supported through outreach at other community events.

By reaching out to residents through direct mailings, email and other electronic communications, city staff has seen a robust, diverse and active group of residents participate in events to help create the vision for the 2040 comprehensive plan. Initial meetings were focused on the broad goals for the community. The format for the scoping meetings was similar to a public comment session in which each residents was given a couple of minutes, in turn, to list their priorities for the comprehensive plan. While this format enabled input from approximately 60 residents, the meeting was lengthy and much of the time spent by residents in the meeting was passive. City staff acknowledges that more conversational forms of engagement would improve upon this process by leveraging the attendance and passion of residents to discuss the details of the specific topics they raised and their ideas for solutions. The four themes identified in this original scoping meeting were 1) Rural Character 2) An Active Community 3) A Connected Community 4) A Positive Learning Environment. Subsequent meetings were used to narrow the focus down onto individual topics using these goals as guiding principles in discussions and decisions.

City staff have credited the 2040 Citizen Engagement efforts with large amounts of interest in the Planning Commission and other ways to become involved. By combining extensive outreach, early engagement, and clear results, this engagement process helped contribute to both a more effective Comprehensive Plan and a more capable, more involved community.

Ramsey New Resident and Business Package

When new residents or businesses move to Ramsey, the city mails a package of basic information about the city, such as contact information for a variety of city services. This package provides detailed lists of services and contact information for entities throughout the city. In addition to this packet, the City provides an additional “welcome kit” to new or expanding businesses. While the kits are specifically tailored to the needs and wants of each new business, the kit may include a ribbon cutting ceremony, advertisements/notifications in city publications and additional recognition of the businesses at city meetings or events. City staff feels this package is essential to welcoming and establishing a positive and proactive relationship with the business community in Ramsey.

Facebook and Social Media

Currently the City of Ramsey has a Facebook page but no other social media. City staff maintains and updates the City Facebook page in conjunction with other online and print notifications/information. Currently Facebook is used solely as an information outlet with minimal attempt is made to facilitate conversations or prompt discussions.

City Planning and Project Engagement

For smaller development, construction and road projects the City of Ramsey currently engages stakeholders through notifications and plan reviews. This process focuses on education and obtaining feedback on developed plans. City staff has identified this process as an area that needs improvements due to its lack of up front engagement and resident driven solutions.

Happy Days Festival

The Happy Days festival is an annual hometown festival of the City of Ramsey. It is about families enjoying a day out and having a wonderful time on a variety of family-friendly activities and events such as 5k & youth fun run, talent show, movie in the park and parade. Most events are free and open to public. The city uses this event to engage with their residents through an informal booth highlighting upcoming projects and activities at the City. City Staff has identified this event as a good opportunity to reach out to more residents and possibly engage residents in a more creative or unique way.

Ramsey Demographics

Overlooked Populations

The City of Ramsey is at the edge of the Twin Cities Metro area. The community consists mostly of white homeowners. However, there are a small minority of residents of color as well as immigrant residents. Minnesota has one the fastest growth rates for populations of color nationally, a trend that has increasingly spread to suburban and rural communities in the past decade.⁵ As this growth continues in the coming decades, it is expected that Anoka County will continue to diversify. However, this diversification has also been characterized by substantial racial inequities in education, employment, health, and other indicators of wellbeing.

City staff has recognized a need for further outreach to the communities and additional services for non-English speaking residents of the community. While current city staff’s engagement with non-English speaking residents is limited, outreach to these residents are extremely challenged by the language gap and lack of interpreters for these residents. For example, when taking calls about public works issues city staff struggles to communicate with non-English speaking residents. Since the current non-English speaking population in Ramsey is small, dedicated city staff will go out to known non-English speaking residents to attempt to respond to the initial call. Upon finding the caller, public works staff will use non-verbal communication and interpretation through children or neighbors to identify and assess the problem. While this is an excellent example of city staff going above and beyond for local residents, this approach will not be sustainable as the population of residents with low English proficiency grows. Additionally, it is an example of reacting to a problem, but not of engaging these residents in city planning and decision-making.

In order to support more equitable community policies, practices, and growth, it is important to make sure non-majority groups are also involved in the community engagement undertaken by the city. Table 1, below, provides a selection of demographic characteristics of which the city needs to be aware in order to plan for more equitable engagement. For example, for residents with limited access to transportation, it is especially important that the city provide opportunities for engagement in their neighborhoods or provide subsidized transportation to events. For residents with limited English proficiency, interpreters are needed and some engagement opportunities should be made available in non-native languages.

City staff has also identified that young families and younger professionals do not engage with the city at the same rates as other ages and populations with the city. While obvious constraints like time and other family commitments can explain this challenge, staff would like to find creative ways to include and engage these residents in city and community events. The second and third sections of this report suggest some tools and strategies to reduce barriers to engagement for young families and the above described populations.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics - Non-Majority Groups

Demographic Attribute	Percent of Ramsey Residents⁶
Renters	10.9%
No automobile available	1.4%
Below poverty line	3.2%
Race	
<i>White</i>	91.7%
<i>Black</i>	1.2%
<i>Asian</i>	3.2%
<i>Two or more races</i>	1.7%
Hispanic	2.7%
Speak a language other than English	7.6%
<i>Spanish</i>	1.7%
<i>Asian and Pacific Island languages</i>	1.9%
<i>Indo-European language other than English</i>	3.3%
<i>Another language</i>	0.6%
Speak a language other than English speak English less than “very well”	24.7%

Section 2: Principles and Practices for Engagement

Guiding Principles for Developing an Engagement Process

Growing a “Culture of Engagement” requires more than additional town hall meetings and a more accessible website. In order to truly get the entire community invested in engagement processes, the city of Ramsey will need to pursue an intentional, dedicated, and iterative participation and engagement process. Effective engagement relies on a clearly understood purpose, a transparent and iterative process, and consistent evaluation. Every instance of engagement will be shaped by the particular stakeholders involved, the desired response, the stage of the decision-making process, and more. Developing a flexible, purpose-guided understanding of how to design effective engagement processes will enable the city of Ramsey to answer new challenges as they arise. The following framework is derived from a “Theory to Practice” article applying Design Science theory to a systematic review of engagement processes.⁷

The most important step in designing an engagement process is developing the goal or purpose. The desired goal or purpose shapes the form of engagement, the selection of stakeholders, and the type of evaluation. Building a process around the desired purpose can help an engagement team understand what types of questions they will need to ask, what solutions they seek, who needs to be at the table, etc. It is also possible to incorporate community participation into developing the purpose of an engagement as well – especially when the problem itself is difficult to articulate or unknown.

For the City of Ramsey, the purpose of engagement can be distilled into three categories - community building, education, and input/data gathering:

Community building is a category that focuses more broadly on making all residents feel welcome, giving a fair voice to everyone in the community, and fostering a sense of pride in the city of Ramsey and the neighbors that share it. Engagement that aims to foster community building may include large community festivals, potlucks, and other community-wide events that bring groups of residents together. This type of engagement may also include methods that encourage discussion, deliberation, and dialogue such as World Cafe, Open Space Technology, and Place It! Workshops. Engagement that aims to build community and civic participation should incorporate opportunities to build relationships, discuss issues, and undertake joint problem solving. Currently in the City of Ramsey, the majority of community building engagement happens at large events like the Happy Days Festival and the annual EDA Business Appreciation Golf Tournament.

Engagement for education purposes is appropriate when the city needs to communicate information to residents, with little need or ability to incorporate discussion and residents perspectives. Tools like the website and the *Ramsey Resident* serve as forms of educational engagement, as would an informational booth at an event like Happy Days. Input and data gathering engagement activities are more likely to include things like surveys, input meetings or other tools to help receive comments and information on specific or broad issues in the city. For example, the Parks and Recreation department is currently running a survey for residents about what residents would like to see for Parks and Recreation in the City of Ramsey over the next 25 years.⁸

These three types of engagement are not mutually exclusive. For each project, issue, or planning need Ramsey should consider which types of engagement are most appropriate and how each might be used to fulfill different needs or to inform different phases of a project.

Engagement isn't always necessary, and tacking on some kind of community engagement that has no purpose or cannot be incorporated into implementation of a project can diminish community members' faith in the legitimacy of the engagement process. For example, if the City of Ramsey were seeking input on a decision where the budget or regulations limit the possible directions the project can take, hosting open-ended idea generating engagement would actually be counterproductive – participants would put effort into developing new ideas, only to discover that their input had no effect on the decision. In this scenario, a more effective approach would be to present the stakeholders with a developed set of options after explaining the budgetary or legal limits and ask for targeted feedback.

Evaluation and Reflective Practice

Effective engagement processes must have some form of evaluation built in as a part of the iterative process, where each engagement exercise shapes the next interaction with the community. Bearing evaluation in mind while designing the engagement process allows for a more robust understanding of both the purpose and the outcomes of the engagement. Firm and measurable evaluation criteria are an indication that the engagement design actually does address the stated purpose; if during the design process the team struggles to identify measurable evaluation criteria, it is likely that either the purpose or some key stakeholder identification has not been fully developed.

Currently the City of Ramsey is doing little to understand when, why, and how its residents are interacting with the city. The Citizen Survey provides some basic information, but the City of Ramsey should do more to understand the impacts and implications of its engagement practices on a more acute level. By tracking the results of different engagement practices the City of Ramsey can refine its approach and better understand its opportunities and weaknesses in order to be consistently improving and refining its processes.

The type of evaluation done depends on which of the three main purposes shaped the engagement activity. Right now, much of the City of Ramsey's engagement efforts are centered on education. From the website to the Ramsey Resident newsletter, these tools are about informing the public. In this case, evaluation would focus on whether or not education efforts are reaching the intended audience, accurately conveying information, and so on. This might mean a basic tracking system for when residents contact the city to ask questions that records where the resident saw the information, what led them to contact the city, and what questions they might have. Tracking at an educational booth at a community event might consist of a sign-in sheet or an email list, or it might be a short survey that includes demographic information and feedback regarding outcomes of the engagement.

Community building engagement evaluation could include basic audience tracking, as with educational engagement, but should also extend to cover the specific purpose of the engagement. Participants could be asked to complete a survey that includes questions about what they learned about their community, or even do something more creative like posting a selfie to Instagram with a new friend (this kind of participation might require the possibility of reward). Data gathering engagement could ask participants what they learned, but might also focus more on asking residents to reflect on the process. In this category staff should first decide whether they are looking for qualitative or quantitative data. For qualitative data, staff should encourage residents to submit comments at events and utilize engagement activities that encourage people to write down longer answers. However, if the focus is on quantitative data, then an activity such as an online mapping tool may be more fitting. This activity will generate specific data points that can be easily compared to each other. Ultimately, it is important to think about the desired end goal at the beginning of the engagement planning process.

In each case, evaluation is more than just gathering feedback from participants and residents – true evaluation requires that this feedback is incorporated into the decisions made by the city, in a way that can be seen by the community. Reflection on the feedback gathered from past engagement should inform future engagement activities. Evaluation is a matter of constantly asking questions and actually listening to the answers: what are we trying to do? Did we do it? What worked? What didn't?

It is very likely that reflective practices are already a part of how staff at Ramsey work through projects, though reflection might well occur through more informal interactions. It might be quick notes after a community meeting or a conversation in a car on the way to an event; whatever ways staff currently use to understand and analyze the effectiveness of engagement and decision making can be formalized and fostered. These small moments of reflection can become part of a larger iterative culture, where staff and community members are able to work together to hone a uniquely Ramsey approach.

This cycle of involvement and feedback is key for effective engagement. Building feedback into the city's process will allow for a reflective approach, where each lesson learned feeds back into the community and into the ultimate solution. Pairing the clear, targeted objectives of the last section with a reflective process will allow the city to catch potential issues early on and develop more holistic solutions to community problems. Although an iterative process might take more time, particularly as both staff and community members become accustomed to the increased interaction, reflective practice can help prevent small misunderstandings from becoming huge conflicts.

Keeping in mind these fundamental principles behind designing engagement processes – centering engagement around a clear and necessary objective, developing a transparent and iterative process, and building in measurable evaluation criteria from the beginning – will allow the City of Ramsey to adapt community engagement and participation tools to fit the specific context and needs of each step of growth. A discussion of best practices for engagement, along with a series of case studies exploring how aspects of engagement design and theory apply to different tools, and descriptions of specific tools and methods for engagement follows in the next section of this report.

Sharing Information Back to Community

Participants must be able to clearly see how their engagement with the city has impacted decisions. This transparency is fundamental to trust building and to the legitimacy of any engagement process. With any type of community engagement, it is important that you share information back to the community. Residents are providing an important resource to the city by sharing their personal knowledge and perspectives. The city should reciprocate by publicly sharing what the city learns during community engagements and how the information is being used or has informed certain decisions, plans, or projects.

A variety of tools can be used to share community engagement learnings with the community. This includes in-person meetings, social media posts, a designated community engagement/current projects section of the city website, and a regular column or special feature in the city newsletter. Regularly sharing back information and notifying residents of their next opportunities for engagement will help to foster a culture of engagement across Ramsey.

Engaging Underrepresented Groups

Planners and policy-makers increasingly recognize a need to promote “equity” within their communities. And yet, the idea of “equity” does not have one simple definition. Generally, many Planners think of equity as one point of Scott Campbell’s the “planner’s triangle” or the “Three E’s”: environment, economics, and equity.⁹ In this model, equity is seen as the location of concerns over the distribution of resources, services, and opportunities - particularly as that distribution is impacted by things like race, class, gender, religion, and orientation. Equity is thus often discussed in the same breath as “diversity,” with the implication that a diverse population brings with it concerns over the equitable distribution of resources.

When applied to community engagement, equity concerns which voices are being included at the table. The design of an engagement process can uphold unjust power structures within a community by privileging majority voices. Or, the design can intentionally uphold marginalized voices, whether by using a particular engagement tool like a Place It! workshop (see tools/methods below) or by changing the time, location, or language of the engagement exercise to make participation accessible to a marginalized group. Sometimes creating a more equitable engagement process simply requires addressing gaps in stakeholder involvement. Sometimes equity must be a goal in and of itself within engagement.

As previously discussed, the city should track participation and assess underrepresented groups. This practice may help the city to refine its understanding of which underrepresented groups need targeted engagement. A few potential groups that have been identified through the census data shown in table 1 and conversations with city staff include English language learners, renters, young adults/young families, and communities of color.

English Language Learners

While the number of residents who lack high English proficiency is low, these residents are likely to be excluded from current communications to residents and community engagement efforts. A few strategies should be used to increase engagement of these groups. Determine the specific languages spoken by these residents; census data indicates a portion of these residents are Spanish speakers, but groups others into broad regions of geographic origin.

Advertise public meetings and engagement events in multiple languages. When feasible for the event format, offer interpretation services for events by request. Note that the city will need to provide a contact through which residents can request interpretation who speaks the relevant language(s).

Because city staff have expressed communications difficulties when contacted by residents with low English proficiency about various city services, the city should also consider contracting with a telephone interpretation service for use on an as-needed basis. This should be advertised to residents in the appropriate languages so that they know when calling to indicate their language preference and wait on the line for an interpreter to be conferenced in.

Consider offering a few activities or focus groups specifically in Spanish and other languages spoken by local residents. This may require contracting with an external facilitator who is a native speaker of the selected language. Recruiting for these language-specific events may require more dedicated door-to-door outreach. This should be done by city staff, resident volunteers, or contractors who are members of the same cultural community and language group. If English language learners are geographically concentrated in certain neighborhoods of the city, consider offering these events in locations that are easily accessible to these neighborhoods.

Young Families

City staff have indicated that young families are currently underrepresented in community engagement activities. In order to better engage this group, the city should offer childcare at public meetings and engagement events. The city may also consider offering family-specific engagement events.

- It is recommended that these events are organized for Saturdays mornings, 10am-12 pm.
- Separate engagement activities should be offered for older children and childcare should be provided for younger children. The city could partner with youth organizations like Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Big Brothers Big Sisters or high school service clubs to help facilitate activities for children.
- Any number of engagement methods, such as World Cafe or Open Space Technology may be used to engage the adults. A Place It! Workshop could be organized for adults-only or for families to participate together, depending on the topic.
- The city should explore resident interest in a young families group. This could provide a way for parents in the community to connect and build community while also offering opportunities for the city to periodically engage the group in city projects and planning activities. This group could be resident-organized and led, with light support such as a location, communications assistance and possibly light refreshments provided by the city.

Renters

Currently, approximately 11% of Ramsey residents are renters. The city anticipates this proportion to increase with the ongoing construction of new rental units. Because renters are likely to be newer residents of the city they may be less represented in current engagement efforts. Additionally, these renters may feel less connected to city services and community events. If renters tend to be lower income, including them in engagement activities is an important component of equitable engagement. Increasing their connection to the city and other residents may also encourage them to remain in Ramsey long-term. The city should assess locations where a high concentration of renters live and target these buildings or neighborhoods for specific outreach, such as door-knocking and advertising engagement events. The city should also consider bringing a community engagement activity into these neighborhoods, preferably in partnership with a few of the residents and/or landlords.

Communities of Color

While communities of color are currently very small in Ramsey, equitable engagement should include efforts to reach people of color. The city may expect that, consistent with statewide trends, the city will become increasingly racially diverse over time. City staff should monitor these demographic trends and periodically assess whether the city is engaging a representative population of different communities of color or if specific, targeted outreach and inclusion efforts are needed.

Youth and Teens

Older children and teens should also be included in the city's community engagement efforts. In addition to family-friendly community engagement events, the city may partner with schools or local youth organizations to provide engagement activities specifically targeted to youth. Topics that are especially relevant to youth may include, but are not limited to, discussions of community space and community center development, parks and recreation, and natural resources. However, the city should spend some time learning from youth about their priorities for the city to avoid making limiting assumptions about topics of concern to young residents. Engaging youth in city processes is likely to build their civic engagement over the long-term and may foster stronger connections to the city and a desire to reside there as adults.

Case Studies Exploring How Principles Shape Engagement

Be Proactive, Not Reactive

Sometimes community engagement is treated as a box to check off after a decision has already been made. Residents are informed, perhaps concerns are raised, and the decision moves forward with minimal changes unless there is extensive resident push back. That form of “engagement” is rarely effective as it does not enable substantial resident influence on city decisions and because when residents see their feedback is not used, they are discouraged from engaging in the future.

Engagement works best when it is proactive, not merely reactive. Building community engagement into the decision-making process at many stages provides legitimacy for the decisions made, as well as ensuring that relevant information makes it to the table. When residents are a part of the process, they feel ownership over it and their community. This sense of ownership then spurs more engagement.

If residents have been involved in formulating the problem, identifying issues, developing ideas, and selecting between alternatives, it is less likely that a city will need to react to a sudden influx of citizen concern. Being proactive about community engagement allows the city to respond to challenges before they become issues. Additionally, proactive practices may reduce the intensity of conflict when it arises because existing relationships between city leaders and residents provide a platform for constructive debate and cooperative solutions.

Case Study: Proactive Engagement through Tactical Urbanism in Minneapolis

Tactical urbanism is a strategy that has gained a lot of traction in recent years. In basic terms, tactical urbanism involves leveraging inexpensive, short-term projects to create long-term change in public built environment. The Tactical Urbanist’s Guide from the Street Plans Collaborative is a web-based platform with a vast number of resources related to implementing tactical urbanism projects. Mainly, these projects involve using relatively cheap or recycled materials like plastic cones, cement blocks, parking stops, and planters to make short-term changes to public streets and places.¹⁰

One common tactical urbanism project is a “parklet.” A parklet is created by closing down a parking space in the street and creating an enclosed seating area using planters, benches, or other materials. The purpose of a parklet is to show residents and visitors how public space can be repurposed, without spending a lot of money or time on making a permanent change to the street. Parklets can be used as a traffic control measure - a mini-road diet of sorts - or as a community building public space, or whatever else the community needs. The short-term nature of a project like this is less likely to elicit a powerful negative response, which can be a major problem when business owners, residents, and shoppers are worried about losing parking or disrupting traffic. This also gives people an opportunity to experience the change before it’s made permanent, allowing a chance for informed community conversation before the decision-making process.

In Minneapolis, tactical urbanism has been used widely to demonstrate protected bikeways. Open Streets Minneapolis is a group that puts on events every year where streets are closed to car traffic. At these events, groups like Our Streets Minneapolis and the City of Minneapolis partner to create what they call pop-up protected bikeways.¹¹ They use cheap materials, such as chalk, paint, plastic cones, or planters to simulate the experience of a protected bikeway, and then encourage people to test it out. Staff and volunteers from a number of organizations are then available to speak with people about protected bikeways, and the city’s plans to implement more of them. This proactive awareness strategy helps residents to understand why protected bikeways are important and helps to gain support for the city’s plan to increase the amount of protected bikeways on city streets.

Case Study: Intentional Engagement Seward, Minneapolis

In 2017, the Seward Neighborhood in Minneapolis was named one of 15 Great Places in America by the American Planning Association. The Seward Neighborhood was chosen for a variety of reasons, including effective engagement of a socio-economically diverse community. The diversity of the community makes it especially important to provide forms of engagement and community building that are accessible to everyone. Seward successfully combines a number of different engagement opportunities to reach key groups within the community, focusing on empowering neighborhood residents to be a part of leadership and community building.¹²

One of the main forces behind this engagement is an organization known as the Seward Neighborhood Group (SNG), which has been around since 1960 with a mission to make Seward a better place to live, work, and play.¹³ SNG has many functions, including the facilitation of about 40 block clubs that exist in the area. According to the SNG website, the block clubs are designed to “help all neighbors get to know each other and establish relationships so that they are able to communicate effectively with one another should problems arise (and even if they don’t).” SNG operates under an elected board of directors, but also has a few committees in which residents can get involved. One such committee is the Community Building Committee, which works to provide a platform for community dialogue and education across cultures and lifestyles.¹⁴ SNG hosts events such as National Night Out, community potlucks, and something called the King’s Fair, which was an event held in the fall of 2017 with live music, a petting zoo, food vendors, artists, a parade, and more.¹⁵

Events like the King’s Fair are not focused on a particular subject, such as a transportation plan, but rather provide an opportunity to bring residents from diverse backgrounds together for community building. SNG touts the slogan, “All are welcome here,” to signal that the neighborhood is proud of the diverse nature of their residents and to consciously promote an equitable community. The many connected organizations within Seward work together to bring people from many backgrounds to the table. Ultimately, this translates into a community with invested residents, where neighbors are better equipped to engage with each other and with decision-making groups such as SNG.

Bring the Meeting to the People

One of the emerging best practices for community engagement is to bring the meeting to the people. This practice breaks away from some of the stereotypical forms of engagement, such as asking people to attend city council meetings or hosting open houses. While council meetings and open houses may be necessary forms of engagement at times, they often lead to underrepresentation of certain demographic groups. For example, it may be a major struggle or simply impossible for a single parent to attend an open house at 6pm on a weekday without access to childcare. If that 6pm open house is the city’s only form of engagement, certain people will be left out of the engagement process. Those people excluded from standard meeting formats are almost inevitably marginalized in some manner. Bringing the meeting to the people is the practice of bringing engagement efforts to events where community members are already self-organizing.

Using this strategy can also lead to more effective engagement of specific, targeted groups. For example, if a city is putting together an ADA transition plan, it may be especially important to hear from seniors. Yet, because seniors are more likely to have trouble finding transportation to an evening open house, that demographic may not be equitably represented. However, there may be day-time events at the local community center that are targeted to seniors. Attending one of these events and tailoring the engagement to this specific demographic will increase the feedback from the desired community.

Case Study: Bringing the Meeting to the People for Walkability in Minnesota Walks

The Minnesota Department of Health and the Minnesota Department of Transportation utilized a targeted engagement approach for a statewide plan called Minnesota Walks, which was the first statewide pedestrian plan for Minnesota. The plan identified six populations that are more likely to rely on walking for transportation: elderly, youth, low-income urban, small town rural residents, American Indians, and persons with disabilities. These priority populations were targeted for engagement in unique ways tailored to each population's needs and abilities. For example, the youth population was targeted at family friendly events such as Open Streets Minneapolis, where kids received small prizes for taking part in a hands-on sticker survey. The project team also sought out opportunities to talk to the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee for the Metropolitan Council.¹⁶ This committee "...advises the Council on management policies for public transportation services in the region from the perspective of riders with disabilities... [and] includes riders and advocates for older people and the disability community, as well as representatives of service providers and other appropriate agencies."¹⁷ While this event may have had a much more formal feel than Open Streets, it still provided the opportunity to seek feedback from a group that represented the interests of one of the priority populations.

It is also important to note that bringing the meeting to the people may require a different kind of engagement activity. While someone that takes the time to show up to an open house may be willing to spend 15 minutes on a survey, the same may not be true for someone at an Open Streets event. Instead, engagement at these events should be concise and direct, and easily understood by people of all ages and abilities.

Section 3: Tools and Methods for Engagement

This section contains a selection of tools and methods that the City of Ramsey can use to conduct different types of community engagement. Because different methods may be more appropriate to different audiences and projects, this section provides a mix of engagement styles. Best uses for each are discussed.

Community Engagement Assessment Tool

Nexus Community Partners, a St. Paul-based nonprofit with a strong focus on community engagement, developed a Community Engagement Assessment Tool which the city can use to assess current community engagement. The tool asks the city to self-rate itself on a continuum ranging from “outreach” on one end to “community engagement” on the other. Dimensions of engagement addressed by the assessment tool include relationships with community members, the purpose of your engagement, how engagement is conducted, the manner in which ideas are generated and the extent to which the city’s culture, policies, and structure support or detract from engagement. Currently, the city tends to rank closer to the outreach than engagement end of the spectrum on many indicators.

The city should consider completing this assessment as a baseline measure of engagement. We recommend completing this tool as a team, with the participation of leaders/staff most relevant to community engagement across departments. In addition to establishing a baseline, completing the assessment together may help to create staff buy-in for engagement and generate useful cross-departmental conversations and sharing. While the city may ultimately want to move toward the community engagement end of the spectrum for all indicators in each of the five dimensions, city leaders should initially develop a set of 3-5 high priority indicators on which staff and elected leaders will focus. Specific goals for improvement on these indicators should be set and regularly tracked through a transparent process. The city should complete the assessment every 3-6 months to measure progress toward deeper community engagement, set new goals, or re-work prior goals when necessary. Over time, this process can help the city move toward more meaningful engagement of community members.

Download the tool at:

<http://nexuscp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Community-Engagement-Assessment-Tool.pdf>

Name Place It!¹⁸

Overview Place It!, a method of engaging people in planning through play, was designed by James Rojas, an urban planner, activist and artist based in LA. Participants are given prompts and build something in response using everyday objects. They then go around and briefly tell the story of their creation. The common themes and values are noted and should be used to inform a planning project.

Population Everyone! James Rojas originally developed the method to facilitate engagement of the Latino community, who he noticed were not participating in public meetings because the format of the meetings was not consistent with their cultural style of communication. He has since found that the method works well with many different populations, including youth, immigrants, families, etc.

Time req. 1-1.5 hours for a workshop.

Best uses

- Elicit core values and themes about what community member envisions; ideal for earlier phases of a planning project.
- Can be used with lower English-proficiency groups.
- Photos of the event can be used to document how community input informed a planning process during subsequent phases.

Materials, resources

- Construction paper
- Large poster paper
- Everyday objects for constructing designs. This can include pipe cleaners, beads, building blocks, feathers, fake leaves and flowers, plastic toys/figures, etc.

Set Up Small tables of 4-6 people with a piece of colorful construction paper at each spot; one large table covered in objects/“building supplies”

How to (or external link) Participants are given a prompt such as “Describe your favorite childhood memory” to get the creative juices flowing. They are then invited to pick up everyday objects from a large table to create a scene representing their response to the prompt. Using just the objects they selected and a piece of construction paper, students take a few minutes to create a representation of their response to the prompt. Each person then tells the story represented by their creation in one minute or less. A facilitator asks the group to identify common themes and values which are recorded. Photos are taken of each creation.

Then, the group is given a more specific prompt like “imagine an ideal community” or “imagine your perfect park.” The prompt should be aligned with a current planning project or concern of the city. Participants work in small groups at their tables to create a scene and share back to the larger group. Themes are once again recorded. Photos are taken of each creation.

Planners should use the themes and values identified in the workshops to inform the project under consideration. Planners can also display photos and themes from the workshops as the project progress to document and remind community members of the engagement process. Some of the actual ideas generated may be fantastical while others are more realistic, but they all generate themes about community priorities. Prompts can be given for a wide variety of spaces or issues that require physical or program planning.

Suggested prompts for Place It! workshops include:

Individual Prompts

Housing

Build your first memory of shelter or belonging

Public Safety

Build a place outside your home where you feel safe

Parks and Recreation

Build your favorite childhood experience in nature

Transportation

Build your first mobility experience

Defining Rural/Urban

Build your first experience with rural life

Small Group Prompts

Build a neighborhood with a place for everyone

Build a public park where people of all ages can gather

Build a park that could bring new visitors to your town

Build a transportation hub for your city

Build a rural town center

Name World Cafe^{19 20}

Overview World Cafe is a method for creating dialogue and iterative conversations across groups of people. So named because the creators believe that setting up the space to resemble a cafe supports deeper dialogue, participants sit in groups of 4-5 people at tables set up across the room. After the event host provides some context for the conversation, participants are asked an open ended question to discuss at their tables. Several rounds of conversation of approximately 20 minutes each are held. The same question may be used in each round or a new question, building directly on the prior question(s) may be posed for each round. Between each round, one person is asked to remain at the table as a “table host” to share the themes of the conversation their table has just had, while others are asked to move to different around the room to different tables in order to cross-pollinate ideas. After several rounds, the large group reconvenes to share key ideas from their conversation with the entire room.

Population Older teens and adults. Ideally, time should be spent recruiting a diverse range of participants to the event, as a diversity of perspectives and life experiences will support the generation of more ideas during the cafe dialogue.

Because this method is grounded in interactive dialogue among participants, it may be difficult to include multiple language groups in the same World Cafe. Consider either separate World Cafe events for different language groups or different sections of the room with sections of tables designated for different language groups. In the latter case, interpreters would be required to convey facilitator instructions to participants and to interpret participants’ comments in both directions during the harvest/share back.

Time req. Approximately 2 hours for the cafe. It is recommended that ample time be dedicated to planning the questions to be asked and the logistics of the event.

Best uses

- Ideal for generating a community dialogue and brainstorming many possibilities. This may be ideal in the early phases of a project, as part of a broad comprehensive planning process, or when a topic generates many contrasting perspectives. It’s not designed to arrive at a pre-designed nor single solution.
- Is a good method for helping various community members to share and learn about others’ opposing views. This may be specific to a city project/area of planning, but it may also be used to build community engagement around topics of broad interest in the city.

Materials, resources

- Small tables with chairs for 4-5 people per table
- Large poster paper and markers for writing and doodling
- “Talking stick” item (optional)
- Other materials are flexible. The original World Cafe method recommends setting up tables to look like a cafe, which may include:
 - Table cloths
 - Flowers, candles, or other centerpieces
 - Beverages and/or snacks
- If possible, it is recommended to have someone skilled in graphic recording to record the insights that are shared back from the group during the “harvest” near the end of the exercise.

How to (or external link) The creators of the World Cafe have created a helpful website with detailed instructions about using the method. The Cafe to Go reference guide describes the principles, key roles, and primary steps needed to host a World Cafe. See an overview of the method here: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>

You can find their Hosting Tool Kit here:
<http://www.theworldcafe.com/tools-store/hosting-tool-kit/>

Name Sticky Note Boards

Overview This is a very simple method for posing questions to the community in public spaces or at large gatherings. It's a quick way to solicit brief input from a large number of community members in response to a specific topic. Large rolls of paper are posted with a few questions or prompts. City staff invite participants to respond, engage them in a brief conversation, and record their key thoughts on sticky notes to be added to the paper boards. Community members are able to see their responses posted and to read and respond to what other residents have said.

Population Everyone!

Time req. Variable - staff could set this up for an hour or two in a public space or before a public meeting, or for the full day at a public event.

Best uses This works best at community events, meetings, or in places with a lot of foot traffic so that you can pull people in. It allows you to compile input from a large number of individuals during a short period of time. As more input is added from the sticky note board, it can act in itself as an attractor - residents want to read what their fellow residents have said and may tell you with which points they agree or disagree.

This method is more focused on breadth of responses than depth, since each person writes down or shares just a few ideas with staff. It doesn't build dialogue across community members, but it does enable basic input from a large number of people during events.

Note that this method could be used as part of an Open House, another engagement technique described in this toolkit.

**Materials,
resources**

- Large rolls of poster paper
- Pens and markers
- Foam core boards and easels to which long sheets of paper can be attached OR tables on which to lay out the papers OR tape to attach the long paper sheets to a wall.
- Lots of sticky note pads, ideally in multiple colors to attract more attention.
- Tape (to better secure sticky notes, especially if outdoors in windy conditions)
- (Recommended) An attractor to draw people's attention to the activity. In South St. Paul where Dakota County staff have been using this method frequently for the Discover Together initiative, large cardboard drawings of people are often used. At one event in which the team asked questions about transportation, a smoothie bike (with an attached blender powered by the pedaling) was used as an attractor.

How to (or external link) Set up the large paper rolls or foam core boards in/outside a heavily used public space (such as a grocery store), at a public event (such as the Happy Days festival) or before a public meeting. Write up a few prompts on the paper/boards to which you'd like community members to respond. This can be very general prompts such as "I wish Ramsey had more/less.," "My favorite places in Ramsey are...," or more specific prompts such as "I wish The Draw park had..." or "I get to work by... (modes of transit/routes)"

City staff should be present and actively soliciting input from community members. Depending on the space, this can be done by walking around and asking community members to respond to the prompts or by standing by the boards and inviting community members to respond. While community members can write out their own responses on post-it notes to add to the boards, a conversation with staff encourages greater engagement and helps build residents' relationships with the city. City staff can explain why they are at the event asking specific questions and then use the prompts to start a brief conversation. Staff should then write down the key themes from the conversation on sticky notes and add them to the board.

Name Leave Behind Boards

Overview This is a similar concept as the sticky note boards but are designed to be left in (enclosed) public spaces over a longer period of time, when staff are not present. A large, attractive board is left in a space such as a grocery store, local business, school, or community center with a couple of key questions or prompts. Markers are provided and community members are encouraged to leave their response.

Population Everyone!

Time req. Minimal - while staff need to spend some time creating the boards and deciding on the best questions/prompts to ask, these boards are designed to be left unattended for a specific period of time (a week or two), and therefore require little staff time to implement.

Best uses This method enables the city to collect very brief input from residents passing through a specific space. Without staff present, it is likely that fewer people will respond and that their responses will be less detailed than the sticky note boards or other engagement methods, so this method is best used in conjunction with other methods. For example, a leave behind board could be placed in a community center for a week before a World Cafe discussion concerning recreational spaces in Ramsey. This board could encourage people to start thinking about and providing input on a topic and can also be used to inform them of the upcoming World Cafe event.

Materials, resources

- Decorated foam core boards (Because these boards are left unattended, it's recommended that more durable foam core be used instead of rolls of paper.)
- Markers for community members to record their responses
- Information sheets that community members can take with them and/or a sign explaining the purpose for the board and questions asked. This should also include details about where they can find more information about the project or learn about all of the responses collected (such as a website or social media page)

How to (or external link) Large, attractive boards with 1-3 specific questions or prompts should be left in a public space (after arranging it with the business owner/agency manager/etc, of course). It's ideal to pick a space that is connected to the topic in some way, but public spaces in which there is simply a large amount of foot traffic may also be appropriate. Markers should be provided for community members passing by to write directly on the boards. Because sticky notes are less durable over a longer period of time and tend to fall off, it's best if community members write directly on the boards or if other fastening materials like tape or tacks are provided to post note cards.

A sign or flyers should be set up to explain the reasons the city is asking these questions, briefly describe the project to which it is tied, and provide information about where community members can find more details or participate in related events.

After a week or two, staff should collect the board and record the input provided by community members. It's recommended that this is shared back with the community at a local meeting, through social media, and/or in the city newsletter.

Name Open Space Technology²¹

Overview A technique similar to World Cafe, Open Space Technology encourages participants to define the agenda and host discussions on topics that are important to them.

Population Older teens and adults. This technique is conversation-heavy and therefore will require separate language groups or interpreters in order for linguistically diverse groups to participate together.

Time req. Variable - this method has been used for gatherings lasting a few hours to a few days in length.

Best uses Open Space Technology is most appropriate when the city would like to initiate a conversation with residents on a broad topic and encourage participants to take ownership over discussing and possibly addressing different aspects of the topic or issue. For example, this method could support the early stages of comprehensive planning when the city desires that residents define the issues most important to them. It could also be used to encourage residents to define their priorities in the early stages of planning for a community center/community space or for broad topics like youth development or affordable housing. This process centers on co-creation and therefore should not be used when the city has already determined a requisite outcome or simply desires resident feedback on a specific project or plan.

In order to leverage the resident knowledge sharing and momentum initiated in an Open Space event, the city should be prepared to provide light support for some conversations to continue or to evolve into specific projects under the umbrella of the broad city planning process.

Materials, resources

- Large sheets of poster paper
- Markers
- Tape (such as painter's tape that can be used to post papers on the wall)
- Chairs for the initial and closing discussions; tables and chairs spread out throughout the room or in breakout rooms for the discussion sessions

Set Up Small tables of 4-6 people with a piece of colorful construction paper at each spot; one large table covered in objects/"building supplies"

How to (or external link) At the beginning of open space, chairs are set out in a circle with papers and markers set in the middle. A large piece of paper (from a roll) is posted on a wall. The principles of open space are explained and then participants are invited to come to the center of the circle, state their name and their topic, write it down, and post it to the large paper on the wall, which becomes the group agenda. Depending on the length of the convening and the number of topics, the agenda can be divided into multiple sessions. After everyone who wants to add a topic to the agenda has done so, the group divides into subgroups according to the topic that interests them, with the individuals who offered the topic as hosts. The host should also capture the important points of the discussion for later sharing. These ideas can be shared back at the closing circle and/or collected by organizers to be compiled and distributed at a later date.

Working in Open Space: A Guided Tour provides a good basic overview of the Open Space principles and process:

<http://openspaceworld.org/wp2/explore/guided-tour/>

A more detailed description of principles, process, considerations, and examples for Open Space can be found in Inviting Leadership in Open Space: A Guide for Training and Practice:

http://www.michaelherman.com/publications/inviting_leadership_guide.pdf

Name Social Media

Overview The City of Ramsey should maintain accounts for social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter which can be used for some light engagement.

Population Any residents who are frequent social media users

Time req. Minimal time per post; accounts should be maintained regularly

Best uses This light-touch method of engagement can be used to pose simple questions, share images and information from in-person engagements, and inform residents about additional opportunities for involvement. It is not intended as a primary form of engagement, but rather as a complement to more in-depth engagement methods

Materials, resources Designated staff member(s) to maintain social media accounts.

How to (or external link) Social media platforms can be used for light-touch engagement in a variety of ways. One way is to reinforce in-person engagement by posting photos and brief highlights of the information learned/shared during the engagement. This shows participants of the engagements that their input is being heard and considered and educates other residents about the ways the city is engaging with residents to encourage their future participation. An open-ended question aligned with the in-person engagement can also be posed to social media users.

Name Participatory Budgeting²²

Overview Participatory budgeting is a process through which community members decide how to spend a portion of the city budget. According to the Participatory Budgeting Project, some of the reasons to undertake participatory budgeting include greater transparency and accountability, public education to help citizens become more active and informed, and community building as residents get to know each other through the regular meetings and become connected to community groups in the city. It's important to note that this process doesn't ask residents to decide on the use for an entire city budget, but rather a portion of existing discretionary funds (usually 1-15% of the total budget). Additionally, the city maintains ultimate legal authority over budget decisions, but commits to honoring the decisions made by residents. The process has been used in over 3,000 cities around the world.

Population Everyone. In order to make sure this process is equitable, it is especially important that the city make efforts to include a diverse set of community residents across age, income, and racial groups. The Participatory Budgeting project suggests that low-income residents are more likely to participate if decisions are being made about spending areas that most impact them such as housing and schools.

Time req. This is a long-term multi-phase process, much like comprehensive planning. The Participatory Budgeting Project suggests 3-6 months for initial design of the process and 5-8 months for a budgeting cycle.

Best uses This process is directly tied to city budgeting. It is a multi-phase process and therefore requires advanced planning. It can be piloted on a small-scale and if found successful, expanded over time. It is likely to foster ongoing engagement of residents because it is a longer-term and recurring process.

Materials, resources Materials and resources varies by activity, but are generally within the realm of everyday meeting materials. A web platform for resident discussion is also helpful.

How to (or external link) See the graphic below for an overview of the process.²³
The website www.participatorybudgeting.org is a comprehensive resource to help you implement participatory budgeting processes in the City of Ramsey. In particular, check out the "How to Start" and "Resource Center" tabs. After learning more about the process, a helpful resource may be the PB Scoping Toolkit (see How to Start > Plan a PB Process tab).

Design the process

A steering committee, representative of the community, creates the rules in partnership with government officials to ensure the process is inclusive and meets local needs.

Brainstorm ideas

Through meetings and online tools, residents share and discuss ideas for projects.

Develop proposals

Volunteers, usually called budget delegates, develop the ideas into feasible proposals, which are then vetted by experts.

OUTCOMES OF PB

- Increased civic engagement
- Broader political participation
- New community leaders and more active residents
- Stronger relationships between government, organizations, and residents
- Fairer and more effective spending

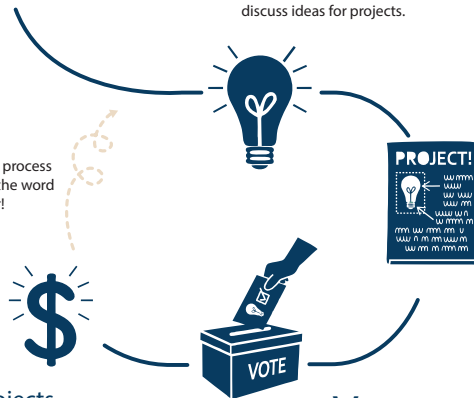
Fund winning projects

The government implements the winning projects, such as laptops in schools, Wi-Fi in public parks, or traffic safety improvements. The government and residents track and monitor implementation.

Vote

Residents vote to divide the available budget between the proposals. It's a direct, democratic voice in their community's future.

Improve the process and spread the word for next year!



Name Participatory Asset Mapping

Overview City leaders work with residents to map out the assets and resources of the community for a given focus area. This can include physical assets, economic assets, shared histories, resident skills and expertise, civic association, and community based organizations or programs.²⁴

Population Adults and Teens

Time req. Variable based on format of the activity.

Best uses The purpose of asset mapping is not just the creation of the map itself. Through the process of mapping, the city should aim to activate and mobilize local residents and community organizations to work together on a particular issue.²⁵ Mapping can be used to outline available resources when considering a new program or making decisions about existing programs or infrastructure,²⁶ identify missing resources,²⁷ and identify barriers to accessing these community resources. The city may also find this technique useful as part of the comprehensive planning process.

Materials, resources Varies depending on format. Large printed maps are likely to be useful for in-person activities while online maps may be best suited to other methodologies.

How to (or external link) While asset mapping can be undertaken with residents through methods such as survey tools, the city can also use this technique during in-person meetings as the catalyst for community conversations. The city could engage residents across multiple platforms by hosting in-person mapping sessions and conversations, followed by online surveys to supplement the mapping. Maps in progress could be posted on social media platforms and residents asked to add to what has already been started by residents at the in-person sessions.

There are numerous resources with suggested methods for asset mapping. Participatory Asset Mapping: A Community Research Lab Toolkit focuses specifically on asset mapping as a community participatory process and walks through the specific steps of an asset mapping process. It describes a variety of different techniques that can be used individually or in tandem.

<http://www.communityscience.com/knowledge4equity/AssetMappingToolkit.pdf>

Name Tactical Urbanism²⁸

Overview Tactical urbanism uses short-term projects that create long-term change. These projects are meant to be cheap, easy-to-implement ways of showing people how the public realm can be altered to benefit the safety and vibrancy of a community.

Population Everyone

Time req. Varies per project

Best uses Tactical urbanism projects are often used to make short-term changes to streets and sidewalks without spending a lot of money. Instead of reconstructing an entire street, these projects can be used to showcase different ways that the street could be changed. For example, a common tactical urbanism project uses plastic bollards (poles) to extend the curb at a crosswalk. This lets pedestrians experience the benefits of having less street space to cross at an intersection, while also letting cars experience the difference in turn radius at the intersection. Another example is projects that use planters to separate bike lanes from moving car traffic. Both of these projects cost almost nothing when compared to the full cost of reconstructing a street, making it a great approach to use in a planning process.

Materials, resources There are a wide variety of resources about tactical urbanism at <http://tacticalurbanismguide.com>, including links to how-to guides and pricing for materials.

How to (or external link) Within the Twin Cities metro, Juxtaposition Arts has contracted with various entities to implement tactical urbanism projects. For more information, see: <http://juxtapositionarts.org/programs/jxtalabs/tactical/>

The Musicant Group is another organization that assists cities in creative community engagement and placemaking. For more information see: <http://www.musicantgroup.com/>

These organizations may be available to consult or contract to implement a project in Ramsey.

Name Open House²⁹

Overview An open house consists of a mix of tables, posters, and presentations for residents to learn more about a specific topic.

Population Everyone

Time req. Variable, 2-3 hours is reasonable

Best uses This engagement methods offers some interactive public education on a specific topic prior to a more formal meeting. This may help residents better understand an issue and how it impacts the things they care about prior to opportunities for public comment.

A more general open house could also be held to inform residents about opportunities to interact with and participate in city projects, committees, and departments. In this case, the open house should be held in conjunction with a broader event or some incentive should be offered to draw people in.

Materials, resources This varies by the topic and purpose of the event, but may include posters and information pamphlets about a specific topic, hands-on education materials, giveaways, and other resources.

Different resources and educational materials should be set up at a series of staffed tables, and space should be arranged (chairs, projector, screen) for more formal presentations.

How to (or external link) The open house format is a relatively informal method for public education. It offers a sizeable window of time during which residents can come and go at their convenience. The exact format is variable, but at a minimum should include several tables or displays at which staff can educate residents about different aspects of a topic or project as well as obtain resident feedback. For residents that prefer a more formal setting, one or more scheduled presentations can also be offered, as a complement to (not replacement for) the tables and displays. Other engagement methods such as the sticky note board could also be used in conjunction with the open house event.

Name Online Mapping

Overview Online mapping tools are used to collect location-based feedback in an interactive format. Results are collected and displayed on a map of the given study area so that participants and staff can see everyone’s responses. There are a number of free tools that can be used for this purpose. Many of them allow you to make comments at a specific location or comment on routes for transportation projects.

Population Everyone

Time req. 5-15 minutes

Best uses These tools can be used for a variety of planning efforts, but the best uses for these tools are for transportation and placemaking projects. For transportation projects, participants are able to draw least and most desired routes, as well as leave markers at specific locations to draw attention to specific areas of concern. For placemaking projects, these tools can be used to see where people would like to see a given placemaking improvement, such as additional trees, a public parklet, and more.

How to (or external link) Follow this link: <http://wikimapping.com/> to get started with wikimapping. There are many other tools that can be found online.

Name Minnesota Walks Community Engagement Toolkit³⁰

Overview This toolkit was originally created by the Minnesota Department of Health and Minnesota Department of Transportation to help gather information for Minnesota Walks, Minnesota’s first comprehensive statewide pedestrian plan. While the toolkit was designed for a specific plan, it was also created so that local communities could use the toolkit for their own engagement purposes around walking. The toolkit includes two main tools that are both designed so that they can be staffed at community events or unstaffed at a variety of locations (library, city hall, etc.). The first tool is designed to get feedback about the destinations that people want or need to walk to, such as grocery stores or parks. Understanding where people want to walk will help communities to prioritize pedestrian investments. The second tool asks participants to explain what characteristics of streets make them either “safe, convenient, and desirable” or “unsafe, inconvenient, and undesirable.” Ultimately, these are easy to use tools that can help start a conversation about walking in your community.

Population Everyone

Time req. 5-10 minutes per person

Best uses Best used at community events or left unstaffed in public areas with high foot traffic.

Materials, resources The toolkit includes a list of materials needed. Basic items include poster boards, pens, printed pages from the toolkit, and stickers.

How to (or external link) Found under the “Community Engagement Toolkit” heading at this link: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/peds/plan/community-engagement.html>

Section 4: Recommendations

While the city has been successful in several recent engagement efforts, there several recommendations that may benefit the City of Ramsey and its residents. The final section of this report identifies specific actions to improve these efforts, which consider the strengths and weaknesses of current engagement efforts in the City of Ramsey. By implementing these recommendations the City of Ramsey will be able to more effectively reach all members of the community. It should be noted, however, that the recommendations within this section are not listed in any particular order. Thus, it will be important for the city to prioritize these recommendations according to their own goals and needs.

Leveraging Community-wide Events

Several existing community events draw a large number of residents. These include Happy Days, The Draw Summer Event Series, and the farmer's market. The city should increase their participation at these events to include not only communication of information but also community engagement activities, such as Sticky Note Boards, asset mapping, mini-surveys or other creative activities that produce brief engagement. The city may choose a theme for these engagements that aligns with the event (such as parks and recreation) or may use the opportunity to engage residents in a specific city project or concern. The city should also leverage this opportunity to share information learned in previous engagements on the topic and advertise upcoming engagements. If the city chooses to create an engagement section of the city website, magnets advertising this webpage would make a good giveaway item.

Welcome Packet

Currently welcome packets are made available to new residents when they move into Ramsey. While this packet includes useful information about city departments and services it does not currently connect the new resident with the city's community. The welcome packet offers an opportunity to foster stronger connections between new residents and the community. The city should reach out to current residents to create these connections. Recruit a volunteer group, or an existing community organization, to add information about civic organizations and community events, keep the information in the welcome packet current, and create a more interesting and engaging layout. This could include information in a booklet or magnets with the most important contacts. Making this effort resident volunteer-led helps to build engagement both with these residents and by encouraging them to leverage their social circles. The welcome group can also create additional events to welcome new residents to Ramsey. An annual new resident potluck with the mayor or community canoe trip are additional possible ways to welcome people to the community - as always, these events could incorporate other more specific engagement exercises.

COR Model

The COR development in Ramsey is only just beginning. As the City of Ramsey's commercial and civic center, the future design and land use within the COR will not only define the vibrancy of this district but the long term resilience of the city as a whole. Because of its importance, the ability for residents, businesses and civic leaders to visualize and evaluate future developments in the COR will be essential in ensuring the best possible outcomes.

A physical model of the COR will give residents of Ramsey a better idea of the current and potential design of the COR development. The model should grow with development and be able to have parts replaced as development occurs. Displayed in a prominent location, the model would be a constant engagement tool, educating the public and facilitating conversations around current and future plans. The model could also be used to evaluate alternative land use proposals or even give residents the ability to design their ideal use

and form of development within the COR. By providing a physical medium where residents and businesses can visualize the current state and dream about the future, the City of Ramsey's COR development will be a constant and collective effort to utilize and maximize the space within the COR.

Small Project Engagement/Road Reconstruction

When working on projects it is important to engage the community and get buy-in from residents early in the process. This is being done for the Ramsey's comprehensive plan, but it is important that this is done for smaller projects in the city such as road reconstruction projects. When final plans are presented to the community there will be more acceptance and understanding when residents are involved from the beginning.

Ways to engage and get community buy-in

Engage the community before plans are made. For engagement to be successful the community must have an opportunity to influence the final plan. This means that the first step of the project should be engaging the community.

Go to the community. When engaging, go to the location of the project. For a road construction project this could be a community building or in the home of a residents who volunteers to host. It could also help to walk the project area or meet outside at the project site.

Bring maps and other visual aids. For a road reconstruction project, bring an aerial map for residents to write on to provide comments. For other types of projects, bring visual aids to help explain the information presented.

Explain why some features are necessary. If the residents know why a feature is necessary at the beginning of the project they will be happier to accept changes later. Discuss each aspect of the project and the necessity of each aspect. Identify some aspects that are not required, but might provide benefits that the community might want.

Get input. Listen to what the community says and record their feedback. The residents know their immediate area better than anyone else. For a road reconstruction project the residents can identify problem spots in the current road and their priorities.

Use the input. Once input has been gathered it is important that the information is used in creating the final plan. If residents feel that their input was ignored they will not like the plan. If some feedback was not incorporated, explain why. One strategy to do this is to layer the comments provided on an aerial map over the new plan to show how the plan responded to the specific comments.

With community engagement comes community investment and ownership. This is especially important for projects that require approval by the community. Early involvement of the community will build this ownership and buy-in. With a demonstration that their input was incorporated they will be happier with the final result.

Tactical Urbanism and Creative Placemaking

As described previously, tactical urbanism is the concept of using low cost and temporary changes to showcase ideas and garner feedback on physical spaces.³¹ Ranging from the popular "Open Streets" events to temporary sidewalks, bike lanes or even parks, Tactical Urbanism is a physical manifestation of ideas and change. The City of Ramsey has an opportunity to use this concept and way of thinking to not only engage its residents in discussions of future planning decisions but build community and place. Given the potential growth in the City of Ramsey, there will be plenty of opportunities to use temporary examples and creative placemaking to engage with residents.

The idea of Tactical Urbanism is simple but powerful and can be translated and utilized in almost any project or engagement event. The Twin Cities have many organizations and government agencies that are utilizing tactical urbanism to engage with residents. As described in the Principles and Practices for Engagement section, these resources have a breadth of experience and knowledge on the use of Tactical Urbanism and different ways in which it can be implemented. The City of Ramsey should seek out these organizations for ideas and precedents as they think about creative ways to engage with their residents.

Specific Tactical Urbanism practices the City of Ramsey should consider:

- For future bike or pedestrian street projects, installation of temporary materials or sections could be used to engage with residents on the best design and give the opportunity to test out different alternatives.
- Showcase and engagements around street furniture and fixtures like benches, trash cans, street lighting, banners, etc.
- Create temporary gathering spaces and events in future parks/city owned lots. These spaces could be set up for larger city wide events (like Happy Days) and left up for a period of time for residents and community organizations to use
- “Perspective viewing” with images of new or potential development to allow residents to see new buildings/construction in the actual space.
- Temporary art installments around the city to advertise or showcase upcoming community events or projects.
- Small grants to residents and businesses for “placemaking” projects and ideas. Specifically this could be used to encourage vitalizing areas of the city typically ignored but highly visible like Hwy. 10 or some of the vacant properties in the COR development.
- A mobile ‘City Hall’ similar to the City of Boston’s ‘City Hall to Go’³²

Information Access and use of City of Ramsey Website

The City of Ramsey is currently beginning the process of designing a new website. Through this process the City has a unique opportunity to not only modernize and update the website but make it functionally more accessible for residents. Currently city documents like council meetings, the ‘weekly update’ and other notices are stored on the cities archive site called LaserFiche. While this is an open and great resource for historical documentation it is not especially efficient or accessible for current or recent documents. Extremely valuable documents like the ‘weekly update’ are hidden in a folder system that requires a deliberate and time consuming search process. The future website should make current information the priority and provide the user with simple and upfront navigation that minimizes barriers to information and engagement with the city.

The City of Ramsey should also use this opportunity to engage with the public on how they would like to access city documents and generally use the City of Ramsey’s website. Through the use of surveys, prototypes, focus groups and other community engagement activities the City of Ramsey can use the knowledge and experience of its residents to design a website and information system that is user-driven. This process could be a unique way for the city to engage with younger residents and families who may not be able to attend city council meetings or the next community engagement event but are interesting in knowing what is going on and participating. Creating a simple and consistent system for online information and feedback will give access to more residents to participate and encourage more consistent participation.

The City of Ramsey should visualize and prioritize information on seasonally-dependent services. Currently City staff fields numerous calls with questions on snow plowing, tree removal, street sweeping, etc. To

provide residents with more information and cut down on time spent answering basic questions, the City of Ramsey should evaluate how to best share and disseminate information on basic city services. While the sharing of this information should cross between multiple mediums the city website will be the key source of this information for the majority of the residents of Ramsey.

Overall Planning Engagement and Lesson from the 2040 Comprehensive Plan

As explained in the first section of this document, the City of Ramsey made a lot of positive improvements to community engagement during the 2040 comprehensive planning process. In general, the city should continue to build upon this success, especially in regards to how residents were included in the design and decision making process from the very start.

The city should continue to put residents at the forefront of design and decision making processes. There are three general steps that the city can continue to adjust for better engagement, including scoping meetings, developing ideas and solutions, and agreeing on preferred ideas and solutions. These steps were used to bring the comprehensive planning process from high level ideas to specific actions that were agreed on by the community. The city may find the Open Space Technology to be a useful facilitation method for scoping meetings, as it encourages residents to set the agenda according to the topics about which they are most concerned. This method would convert the mostly passive meeting format used in the past to a conversation-based forum in which topics are suggested and begin to be discussed in the same meeting. This may also build momentum for residents to continue participating in discussions about topics that interest them in future meetings.

Additionally, the city should introduce new methods of engagement to continue discussion of topics identified in scoping meetings, such as the Place It! workshops or World Cafes that were identified in section 2 of this document. Utilizing these methods will increase the functionality of these meetings, because these tools are specifically designed to bring out new ideas and create useful conversation between residents, even those who have major differences of opinion. The city should also be intentional about outreach for these events. It is the responsibility of the city to make sure that the necessary voices are represented in engagement efforts like these. This means that staff will have to use both conventional means and social media to reach people, as well as attend community events where target populations are already present to encourage residents to join the engagement process.

The City of Ramsey should also utilize innovative approaches to keep people engaged. One approach the city could implement is using “Leave Behinds” at City Hall. Essentially, this is an installment that has a new prompt every week or two. The installment might ask a question or involve something more interactive such as moving tiles around a map, for example. In either case residents will be interested to see how the installment has changed from week to week, and while it may not be the most intensive form of engagement, it has the capacity to keep people interested in city processes and plans. This sort of installment can also be used to spread the word about the city’s social media accounts. Participants could be asked to post a picture of themselves interacting with the installment and use a hashtag to help spread the word.

Conversational Social Media

Currently, the only social media that the City of Ramsey is using for engagement is Facebook. Their Facebook page is used similarly to other online and print communications from the city for making general announcements. In order to more effectively engage its residents, the City of Ramsey should consider using social media to hold conversations and provide opportunities to actively participate by virtual means. Social media can also be a tool for some of the reflective practices mentioned earlier in this report - by including posts about engagement activities, the city can spread awareness of current projects and invite feedback from residents. There are a few necessary changes that will help the City of Ramsey to better utilize their social media presence.

Firstly, consider branching out into other forms of social media, beyond just Facebook. Two widely used, simple forms of social media are Twitter and Instagram. One advantage of using these three social media platforms is that they can easily be coordinated, and in fact should be to achieve the best results. For example, when creating a message for the city's Facebook page, that message should be crafted so that it also works on Twitter (280 characters or less), and a picture should be used with the message. This way, the message can easily be posted to all three social media platforms. In fact, it is fairly simple to link all three accounts so that you only have to post on one of them, and it will show up on all three accounts.

Secondly, use these platforms to create a space for conversation, and not just to make announcements. There are many ways to get information from people by using social media. One common engagement strategy on Twitter is to host a question, comment, and answer hour, where residents are encouraged to ask questions or make comments around a specific theme. These virtual events encourage residents to ask questions publicly, so that information can be shared among many. When preparing for events like this, it is important to advertise using all forms of media. It also helps to have a few people commit to posting some questions or comments early in the event, so that community members feel comfortable contributing.

Another important aspect of using social media is incorporating the city's social media presence into in-person engagement. This can be done in a variety of ways. For example, this could include posting photos or videos from in-person events and mentioning a few of the takeaways. Social media can also be used as a follow-up opportunity where attendees can post their own photos for a contest, answer or ask follow-up questions, or simply thank the city for hosting an event. Incorporating engagement and social media allows in-person engagement activities to impact even those residents who could not attend, while also providing a handy record of the event.

Aside from the three social media platforms mentioned previously, there are also several online mapping tools that have become more popular and easy to use. Essentially, these tools utilize a web-based platform that includes a map of a given area. Users are then asked to click on the map and either leave a specific marker, add a comment, choose a route, or do a number of other things to show where and how they want to see change in their community. These tools are especially useful for engagement around transportation projects, as they provide an easy way to get feedback on an entire system of sidewalks, bike lanes, streets, and highways.

Incorporating these changes into the social media plan for the City of Ramsey will help the city to more effectively engage people in the virtual world. The various social media platforms described here are generally easy to use, have the potential to reach a wide audience of many ages, and are cheap, if not free, to implement.

Provide a Mix of Short-term and Long-term Engagement Opportunities

As previously discussed, initial experiences with community engagement build resident capacity for and interest in future engagement. The city should aim to provide a mix of short-term and longer-term engagement opportunities. The one-time engagement events to inform programs and planning projects provide an opportunity to recruit residents into multi-phase projects like the comprehensive plan or the welcome packet committee. Participating in the welcome packet activity may build residents' interest in joining longer-term committees such as the Planning Commission. Additionally, by empowering residents to lead some engagement strategies like the welcome packet committee, the city can tap into their social networks, essentially transforming participating residents into peer engagers. Welcome packet committee members become more knowledgeable about a variety of ways to participate in the city, and are likely to tell their friends about what they are learning. As these residents attend more engagement events, they are likely to encourage their friends and family to do the same. In this way, the city can use a mix of one-time, shorter-term, and longer-term participation methods to build a stronger culture of engagement in Ramsey.

Endnotes

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