

Planning for Meaningful Public Participation in Red Deer

by

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Planning for Meaningful Public Participation in Red Deer

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Executive Summary

This report explores the current context within The City of Red Deer to understand how the organization can enhance public participation planning as well as support diverse and inclusive participation to involve individuals interested and affected by municipal decisions.

The City of Red Deer recognized the importance of involving citizens in their strategic plans for from 2012 – 2018; however, incorporating public participation into the organizational culture and processes has been met with challenges. These challenges include a lack of resources (e.g., financial and human), input not being used to makes decisions, and recognition that there were stakeholders who were not always visible in previous public engagement activities. While these issues exist, The City of Red Deer also continues to face barriers to creating public participation approaches that involve a diverse and broad range of citizens.

Planning is a foundational component to strong public participation approaches, and therefore this research report provides The City of Red Deer with recommendations to support meaningful public participation by strengthening the planning stage. Meaningful participation, in this report, is defined as the public influencing decisions in alignment with the commitment made by the municipality. Recommendations are also made to support broader participation of individuals that are interested and affected while incorporating a diversity (broad range of ideas, opinions, and experiences) and inclusion (opportunities for hard to reach stakeholders to be heard) lens. Given this, the research questions answered within this report that led to the recommendations were:

Primary:

How can The City of Red Deer enhance their public participation planning process to ensure those affected and interested in a decision are meaningfully involved?

Secondary:

- What is The City of Red Deer’s current status as it relates to public participation planning?
- What is The City of Red Deer’s future desired state as it relates to public participation planning?
- What are the ways The City of Red Deer can plan and design participation activities that foster diverse and inclusive participation?
- What smart practices support public participation within The City of Red Deer?

Methodology and Methods

This project is designed as a gap analysis, which focuses on understanding current and future desired states to identify gaps and make recommendations to minimize them. A qualitative content analysis approach was used to analyze primary and secondary data, and a SWOT analysis brought the findings together.

A literature review provides an overview of theory and research related to public participation for decision-making. The literature review has three main themes: defining effective public participation, planning for public participation in local government, and considerations for diverse and inclusive participation. Understanding these focus areas informed the finding highlights, discussion and analysis section, and recommendation development.

Both primary and secondary data collection were utilized to help answer the research questions. Participants invited were Administration staff within The City of Red Deer who were part of projects or programs that implemented public participation in 2018. The client identified 20 potential participants who could voluntarily participate in one-on-one interviews, provide documents requested, or both. In total, there was 103 documents submitted and 16 interviews conducted. Interviews were semi-structured and averaged 30 – 45 minutes in length. These interviews helped to develop a better understanding of what people felt was working well and where there were challenges. Questions asked also provided an opportunity to gain insight into a future desired state by asking about hopes and successful participation. The document review specifically helped in identifying the current state. Examples of documents reviewed included: requests for proposals, participation plans, email correspondence, promotion, and news articles.

Key Findings

The data provided rich information to inform the findings and due to the significant number of findings that were pertinent to the research topic, were divided into 3 separate sections.

Current State

The City of Red Deer has many strengths that are supporting meaningful public participation. These include staff's passion for public work and as allies, desiring and willingness to improve processes, and inter-departmental collaboration. There was also a marked increase in organizational capacity with the focus on IAP2 training and a dedicated public participation coordinator position in 2018.

The findings show that while these strengths exist, organizational barriers are preventing meaningful and inclusive approaches including a lack of role clarity between Administration and Council as well as project teams and Communications. Another barrier is apprehension caused by fear and uncertainty that exists around public participation. Diversity and inclusion were hard for staff to distinguish and there was an acknowledgment that there was a lack of commitment to considerations for diversity and inclusion.

The secondary data and interviews demonstrated that planning happens to varying degrees and for some projects may not be happening at all. When planning is occurring, content differed significantly in areas such as stakeholder and decision identification. Invitations to participate were mostly not at an elementary reading level and lacked an indication of the level of influence of the public on a particular decision. Reports were not publicly available or easily accessible.

Future State

In the future, the findings highlighted that participants want clear intent and commitment to the public with a defined link to decision-making. Also, there is a desire for more transparency, openness, and accountability with the public, and processes that value their time and perspectives. Participants hope for purposeful and strategic planning that is coordinated across the organization and allows for approaches to reach hard to reach participants and diverse groups. Investment in resources and skills was also a big theme and included time, money, expertise, energy, and human resources with the ultimate goal of projects realistically resourced. There is also a desire for capacity development of soft-skills and openness to evaluation and reflexive practice.

Discussion and Analysis

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis

After an understanding of current and future desired states was developed, a SWOT analysis was conducted. The SWOT analysis identified strengths (what supports reaching desired state), weaknesses (what prevents getting to desired state), opportunities (what can start/ be implemented to achieve desired state), and threats (what could put getting to desired state at risk).

The main findings were that collaboration, training, and creative approaches for public participation support The City of Red Deer to reach their desired state; however, several organizational barriers as well as short-term interactions, and lack of clarity prevent meaningful participation. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the time, resources, and effort necessary for strong public participation approaches. Several activities can be implemented to achieve the future desired state including conducting preliminary planning to assess the need for public participation and estimate resources required, implement consistent planning using a framework that incorporates components that support diversity and inclusion, and strengthen evaluation. Actions that put getting to the desired state at risk include a lack of professional support internal to the organization and diffused and/or centralized responsibility. Besides, poor participation approaches (e.g., validation as a level on the spectrum, lack of adequate resources, lack of clarity on the purpose of public participation, and reinforcing power imbalances) can negate positive steps in other areas. Fortunately, many of these risks are mitigated through strengthened planning.

Fostering Diverse and Inclusive Participation

This section sheds light on what is needed to foster diverse and inclusive participation. The City of Red Deer needs to look at practices and concepts which are augmenting privileged groups and individuals. Concepts to assess based on the findings include representativeness, validating, staff and Council as participants, the idea of neutrality, equity vs. equality, and what voices are considered most important and why. A community of practice within the organization would be beneficial to explore these topics around diversity and inclusion and energize allies within the organization. Focusing on barrier removal helps to enhance public participation for all.

Therefore, working on the removal of 2 -3 barriers across projects improves the overall public participation experience. Lastly, to develop inclusive approaches, relationship building with marginalized communities is essential.

Recommendations

Recommendations are grounded in the context of The City of Red Deer and therefore capacity is taken into consideration; however, some recommendations need additional resources than currently available and require The City of Red Deer to assess costs/benefits of implementing a recommendation. The order of the recommendations is from most critical to least critical though they do not need to be implemented in linear order as several can happen in tandem.

Recommendation 1: Create at least one permanent public participation coordinator position.

Recommendation 2: Develop a public participation plan framework.

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement a process guide for public participation planning and a roles and responsibilities terms of reference (TOR) template.

Recommendation 4: Implement an annual public participation strategic plan.

Recommendation 5: Consider the development of an organizational public participation training plan and/or a mentorship program.

Recommendation 6: Identify 2 – 3 barriers to participation to improve the overall public participation experience across projects and set goals to remove them.

Recommendation 7: Start an inclusive public participation community of practice.

Recommendation 8: Focus on establishing mechanisms and approaches for ongoing relationship building with marginalized communities.

Recommendation 9: Conduct audit(s) by external organizations to assess how organizational rules, norms, and expectations are excluding certain citizens.

Recommendation 10: Revise the new public participation policy.

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1.0 Introduction

This report explores the context within The City of Red Deer and current public participation research to understand how the organization can enhance public participation planning as well as support diverse and inclusive participation to involve individuals interested and affected by municipal decisions.

1.1 Background

The City of Red Deer: The Context

The City of Red Deer is located in central Alberta and is the 3rd largest municipality by population following Edmonton and Calgary with 99,832 residents (The City of Red Deer, 2016a). Within Red Deer, the demographic breakdown is quite diverse. While not a complete picture, the 2016 Federal Census data provides a glimpse into the unique demographic makeup of Red Deer:

- 5.3% of the population are Indigenous
- 14.9 % of the population are immigrants totaling over 14,000
- 65.7% of residences are owned
- 48.8% of the population’s before-tax income is \$39,999 while 12.5% make \$100,000 or more
- 85.2% of the population speaks English. 112 other non-official languages were captured in the census with the top five being Tagalog, Spanish, Arabic, Ukrainian, and Cantonese
- Red Deer saw a 10.9% population growth rate between 2011 and 2016

Source: The City of Red Deer (2017)

The Government of Alberta: Public Participation Policy

The Alberta Government amended the *Municipal Government Act (MGA)* requiring each municipality to establish a public participation policy in March of 2015 when it passed third reading and receive royal assent (Legislative Assembly of Alberta, n.d.). Within this new Act, municipal governments must outline categories of approaches to engage as well as circumstances in which they engage with stakeholders. This policy must be publicly available and reviewed every four years (Alberta Queen’s Printer, 2017).

The City of Red Deer and Public Participation

The City of Red Deer recognizes the importance of involving citizens with regards to policy, planning, projects, and service level change decisions (The City of Red Deer, 2016b; The City of Red Deer, n.d.a). They define the public as “any individual or group of individuals, organizations, or political entities with an interest in the outcome of a decision” (The City of Red Deer, 2016b, p.1). The City of Red Deer highlights public input as one factor of good decision-making and uses the following graphic image to illustrate how the various streams of input

influence a decision (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The City of Red Deer Decision-making Weave (The City of Red Deer, n.d.a)

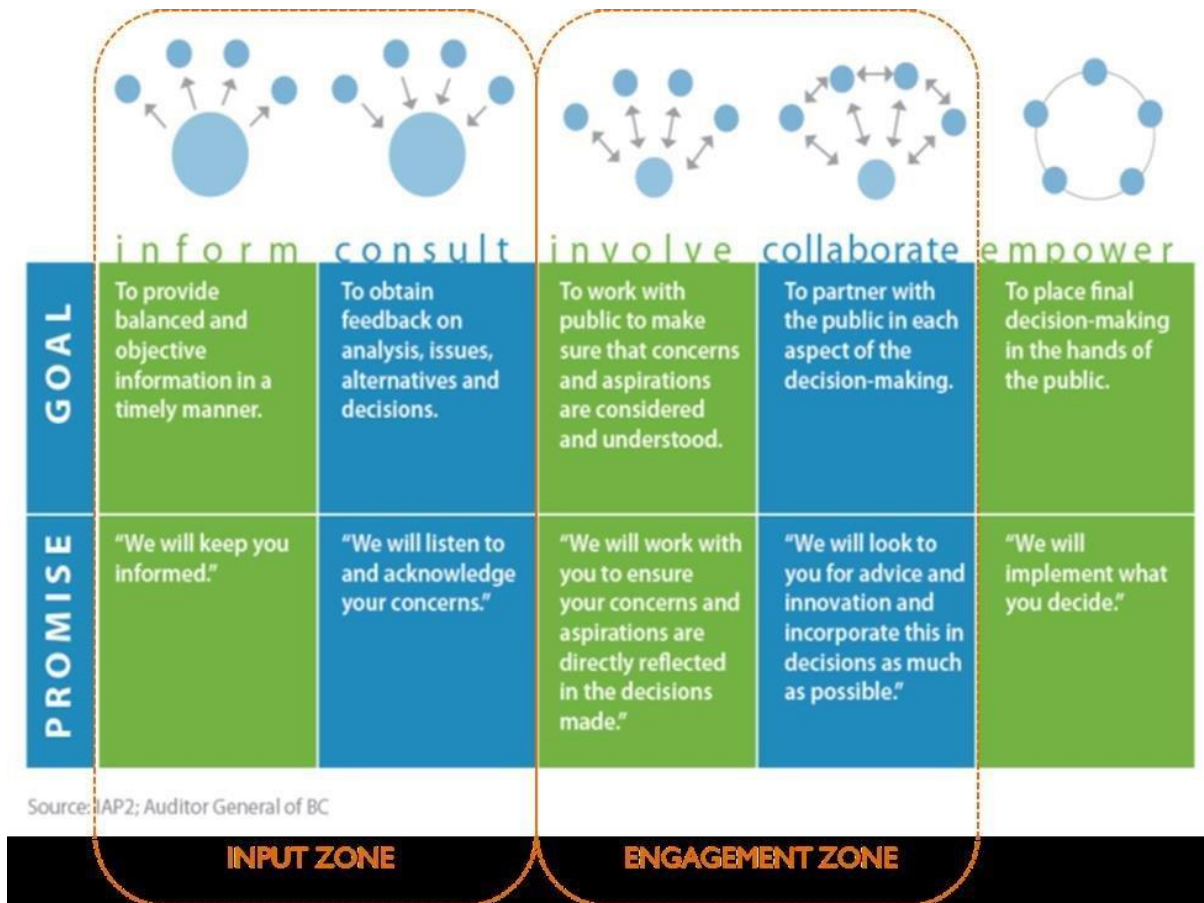


The public participation process, linked to decision making, is marked by distinct phases including planning and design, implementation, data analysis, reporting, and evaluation. The planning stage can be further broken down into five different steps (IAP2, 2016, p.33). Individuals who support project managers and leadership with the practice of public participation are often communications professionals, except for one temporary public participation position that was with The City of Red Deer until January 2019. Therefore, any public participation activities are in addition to their communication commitments, and as such, capacity is limited for providing public participation support.

The City of Red Deer identified community dialogue as a strategic goal in their 2012- 2014 and 2015-2018 strategic plans (The City of Red Deer, 2011; The City of Red Deer, 2015). They also created a dialogue charter which highlights the importance of providing opportunities for citizens to express their opinions, provide feedback, and voice ideas and concerns as a success factor (The City of Red Deer, 2011, p.15; The City of Red Deer, 2013). They have also adopted the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum the moves from inform through to empower (IAP2, 2016) as a framework for public participation. In the IAP2 spectrum, each level is associated with objectives and promises to the public (IAP2, 2016, p.30) which creates clarity about the purpose of participation (Head, 2007).

The City of Red Deer has adapted this spectrum by identifying input and engagement zones (Figure 2) (The City of Red Deer, n.d.a) for the public and those planning public participation approaches. IAP2 also defines public participation as “any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision making and uses public input to make sustainable decisions” (IAP2, 2016, p.2). While there are many other definitions for public participation, the IAP2 definition is widely used and accepted by municipalities including The City of Red Deer. Even with several documents creating a strong foundation, challenges with resources, timing, and capacity continue.

Figure 2: City of Red Deer IAP2 Adapted Spectrum (The City of Red Deer, n.d.a)



1.2 Defining the Problem

Many local governments are facing increased demands from citizens to provide input on decisions (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). This demand has developed from the unique governance structure and open lines of communication with citizens (Graham & Phillips, 1998) as well as the direct ways that municipalities affect the lives of residents (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). While this creates opportunities for participatory approaches (Stefanick, 2003), the increased demand often strains already limited municipal resources (Fung, 2015).

Municipalities also struggle with involving diverse citizens, especially early in the process (Sandoval & Rongerude, 2015). Many authors have highlighted that public participation approaches tend to include the ‘usual suspects’ (Barnes, Newman; Knops & Sullivan, 2003; Fung, 2015; Lerner, 2014; May, 2006; Nabatchi, 2012). These participants are typically individuals that care deeply about an issue, are wealthy, educated, and professionals (Fung, 2015). Graham & Phillips (1998) note that municipalities are making efforts to broaden participation; however, the relationship is still illusive (p.3). The City of Red Deer is

experiencing these same challenges as well as negative experiences with public participation due to a lack of focus or capacity for strategic planning.

Planning is an essential component of effective public participation (IAP2, 2016) and assists with identifying stakeholders most interested and affected by the decision (Petts, 2008, p.823). Considering unique contextual factors, prior to implementing public participation is also essential (Head, 2007; Rowe & Frewer, 2005) as these factors can significantly change the results of participation efforts. The lack of robust planning for public participation on past projects within The City of Red Deer has led to negative experiences for both the public and Administration. Participation activities missed stakeholders, for example, and this unintentional omission created public outrage and opposition for those projects. Another example where lack of planning played a role in negative experiences was when projects collected input from community stakeholders but it was not used in the decision-making process because of timing and/or lack of shared internal commitment. Recently, there is increased interest and willingness to enhance planning for public participation within The City of Red Deer resulting from more IAP2 training opportunities and support from a dedicated public participation professional working within Communications.

In their ‘Public Participation Toolbox’ The City of Red Deer identified that public participation tends to involve “people that are easy to connect with” (The City of Red Deer, 2016b, p.1) rather than a diverse and broad range of citizens. As a result of acknowledging this gap they developed a vision of “creating accessible, inclusive, and diverse participation processes” (The City of Red Deer, 2016b); however, this vision does not set forward a plan in which to achieve it. Even with the acknowledgement and vision of public participation as accessible, inclusive, and diverse currently many of the public participation activities and approaches have still involved the usual suspects (Barnes, Newman; Knops & Sullivan, 2003; Fung, 2015; Lerner, 2014; May, 2006; Nabatchi, 2012) and struggles with involvement of diverse citizens. In addition, there are existing contradictions between quality and quantity of effective public participation. The City of Red Deer defines effective public participation as “resulting in better decisions” (The City of Red Deer, 2016b, p.6), which does not consider the tension between high participation numbers and the processes required for inclusive and accessible participation. The City of Red Deer is drafting recommendations for an inclusive engagement strategy for Council and Administration which this research supports.

Public participation plans support meaningful public participation (Flicker, Savan, McGrath, Kolenda & Mildenerger, 2007). This is a key time to explore ways to enhance public participation planning within The City of Red Deer as there is some built organizational momentum and increased expectations for public participation for city projects. Further, strengthened planning will support The City of Red Deer’s vision for diverse, inclusive, and accessible public participation processes and their corporate strategic plans while mitigating some of the risks associated with public participation.

1.3 Project Client and Deliverables

The client for this project is the Communications and Strategic Planning Department (Communications) within The City of Red Deer. Julia Harvie-Shemko, Director,

Communications and Strategic Planning is representing this client. This department has several roles and responsibilities within The City of Red Deer including communications, media relations, organizational strategic planning, corporate event planning, and as a resource to city departments for event planning (The City of Red Deer, n.d.b). In addition, they play a significant role in championing and implementing public participation approaches within The City of Red Deer.

The deliverables agreed upon with the client include a copy of a final master's project report to both The City of Red Deer and the University of Victoria. This report includes the following:

1. Literature review
2. The City of Red Deer public participation planning gap analysis
3. Recommendations for public participation planning
4. Recommendations to foster diverse/inclusive participation
5. Recommendations to ensure those most affected and interested are involved

In addition, an in-person presentation will also be provided once the report has been finalized by the School of Public Administration.

1.4 Project Objectives and Research Questions

This master's project addresses how The City of Red Deer can strengthen planning to enhance public participation approaches by exploring The City of Red Deer's unique organizational context and makes recommendations that support enhanced planning processes, involvement of citizens most affected and interested by municipal decisions and creating opportunities for diverse and inclusive participation.

Research Questions:

Primary:

How can The City of Red Deer enhance their public participation planning process to ensure those affected and interested in a decision are meaningfully involved?

Secondary:

- What is The City of Red Deer's current status as it relates to public participation planning?
- What is The City of Red Deer's future desired state as it relates to public participation planning?
- What are the ways The City of Red Deer can plan and design participation activities to foster diverse and inclusive participation?
- What smart practices support public participation within The City of Red Deer?

For the purpose of this research the following definitions of terms apply:

- Inclusive participation: “opportunities for hard to reach stakeholders to participate and be heard” (IAP2, 2016, p.11).
- Diverse participation: A broad range of ideas, opinions, and experiences are captured through participation activities
- Interested and affected: Someone who has an opinion about a decision or either directly or indirectly experiences changes to an aspect of their lives as a result of decision(s).
- Meaningful participation: individuals influence the decision-making process in alignment with commitment made.
- Smart practices: successful behaviours and ideas which can be applied in different contexts and make processes more efficient in both cost and resources (Bardach, 2012).

1.5 Organization of Report

This report is organized beginning with an introduction that explains the problem, research client, background information, and research questions and objectives. The following section reviews literature related to public participation within a local government setting and includes three main themes.

The literature review sets the stage for the conceptual framework guiding this research. Next, research methodology, methods, data sources and limitations and delimitations are discussed. Findings are broken into three separate sections looking at current state and future desired state. The discussion section synthesises and links the findings with the literature review in order to identify gaps. The final sections provide recommendations to the client before concluding.

2.0 Literature Review

Public participation is written about extensively by public sector bodies, professional associations, and research institutes alike. In addition, there is a continually growing body of existing work within academia since the foundational work of seminal authors such as Arnstein (1969) who created the influential ‘Ladder of Participation’. Other prominent and frequently referenced authors on the topic of public participation include Rowe & Frewer (2000; 2005), Nabatchi (2010; 2012), Fung (2006; 2015), Bryson (2004, 2013) and the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). The breadth of topics ranges significantly from discussions on participatory governance and democratic theory to specific tactics and approaches for planning, evaluation, and reaching hard to reach groups and individuals.

Due to diversity in topics and terminology, there is a lack of consensus on the benefits of public participation. For example, some authors highlight that the benefits of public participation include inclusiveness, transparency, effective decision-making, increased public support, and minimizing cost and delays (Bherer, Gauthier & Simard, 2017; Creighton, 2005; Thomas, 1995) while others discuss risks such as increased outrage, frustration, and a weakened democracy (Masuda, McGee & Garvin, 2008) as well as the dangers of processes that reinforce existing power imbalances (Smith, 2009). Yet key points are consistently agreed upon within the literature. Many contend that public participation is an integral part of public service (The Institute of Public Administration of Canada, 1998; Thomas, 1995) and planning is essential for effective and meaningful public participation (Bherer, Gauthier & Simard, 2017; Bryson, 2004; Bryson, Quick, Slotterback & Crosby, 2013; Thomas, 1995; Quick & Feldman, 2011). Public participation in local government has become an increasingly popular topic within the literature due in part to the noted pressure from citizens to be involved in decision-making (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). Research with a specific focus on local government emerged on mass from the late 1990s onward.

This literature review provides an overview of research and theory related specifically to public participation for the purpose of decision-making within local government and includes academic journals such as *Public Administration Review* and *Journal of Public Administration* as well as searches within Google and Google Scholar and the following specific databases: JSTOR, SAGE Journals, and the Humanities Index. Also, the physical library collections of both the University of Victoria and the University of Alberta were utilized. The terms “public participation,” “public consultation,” “public engagement,” and “public involvement” were used interchangeably with other key search phrases such as ‘planning and design,’ ‘inclusiveness,’ and ‘local/ municipal government.’ As well, references and citations supported the identification of additional related publications. Due to the amount of information on this topic, other parameters set included publications written in English and within a North American context. The date range was not limited to gain an understanding of how past thought has influenced modern-day practice and to capture frequently cited authors.

Three key themes explored in the literature review are:

- defining effective public participation
- planning for public participation in local government
- identifying considerations for diverse and inclusive participation.

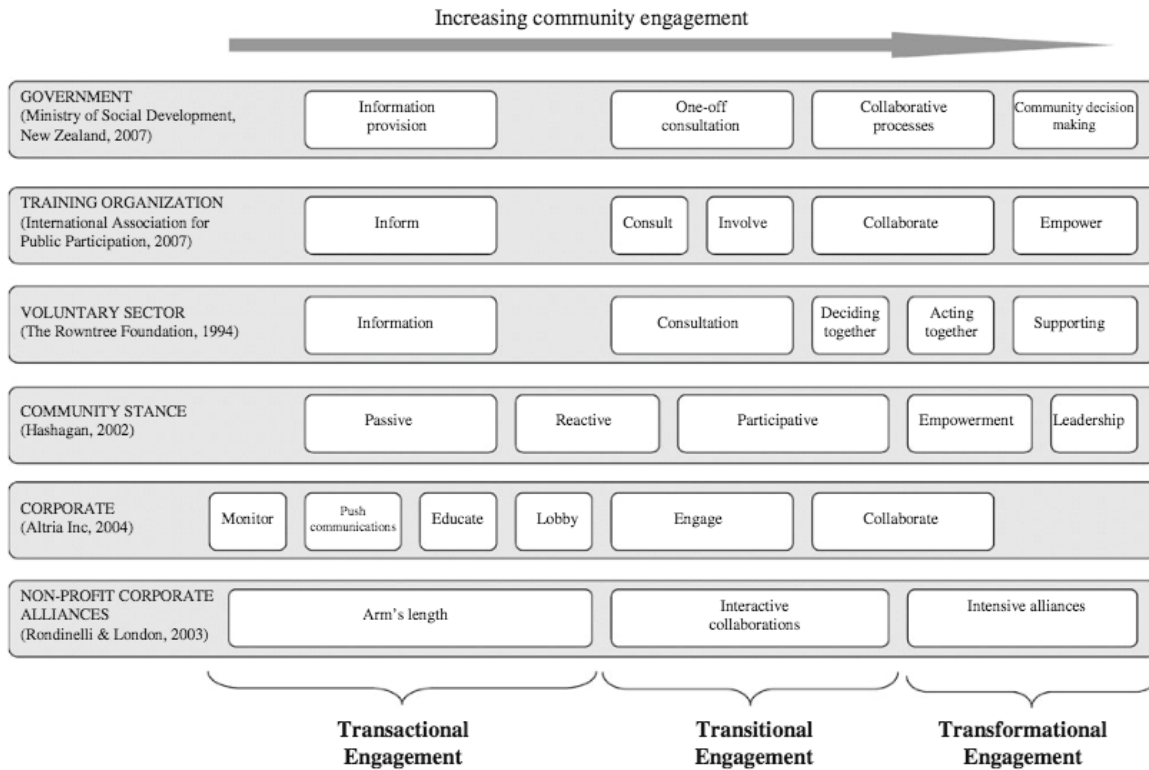
Each of these focus areas is intended to create foundational knowledge around theory, strong practices, approaches, benefits, and challenges in public participation planning with a focus on strategies that enhance diverse and inclusive participation.

2.1 Defining Effective Public Participation

Both Nabatchi and Amsler (2014) and Rowe and Frewer (2005) contend that the frequency of mismatched terms in the literature around public participation limits the development of strong practice and theory and creates confusion about meaning. While there are several distinct understandings and terminology used in describing public participation, the most interchangeable and often used in the literature is the term “public engagement.” Therefore, developing a distinction between ‘public participation’ and ‘public engagement’ is essential to ground the discussion on effective public participation.

Public engagement is described as an overarching term that includes methods for bringing people together to address issues (Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi & Herremans, 2010; Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). Quick and Feldman (2011) argue that public engagement has two distinct dimensions: participation and inclusion. Participation involves efforts to gain input while inclusion is about relationship building over time, both dimensions, they claim, are needed (p.274-275). Wilcox and Pei (2018) echo this sentiment in their reflexive article that emphasizes the importance of a two-way relationship in engagement and distinguish this from one-way consultation. Several authors discuss public participation as intentional engagement and as the act of involving individuals in decision-making (Fung, 2015; Graham & Phillips, 1998; Hurlbert & Gupta, 2015; Lee, 2014). One author highlights public participation as having a specific meaning within a particular field (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014) and another describes participation as “engagement through deliberative process” (Petts, 2018). Rowe and Frewer (2005) establish a distinction based on the flow of information: public communication, public consultation, and public participation which when combined equal public engagement. Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, and Herremans (2010) developed a typology of engagement that is broken down into three specific types: transactional, transitional, and transformational. IAP2 and other spectrums are mapped within this continuum (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Continuum of Community Engagement (Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi & Herremans, 2010)



While there are diverse uses for the term engagement, the literature does tend to emphasize engagement as a broad term that describes actions of involvement within civil society or the public sphere. For this report, public participation is considered one method under the umbrella of engagement that has a specific purpose of “directly engaging citizens, customers, and partners in the work of government” (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014, p.64).

Many authors discussed the need for effective public participation in local government (Fung, 2015; King, Feltey & Susel, 1998). Key themes emerged in the literature about what constitutes effective participation including inclusiveness, clear and transparent communication, and public influence on the decision (Bherer, Gauthier & Simard, 2017; Creighton, 2005; Stefanick, 2003). A few authors grappled with the specific challenge of broad or in-depth participation with regards to assessing effective public participation. For example, Graham and Phillips (1998) contend that effective public participation is often assessed by the number of people that participate, even when that involvement is minimal or what they term ‘shallow’ (p.7). By contrast, they argue that, rather than solely quantity as a measure, for public participation to be effective the right people need to be involved in the right context and have an influence on decision-making. They go on to state that to achieve this effective public participation requires commitment from senior management, staff training, and experience (p.9-11). This idea is echoed by Creighton (2005) in which he emphasizes that it is less important to have high numbers participate than diverse opinions represented. Yet Creighton further comments that in

strong public participation processes anyone can decide they are a stakeholder (p.22-34) which means there needs to be a commitment to keep the public informed, so they can choose to be involved. Of the literature reviewed, not a single reading argued that high numbers of participants are an indicator of effective public participation.

Creighton (2005), also outlines in his book 'The Public Participation Handbook,' several additional characteristics for effective public participation such as integration with decision-making, participation in incremental decisions at different stages, and multiple techniques used to involve citizens (p.21-24). While several authors have focused discourse on the processes around public participation, Rowe & Frewer (2000) bring a unique perspective by looking to evaluate positive outcomes. In their article 'Public participation methods: A framework for evaluation,' they develop a comprehensive guide to assess the effectiveness of several standard methods of participation. Their article divides evaluation into two categories. The first is acceptance criteria which measures construction and implementation and includes representativeness, unbiased processes, early involvement, influence on the decision, and transparency. The second category is process criteria which measures acceptance and perceptions of fairness of the public participation approach such as access to appropriate resources, clearly defined tasks, structured decision-making, and cost-effectiveness (p.11 - 17). All of these measures in totality create an understanding of effective participation and a proposed way to measure effectiveness.

There is also significant literature about what constitutes poor public participation. Bherer, Gauthier & Simard (2017) stress that public participation is not effective when used by public sector bodies as a means to gain buy-in. They caution that when buy-in is the principal purpose, public participation approaches are typically not planned or implemented well and put the benefits of good participation processes at risk (p.6-7). Poor participation is also described as short-term, transactional, and involving only individual exchanges between citizens and leaders (Walker, 2014, p. 205) and when participation is a single event rather than an ongoing approach (Graham & Phillips, 1998). Smith (2009) recognizes the lack of adequate resources and tight timelines as a barrier to effective participation and adds that often public participation is done due to expectations without proper support and professional experience (p.19). Other authors have identified the lack of resources and time as key factors preventing effective participation (Graham & Philips, 1998; Juarez & Brown, 2008; Rowe & Frewer, 2000). Lack of clarity can also lead to mismatched expectations of influence (Fung, 2015; May, 2006). In other words, the public may perceive a higher level of influence on decision-making than is intended from the municipality. Lastly, poor participation is not timed well or works towards the advancement of social justice (Fung, 2015). In practice, this looks like reinforcing the status quo by listening to the most powerful citizens or involving citizens after decisions are made.

By understanding poor participation, one can surmise that effective participation includes ensuring the public has an influence on decisions and that citizen involvement is at a time that allows their input to influence the decision-making process. It also means that effective participation requires providing sufficient resources, time, and expertise to create an ongoing process that is clearly defined and framed so that the public understands what they are asked to contribute and provides opportunities for empowerment. Good public participation can involve small numbers; while allowing opportunities for the public to opt into the process; however intentional efforts to engage with diverse groups are also needed. Foundational to good public

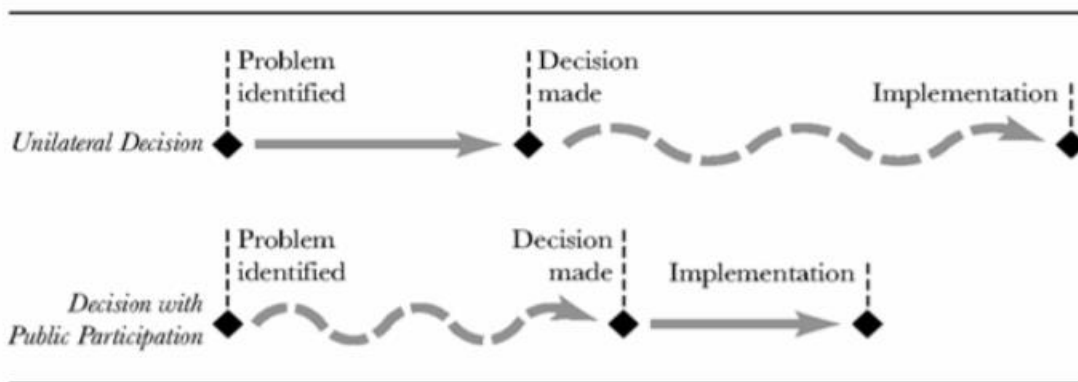
participation approaches are internal commitments from senior leadership and expertise gained through experience and training. Lastly, purposeful planning is a prerequisite.

2.2 Planning for Public Participation in Local Government

According to several government bodies, decisions made at the municipal level directly affect the lives of residents (Government of Alberta, n.d.; Auditor General of British Columbia, 2008). For example, changes in service availability, access to recreation centers, public transit, support programs, policy changes to neighbourhood development, or tax increases have immediate and direct effects. Graham and Phillips (1998) also highlight that municipalities have an open government system that allows administrators and elected officials to hear from citizens differently than other levels of government. Due to the direct effects and accessibility of local government, there are increased demands from citizens to participate and influence decision-making (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). While this creates the opportunity for municipalities to be well positioned to increase interest and engagement of citizens by utilizing innovative and participatory approaches (Stefanick, 2003) several authors have noted that public participation can be time and resource intensive.

Many municipalities have limited resources (i.e., financial or human) and increase demand for public participation adds additional pressure (Fung, 2015). Thomas (1995) and Creighton (2005) acknowledge that public participation is time-consuming; however, they contend that the time invested in robust approaches for participation leads to time saved during implementation (Figure 4). Given this, Rowe and Frewer (2000) note the importance of anticipating cost and resource requirements to determine the need and extent of public participation and to work within each project's unique constraints. As well, Smith (2009) argues that municipalities must recognize that enhancing public participation cannot be considered an efficient mode of governance (p.18) while IAP2 (2016) notes that it is effective in creating sustainable decisions (IAP2, 2016).

Figure 4: Comparison of Length of Time: Unilateral Decision vs. Public Participation (Creighton, 2005, p.18)



Some authors argue that within local government it is no longer a debate about whether participation should happen, but rather the focus has shifted to how it will occur (Juarez &

Brown, 2008; Webler & Tuler, 2002). This is not universally agreed upon throughout the literature. Many contend that as part of the planning process, decision-makers need to determine if public participation is feasible or realistic in the first place (Hurlburt & Gupta, 2015). To make this determination, several authors make recommendations on approaches to assess the need for participation. Creighton (2005) distinguishes between technical and value-based decisions and claims that purely technical decisions do not need to involve the public. He goes on to assert that often organizations classify decisions as technical when they frequently include assigning weight or prioritization which means they are value-based decisions even when a high level of technical information is needed to make them (p.15). Municipal budgeting is an excellent example of value-based decision-making that involves significant technical knowledge. Another assessment tool measures the need to involve the public along two axes': acceptability and quality. When the need for quality increases the need to involve the public decreases but when the need for acceptability is high so is the need to involve the public (Thomas, 1995, p.36). He suggests seven questions to help define the requirements for quality and acceptability in any decision (Table 1). When deciding if participation is feasible, assessing the timeline to make the decision and what, if any, resources can be dedicated are important considerations (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). When there is a lack of either it may be better to not engage in participatory processes with the public as the risk of not doing participation can be less than the risk of doing poor participation (Graham & Phillips, 1998).

Table 1: Characteristics of Issue: Questions (Thomas, 1995, p.41)

1	What are the quality requirements that must be incorporated into any decision?
2	Do I have sufficient information to make a high-quality decision?
3	Is the problem structured such that alternative solutions are not open to redefinition?
4	Is public acceptance of the decision critical for implementation? If so, is that acceptance relatively certain if the manager decides alone?
5	Who is the relevant public?
6	Does the relevant public share the agencies goals to be obtained in solving the problem?
7	Is there likely to be conflict within the public on the preferred solution?

Once public participation is identified as needed, the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) (2016) outlines five steps for public participation planning and associated tasks for each step (Table 2). The first step, gaining internal commitment, is argued to be the most important because without support from decision-makers and internal stakeholders the whole process can be compromised. They also identify that a large factor in gaining internal commitment relies on the organization's environment, culture, values and past experience with public participation (IAP2, 2016, p.34).

Table 2: Five Steps for Public Participation Planning (IAP2, 2016, p.33)

STEP	ACTION	TASKS
1	Gain Internal Commitment	Activity 1: Identify the decision-maker(s) Activity 2: Profile sponsoring organisation's approach to public participation Activity 3: Clarify the scope of the decision Activity 4: Identify preliminary stakeholders and issues Activity 5: Assess sponsor's expectations of the IAP2 Spectrum level
2	Learn from the Public	Activity 1: Understand how people perceive the decision Activity 2: Develop a comprehensive list of stakeholders Activity 3: Correlate stakeholders and issues Activity 4: Review/refine the scope of the decision
3	Select the Level of Participation	Activity 1: Assess internal and external expectations Activity 2: Select level on the IAP2 Spectrum Activity 3: Assess "readiness" of sponsoring organisation
4	Define the Decision Process and Identify Public Participation Objectives	Activity 1: Understand the existing decision process Activity 2: Set public participation objectives for each step in the process Activity 3: Compare decision process with public participation and communication objectives Activity 4: Check to confirm objectives meet needs
5	Design the Public Participation Plan	Activity 1: Determine plan format Activity 2: Integrate baseline data into plan format Activity 3: Identify the public participation techniques Activity 4: Identify support elements for implementation, including communications planning Activity 5: Plan for evaluation

In addition to internal commitment, understanding contextual factors are highlighted as a critical step when designing public participation (Bryson et al., 2013). Knowing and monitoring context allows administrators to fit processes to specific contextual factors. Bryson et al. (2013) define general context as broad social, political, demographic features while specific context includes mandates, identified stakeholders, and resources available (p.25). Webler & Tuler (2002) also outline that knowing context helps to predict outcomes and interventions when overlaid with management, collaborative learning, decision analysis, procedural justice, democracy, and evaluation theories and frameworks (p.181). Therefore, understanding context supports better outcomes and allows Administration to predict potential pitfalls and risk.

A significant piece of context is stakeholder identification. Authors have outlined in detail specific tactics to map and identify stakeholders related to public participation planning (Bryson, 2004; Creighton, 2005). Stakeholder mapping is also highlighted within project management literature (Project Management Institute, 2013; Thiry, 2010). There is agreement that the definition of stakeholder affects who and what counts and therefore a broad definition of stakeholder is ideally utilized (Bryson, 2004; Butler & Adamowski, 2015). In contrast, there is a

lack of agreement on what constitutes a stakeholder. Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) developed stakeholder salience theory which measures stakeholders against characteristics of influence, power, and urgency to identify categories (i.e., primary or secondary stakeholders) that managers can use to prioritize (p.845-855). Butler & Adamowski (2015) critique stakeholder salience theory as ineffective when the goal is increased inclusion (p.156). Bryson's (2004) highly cited article 'What to do when stakeholders matter' is a comprehensive resource for stakeholder identification techniques which he closes by emphasizing that stakeholder identification is a smart public participation practice when matched with useful techniques, skills, and thoughtfulness. He also highlights that more than one stakeholder mapping technique might be needed for larger projects or programs (p.49).

Creighton (2005) and IAP2 (2016) both highlight the importance of developing public participation plans. These documents can range from a simple road map to documents that guide implementation and outcomes. The complexity of the project/ decision determines the detail needed in the plan (IAP2, 2016, p.74). Within a complex plan, there are five sections recommended: baseline data, techniques, communications strategy and plan, support elements, and evaluation plan (IAP2, 2016, p.75). Participation processes need to have a clear purpose and terms of reference as well as flexibility (Graham & Philips, 1998) therefore creating plans that are thought out and hold to their principal purpose but also are flexible and responsive. Creighton (2005) emphasizes that there is not a single plan template that fits all public participation approaches and lists several reasons that preparing a public participation plan is beneficial:

- Creates clear connection between public participation and decision-making
- Confirms commitment from the organization
- Alerts management of political implications
- Demonstrates rationale for types of public participation activities chosen
- Co-created to gaining commitment to implement the plan (p.74)

While public participation planning is primarily the project manager's role (Graham & Phillips, 1998), to effectively plan, public participation professionals are also integral (Creighton, 2005; IAP2, 2016; Bherer, Gauthier, & Simard, 2017). Contracting public participation professionals frequently occurs within the public sector; however, Bherer, Gauthier & Simard (2017) contend that public organizations need internal staff that can design and evaluate participatory activities (p.4) and maintaining the integrity of the process. Consistent planning is highlighted as essential to strengthen participatory approaches even though the techniques, tools, and strategies to significantly varied throughout the readings. Critical components of public participation planning are assessing the need and extent for public participation, gaining internal commitment, identifying stakeholders, understanding contextual factors to align approaches, and developing a public participation plan. Several individuals play integral roles in the planning process including project managers, organizational leadership, decision-makers, internal stakeholders, and public participation professionals.

2.3 Considerations for Diverse and Inclusive Participation

Public participation often involves non-representative groups (Thomas, 1995). Several authors refer to the "usual suspects" (Barnes, Newman; Knops & Sullivan, 2003; Fung, 2015; Lerner, 2014; May, 2006; Nabatchi, 2012). Which are identified as individuals that care deeply about an

issue, are wealthy, educated, and typically professionals (Fung, 2015). At the municipal level, there have been efforts to broaden participation beyond the ‘usual suspects’; however, the relationship with marginalized groups continues to remain incremental and illusive (Graham & Phillips, 1998, p.3).

Marginalized groups include people that are typically on the periphery of mainstream society and can consist of youth, low-income seniors, newcomers, Indigenous groups, cultural groups, visible minorities, etc. Within the literature, discussion of participation of marginalized groups typically focuses on specific demographics rather than looking at inclusive processes that allow for several marginalized groups to participate (Checkoway, 2011; Hart & Schwab, 1997; Jackson, Tan, Mooney, Hoverman & White, 2012). The literature is limiting in this regard as frequently individuals experience more than one facet of marginalization, making participation increasingly challenging and unlikely as these factors intersect. For example, a low-income single-mother has multiple barriers to participation regardless of how interested or affected she is by a decision. Therefore, the assumption that a lack of involvement means that individuals are apathetic is inaccurate (Graham & Phillips, 1998). On the other side, non-participation can also be a valid and legitimate choice (Shortall, 2008).

A key theme that emerged was the concept of power. Several authors cautioned that providing opportunities for citizen participation can strengthen power differences that already exist, therefore empowering the already empowered (Clark, 2018; Juarez & Brown, 2008; Nabatchi, 2012; Shortall, 2008). Butler and Adamowski (2015) highlight this by demonstrating how methods for collecting stakeholder feedback can erase marginalized voices. An example is voting, such as dotocracy, where marginalized groups may have a significant issue but through the process, their issues become hidden within collective responses (p.159). An integral part of building inclusive participation approaches is developing an understanding of who are marginalized groups in a given community and how to best engage with these groups (Juarez & Brown, 2008). There is also a need for intentionality in planning for public participation to be inclusive including self-reflexive practices to uncover biases (Clark, 2018; Nabatchi, 2012).

The theory of oppression has prominence within the field of social work and refers to the injustices faced as a consequence of structural and individual unconscious assumptions, societal practices and norms (Baines, 2011; Bishop, 2015; Butler & Adamowski, 2015; Young, 2014). In order to enhance diverse and inclusive participation there needs to be consideration for the ways that the organizational rules, norms, and expectations exclude or undermine the contributions of certain citizens (Smith, 2009). Butler and Adamowski (2015) outline two problematic assumptions that prevent inclusive participation practices. The first assumption is that citizens are a homogenous group that obscures the ability to recognize how groups may be more significantly affected or affected in unique ways. The second assumption is the emphasis of community groups and organizations as representative which undermines marginalized individuals because people in representative roles tend to have higher social capital and privilege (p.155-156). Feldman and Khademian (2007) contend that managers in public service are in a position to promote or inhibit inclusion. Though, often the challenge is not a lack of ability to make processes inclusive but rather a lack of motivation to advance social justice (Fung, 2015).

Several authors posit that inclusion and diversity are not synonymous. They contend that inclusiveness must consider concepts of equity and social justice (Fung, 2015) and, according to Thomas (1995), should be a principal value of Administration. Smith (2009) argues that often participation activities that are open to all, while seemingly the most inclusive do not ensure that marginalized groups are not excluded and therefore restricting participation can be the most inclusive approach (p.21). Juarez & Brown (2008) highlight that large public activities are especially challenging to involve marginalized groups and assert that smaller and informal activities better support the representation of less powerful interests.

Smith (2009) discusses equality in terms of both voice and presence (p.21-22). Equality of voice means that there are supports and resources for certain citizens to provide their opinions and ensure their voices are not reduced when stakeholders with more considerable social capital and privilege also providing input (Butler & Adamowski, 2015; Shortall, 2008; Smith, 2009). Therefore, an important question to ask is “who speaks, for whom, and who is heard” (Gaventa, 2002, p.8). In addition, the kinds of spaces in which participation occurs must be understood within the context of power relations. Cornwall and Gaventa (2000) distinguish between invited spaces and chosen spaces but highlight that whatever space is used, no space is neutral. Therefore, attention to how these spaces carry traces of previous social relationships, resources, and knowledge is essential. Consequently, venue selection is a critical consideration in inclusive participation (Butler & Adamowski, 2015).

Barriers to Participation

Barriers hinder access and can be physical or social (Bednar, 1977). Physical barriers include items such as lack of wheelchair access or locating of an event where there is minimal or no transit access while social barriers are subtler and more difficult to recognize such as having a hard time understanding information or past experiences with government bodies. There is a need for advocates who can discover and create awareness of barriers and then work to remove them (Bednar, 1977). Bednar (1977) contends that the environment improves for everyone, with barrier removal, not just those that were affected by the barrier.

Social barriers identified within the literature:

- Lack of time (Bednar, 1977; Butler & Adamowski, 2015; May, 2006)
- Activities are not enticing (Bednar, 1977)
- Logistical constraints (Juarez & Brown, 2008)
 - Childcare (Butler & Adamowski, 2015)
- Meeting activity and format (Juarez & Brown, 2008)
- Costs of participation outweigh the benefit (Smith, 2009)
- Economic barriers (Butler & Adamowski, 2015)
- Racism, classism, homophobia (Butler & Adamowski, 2015)
- Unsafe spaces (Cornwall, 2003) or spaces when people feel they don't belong (Kitchin, 1998)
- Governments choosing efficiency over empowerment (Clark, 2018)
- Unwelcome and disempowering environments (Holley, 2016)
- Lack of clarity in the purpose for participation (Nabatchi, 2012) and poorly defined problem (Butler & Adamowski, 2015)

Overall, within the literature, there was a gap regarding concrete solutions to remove barriers to participation and allow for more inclusive and diverse approaches. Both effort and resources are needed to attract citizens to participate (Smith, 2009), and there is an acknowledgment that techniques to increase participation can be expensive and include considerations for financial compensation such as providing childcare (Butler & Adamowski, 2015). In general, vital items that support inclusive and diverse participation include awareness and planning for power differences, self-reflection of biases, having strong advocates and allies within the organization, and willingness to learn about and work to remove barriers.

2.4 Literature Review Summary

Several key themes and concepts have emerged through the literature review. Below is a high-level summary of key ideas per theme.

Table 3: Literature Review Main Themes and Key Ideas

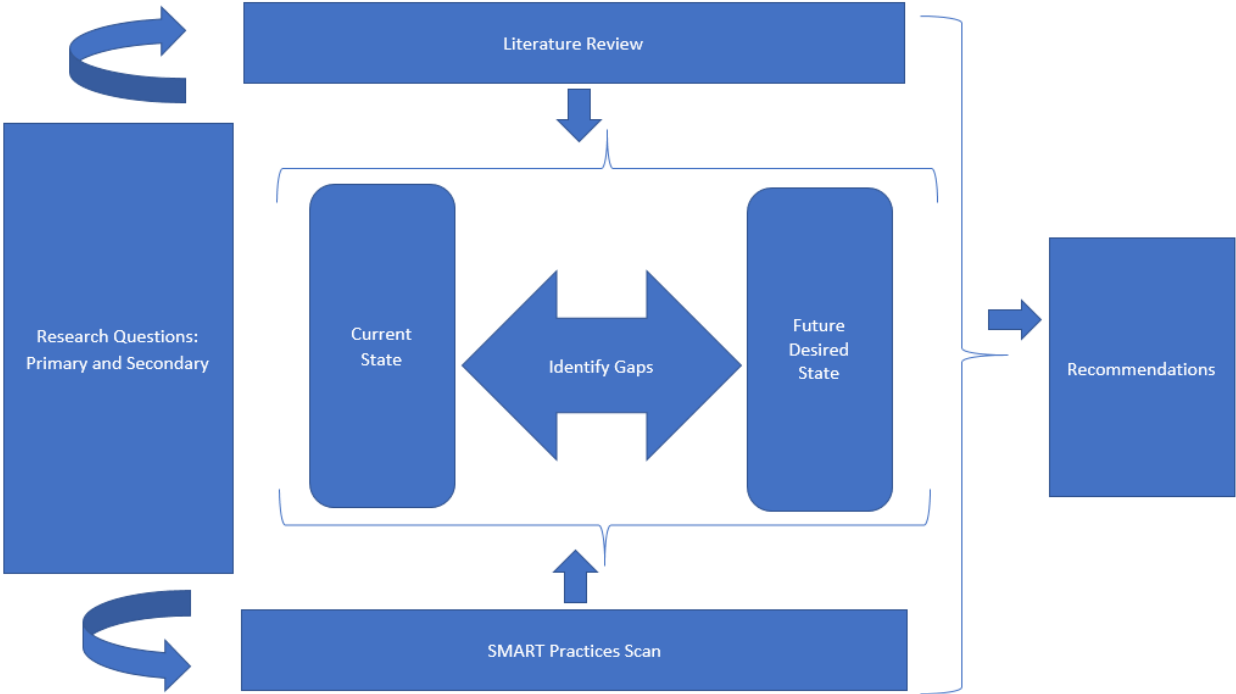
Main Theme	Key Ideas
<p>Defining Effective Participation</p>	<p>What it is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method under the umbrella of engagement that focuses on directly engaging citizens in the work of government • Expertise through experience and training • Purposeful planning • Public has influence on decision • Participation is timed properly • Sufficient resources and time • Provides opportunities for empowerment • Clear and transparent communication and commitment to keep public informed • Opt-in mechanisms for the public • Multiple techniques used <p>What it is not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large numbers (as a sole measure) • Used to gain buy-in • Short-term and transactional • Involving only individual exchanges • Seen as a single event rather than an approach • Lack of support and done only because expected

<p>Planning for Public Participation in Local Government</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asses the need and extent of public participation • Gain internal commitment • Identify stakeholders • Understand contextual (specific and general) to align approaches • Develop public participation plans • Several individuals play a role: project managers, leadership, decision-makers, internal stakeholders, and public participation professionals • Consistent planning is needed
<p>Considerations for Diverse and Inclusive Participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public participation typically involves usual suspects • Can empower the already empowered • Develop understanding of who are the marginalized groups and how best to engage them • Need for self-reflexive practice • Consideration for how organizational rules, norms, and expectations exclude certain citizens • Inclusion and diversity not synonymous and inclusive must consider equity and social justice • Equality of voice and presence and power dynamics of chosen spaces • Willingness to learn about and remove both physical and social barriers • Need strong advocates and allies within the organization

2.5 Conceptual Framework

The literature review provides a foundational understanding of strong public participation within a local government context. The themes of defining effective participation, planning for public participation, and considerations for diverse participation were identified to help answer the primary and secondary research questions. Understanding in these focus areas informs strong practice and links to several areas within this research project including finding highlights, gap analysis, and recommendation development (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Conceptual Framework



3.0 Methodology and Methods

This project is designed as a gap analysis that focuses on understanding current and future states to identify gaps and then makes recommendations to minimize them. A qualitative content analysis approach was used for both primary and secondary data, and a SWOT analysis brought the findings and literature review together. Methods used for this project were interviews and document review. This section provides an overview of the project methodology, research methods, data collection, and analysis, as well as project limitations and delimitations.

This research received ethics approval on October 22, 2018 (Certificate #:18-1021) for the following:

- Secondary data collection from The City of Red Deer
- Secondary data collection from the Canadian Municipal P2 Network
- Primary data collection through one-on-one interviews with The City of Red Deer employees.

3.1 Methodology

The data collected within this research project is solely qualitative as the number of participants is small and the research seeks to understand specific context within The City of Red Deer.

This project utilizes a gap analysis methodology in order to support The City of Red Deer to enhance public participation planning. Channon and Sammut-Bonnici (2015) define a gap analysis as a comparison of objectives and outcomes which leads to the identification of gaps. They go on to highlight that this analysis focuses on the cause of the gap and processes that can reduce or eliminate it (p.1). By understanding the current state of public participation planning practices within The City of Red Deer and their future desired state; gaps can be identified (Ball, 2018).

Smart practices are successful behaviours and ideas which can be applied in different contexts to make processes more efficient in both cost and resources (Bardach, 2012). A secondary methodology was to uncover smart practices from other Canadian municipalities regarding public participation planning that could be allied within The City of Red Deer context.

3.2 Methods

Document Review

Secondary data was requested from 20 communications, leadership, and project managers that were part of projects or programs that implemented public participation in 2018 as identified by The City of Red Deer. Documents requested from participants were related to public participation approaches. Examples of items provided include requests for proposals, participation plans, email correspondence, promotion and communication of the events/ activities, and news articles. In total, 103 documents were provided. In addition to internal documents, some publicly available materials such as Council reports or media coverage were also reviewed for high profile projects. These documents helped to develop an understanding of

what The City of Red Deer did in 2018 concerning planning for public participation as well as their processes.

Documents were also requested from members of the Canadian Municipal P2 Network that highlighted smart practices for both public participation planning and inclusive practices. One municipality provided documents.

Key Informant Interviews

In addition to the document review, interviews were conducted with The City of Red Deer administration staff. Fourteen (14) interviews were conducted in-person in Red Deer and two over the phone for a total of sixteen (16) interviews. Each interview was recorded and transcribed to capture the content in the conversations accurately. One phone interview experienced technical difficulties and did not record; therefore, notes from memory were drafted to capture as much content as possible.

The interviews were semi-structured with pre-determined open-ended questions (Appendix A) and then additional probing or clarifying questions were asked as well. This format supported the exploration of a specific topic (Ayres, 2012); in this case public participation planning within The City of Red Deer. The interviews averaged between 30 – 45 minutes in length. These interviews established an understanding of the current state such as what people believe currently is working well and where there are challenges in planning public participation. It also provided an opportunity to gain insights into the future desired state by asking about hopes and successful public participation for The City of Red Deer. These interviews fostered contextual knowledge that is not apparent from solely analyzing documents.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The research analysis for this project involves several key steps. First, the literature review identified promising approaches, practices, and supported the development of theoretical knowledge. With this knowledge, key ideas were used to frame the findings, analysis, and recommendations. For example, the findings were highlighted utilizing content analysis, which allocates content to pre-determined and detailed categories (Payne & Payne, 2004) which in this case were key ideas from the literature review.

After an understanding of current and future desired states were developed and outlined in the findings section, a SWOT analysis was conducted. A SWOT analysis is a strategic planning tool that that helps to foster enhanced awareness of a situation and typically focuses on both external and internal factors (Community Toolbox, n.d.); however, the analysis for this paper sought to look solely internally to The City of Red Deer and therefore created categories to explain what each section discusses. The SWOT analysis in this research identified strengths (what supports reaching the desired state), weaknesses (what prevents getting to the desired state), opportunities (what can start/ be implemented to achieve the desired state), and threats (what could put getting to the desired state at risk).

3.4 Project Limitations and Delimitations

A smart practice scan for public participation documents from public sector bodies within Canada was conducted as part of this research. Documents pertaining to this research were requested of members of the Canadian Municipal P2 Network. One municipality provided documents through this request. In addition, publicly available documents were also reviewed, unfortunately, the information collected was limited as documents that highlight public participation planning or practice approaches are not readily publicly available from municipalities. Therefore, the smart practice scan was removed from findings and analysis due to a lack of sufficient data.

This report seeks to make recommendations for inclusive processes. The researcher writes this as an ally with the understanding that their identity, worldview, and social constructions are situated in their current knowledge and awareness of barriers, oppression, and cultural understandings. Therefore, this report is intended to augment inclusive practice. .

4.0 Findings: Current State – Interviews

The collection of primary and secondary data came from the same pool of eligible participants: staff who were involved with the implementation of public participation activities in 2018. Participants were able to decide if they wanted to participate in the interview, provide documents related to public participation, or both.

In total, 16 participants volunteered to be interviewed. Interviewees were asked several questions ranging from their current sentiments towards public participation, successes, and challenges in planning both in general and specifically with their project(s), their definition of diverse and inclusive participation, and learnings to support understanding of current state within The City of Red Deer.

The primary and notable current state themes from the interviews were:

- Strengths in Public Participation
- Barriers to Public Participation
- Lack of Shared Understanding
- Capacity Development
- Other Notable Themes

4.1 Strengths in Public Participation

Knowing strengths helped form a balanced picture of the current context within The City of Red Deer. Specific interview questions asked during the interviews that supported the development of understanding around strengths in public participation were:

- With regards to public participation planning, what are some strengths or successes you have experienced?
- Anything you would make sure to do again?
- What is your biggest lesson learned?

Key topics that emerged regarding strengths and successes included:

- Collaboration
- Creativity in approaches
- Staff as allies
- Willingness/desire to do better

Collaboration

Interviewees highlighted that their projects utilized inter-departmental collaboration. While the Communications department was noted as being involved at varying levels in all projects that participated in this research, six participants discussed collaboration with other departments and

work areas. Reasons cited for the need for collaboration were to leverage the skills and knowledge in another area or to streamline the process for citizens by looking at their work collectively and how they overlap. The projects in which collaboration occurred emphasized that working together made the process stronger. As one participant noted, “We have different departments, people with different skills and knowledge bases, that are all coming around a table to participate in the planning process in some fashion” (Participant 312, personal communication, 2018).

Creativity in Approaches

In total, nineteen (19) distinct participation tactics were identified through the interviews. While traditional methods such as open houses and online surveys were mentioned most frequently, the diversity in activities indicates a willingness to try new approaches and be creative with how input is collected. One participant summarized this willingness to be more creative; “I think over the years, we've become more creative in the ways we try and get information from people” (Participant 311, personal communication, 2019). For the public participation activities noted, all but two involved one-on-one conversations between individuals/ organizations and The City of Red Deer.

Staff as Allies

Seven individuals expressed a desire to make public participation processes inclusive and find approaches to involve missing voices. These same individuals emphasized that organizational factors prevent putting into action approaches that support including hard to reach participants. The key barriers to inclusive approaches that were identified by these allies were time, resources, and know-how. One participant shared that they often advocate for more inclusive approaches but get worn down. A couple of the interviewees discussed how their roles are in service to the public and the citizens of Red Deer. They demonstrated passion and care for making the city better for all citizens. As one participant stated, “Sixteen hundred employees that are in public service for a reason...and so you already have ambassadors built in who are citizens and staff members, you have people who care” (Participant 312, personal communication, 2019).

Willingness/ Desire to do Better

Through the interview process, each participant demonstrated varying degrees of willingness to reflect on opportunities for improvement both within their projects and how they could have done better. Participants mentioned that they felt limited by factors such as timelines, resources, lack of knowledge of the proper language (e.g., Newcomer vs. new Canadian), or ways to connect with specific groups. The following quotes demonstrate self-reflection during the interviews; “We didn’t narrow down [stakeholders] as much as we would now if we had more time” (Participant 304, personal communications, 2019) and “We are learning from our experiences and constantly looking at how we can make it better” (Participant 310, personal communication, 2019).

4.2 Barriers to Public Participation

There was a general sentiment that while there is the intention and desire to do good work, there are many factors that prevent this from happening. Participants throughout the interview mentioned the barriers to meaningful participation; however, key questions were asked to gain understanding such as:

- With regards to public participation planning, what are some challenges you have experienced?
- In your opinion, what role did planning play in the outcome of your public participation activities?
- Would there be anything you would do differently with your planning?

Barriers identified are in order of most to least mentioned. The numbers beside the barrier indicates the number of interviewees that identified this barrier.

- Resources (13)
- Timeline/ Time (11)
- Capacity – Communications Department (9)
- Council Control (3)
- Lack of experience/ skills (3)
- Competing priorities (2)
- Content is not accessible (1)
- Capacity – IT department (1)
- Budget (1)
- Getting the message out (1)

Public participation projects varied from as little as five weeks from start to finish to several months and included planning, implementation, data analysis, and reporting within that time frame. Nine participants noted that short timelines are a significant limiting factor. For example, one participant disclosed, “I don’t think our environment allows us to do the full job that we would like to do — just given the time constraints and the expectations that are put on us” (Participant 303, personal communication, 2019). Conversely, two participants felt that their projects demonstrate how meaningful engagement can happen in a condensed timeframe.

Resources were frequently cited as limited and needed throughout the organization to support better participation processes. The specific resources mentioned were budget and additional resources for Communications. Insufficient resources were acknowledged as a critical factor preventing planning altogether or the ability to do fulsome planning, ability to reach hard to reach participants, and strong approaches throughout the process (e.g., data analysis and linking with decision-making). The lack of resources, such as dedicated public participation professionals, within Communications, was mentioned by 15 participants and is illustrated in the following quotes:

- “Communications doesn’t have the resources to provide that perspective and that guidance.” (Participant 307, personal communication, 2019)
- “I don’t know that they are given the resources to do a holistic job.” (Participant 303, personal communication, 2019)
- “Communications is very limited in terms of their capacity with one temporary employee. It’s an add-on to their comms role.” (Participant 305, personal communication, 2019)

4.3 Lack of Shared Understanding

Often the answers to questions were diverse and distinct from participant to participant so much so that the pattern that emerged was the non-existence of one. While direct questions about what specific terms mean such as defining inclusion and diversity were asked during the interviews, the general responses to the interview questions demonstrated areas that are lacking clarity including:

- Public Participation and Processes
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Diversity and Inclusion

Public Participation and Processes

When discussing and defining public participation, three participants suggested that any interaction with the public is considered public participation. Those that had IAP2 training more frequently linked public participation with decision-making. Six were not clear on the commitment they had made to the public about their level of influence on the decision for their project. They were either were not aware of where it fell on The City of Red Deer’s adapted IAP2 spectrum (see figure 2) or thought that communications person on their project had most likely identified where it fell. One theme that came up frequently in the interviews was the idea of needing to validate decisions made and/or the input collected. Seven participants discussed the concept of validation. As an example, one participant highlighted validation as a level on the spectrum and said, “The public participation would have been around validating.” (Participant 306, personal communication, 2019). Others discussed validation in the context of ensuring that the information collected from participants was accurate and that it was heard correctly by the consultant or Administration.

Participants also discussed public participation tactics versus approaches. Four interviewees emphasized that often public participation within The City of Red Deer is thought of as a specific tactic, such as having an open house, rather than looking at planning as an approach that may include one or several tactics.

Roles and Responsibilities

One participant acknowledged that there is a lot of misunderstanding around roles and responsibilities with regards to the public participation process at The City of Red Deer;

however, within the interviews, there were two specific areas in which the lack of role clarity became evident. The two areas where roles were unclear were between Council and Administration and project teams and Communications staff.

Between Council and Administration, the ambiguity of roles was present with regards to decision-making and participation in the process. Seven interviewees highlighted that Council is the ultimate decision-maker and that they cannot control the use of public input. A participant's comment illustrates this: "We [Administration] are not the decision-makers...you are relaying information to someone that can't make a change" (Participant 301, personal communication, 2019). Eight participants noted that the tactics that they had to use for their approach were pre-determined by Council and while they felt they were not ideal, it was mandated. Also, three participants indicated that Council were public participation participants and were consulted through the process at various stages, some at the onset and others as a specific activity to collect input on Council's views or what they hear from their constituents. In the cases where Council was consulted, the projects also went or were going, before Council.

Project team members and Communications staff grappled with trying to understand each other's level of responsibility for their projects in 2018. Seven participants felt that the capacity for public participation is needed throughout the organization and three felt that experts within the organization should be able to bring knowledge to the team and therefore expertise is better centralized. In describing their projects, six interviewees voiced disconnection with the planning process for their project's public participation approaches and were not able to identify the level of influence of the public or the method for determining scope and scale. In one project, the project manager indicated that they were not privy to the budget or involved in the planning for public participation activities for their project. Almost all project managers interviewed felt that having Communications collaborating on the project was invaluable and necessary for success.

Defining Diversity and Inclusion

All participants were asked to define inclusive participation and diverse participation in their own words and, based on that description, what factors were considered in their projects. Three participants indicated that diversity and inclusion were overall not distinct from one another. When defining inclusion, the concepts that came up most frequently were the idea of including everyone, representativeness, and the removal of barriers. A couple of distinct ideas were (a) two participants noted that inclusion is more active and deliberate, (b) three highlighted that it is not about everyone having an opportunity and (c) one emphasized the need to consider power structures. When defining diversity, participants listed areas in which they would like to see diversity occurring as their definition. Differences in opinions, culture, and backgrounds were the most often mentioned. Other areas that were identified by participants included race, gender, age, ethnicities, social groups, socio-economic groups, lived experiences, occupations, lifestyles, users, and attitudes. A couple of participants emphasized the need to get people that are beyond those firmly in support or opposed to a decision. One highlighted that this diversity is essential, so it does not look like The City of Red Deer is "cherry picking" (Participant 307, personal communication, 2019). Another participant reflected on how decisions are made about the most important voices to hear from; "You're never going to get the full diversity in the public participation process, or you will never get it done so there are often decisions made about who

are the most important voices to hear from. Get the ones that really matter” (Participant 304, personal communication, 2019).

Participants were also asked about the considerations made for diversity and inclusion in public participation for their projects in 2018. Three participants indicated that while reaching out to diverse groups and thinking about barrier removal were identified during planning, it did not go further than initial identification or did not hit the mark, “I find the participation that we get is very average” (Participant 309, personal communication, 2019). Considerations for diversity and inclusion mentioned during the interviews included the time of day, venue for the event, compensation for participation, adding more visual content, and going to where potential participants already gathered. One project collected demographic information in their online survey to ensure they were reaching key groups. They indicated that this met with resistance. Participants also discussed thinking about what demographics were important and when not represented, trying to reach out in different ways.

All participants were asked if they felt that those interested or affected by their projects had the opportunity to provide input. Nine of the participants indicated that they did believe there was an opportunity for anyone interested or affected to participate. Three others said yes, but with disclaimers. For example, one said they had the opportunity but noted that it still did not lead to involvement. One participant stated, “not at all” and followed up by explaining “I would suggest that often I give up on the fight of some of those diversity lenses or some of those things because I feel like it's very baby steps and so maybe not pushing hard enough on reaching out” (Participant 312, personal communication, 2019). When asked about who the target stakeholders for their projects were, five said the entire community. Five specifically noted that taxpayers/property owners were their target because they are the ones most affected due to tax increases. Also, two indicated that their stakeholders were geographic (e.g., community boundary) and three mentioned interest-based (e.g., business sector).

4.4 Capacity Development

Woven throughout the interviews were comments that indicated the importance and need for capacity development to support public participation within The City of Red Deer. Two themes developed around the concept of capacity development:

- Fear and Uncertainty
- Shift in Organizational Capacity

Fear and Uncertainty

Ten participants indicated they were apprehensive about public participation. Some were fearful of emotional safety and outrage when consulting with the public especially on contentious issues. Three reported that the unknown created fear and said that they were worried about not knowing what to do or say. Participants had mixed feelings about public participation with noting risks such as unintended consequences, creating more problems, and the amount of work for the results. For example, “If the issue is sensitive, complex the experience can be, if it’s not done sensitively, a divisive challenging process and could be something that harms the social fabric of

the community” (Participant 314, personal communication, 2019). Two suggested they felt it was better to avoid public participation when it is not authentic. Aside from general apprehension about public participation, there was a lack of confidence in participants own skills and abilities. Four emphasized that they did not feel that they had the training and experience to be confident in their skills and knowledge in public participation. Though, one participant mentioned that public participation planning on their project in 2018 helped build their confidence and lessen their anxiety.

Shift in Organizational Capacity

Throughout 2018 a full-time temporary Public Participation Coordinator worked for The City of Red Deer within Communications. Five participants noted that this position made a difference within the organization in terms of capacity growth and specifically mentioned improvements to policy, training, and public participation planning as a direct result of this position.

4.5 Other Notable Themes

Throughout the interviews a few distinct concepts developed. While they did not fit into one of the previously themes, they were mentioned frequently and therefore are highlighted within the findings. These include:

- Concept of Neutrality
- Concept of Right

Concept of Neutrality

In different contexts and as a response to various questions within the interviews, the idea of needing to create neutrality developed. Neutrality was discussed most frequently regarding individuals interacting with the public and the spaces chosen to hold participation activities. One participant talked about a past participation event and bringing in neutral experts, “They brought experts in and had an expert panel. They were from other places, so they were neutral” (Participant 308, personal communication, 2019). One staff member felt that they could not convey their interests on a matter when interacting with the public and two others explained that a third-party facilitator was needed because they were neutral and didn’t have the same relationships or stake in the outcome. Three others highlighted the need to find neutral spaces for participation activities such as this comment from one participant, “got to find neutral places to have those conversations is really important” (Participant 313, personal communication, 2019).

Concept of Right

The idea of “right” was repeatedly added as a qualifier to various concepts discussed. These included the right place, right time, right people, right questions, the right way, and the morality of doing the right thing. These were often discussed as hard to identify but important to achieve. The right time was defined by one participant as before decisions are made so the public can still have influence.

4.6 Summary Current State – Interviews

Fulsome discussions during the interviews helped developed a good understanding of the current context for The City of Red Deer regarding public participation planning. There are many strengths, and successes noted including the staff’s passion for public work, desire to improve processes, and successful inter-departmental collaboration. Enhanced capacity development was noted for 2018 due, in part, to having a dedicated public participation coordinator and training opportunities. A unified understanding of what public participation is and what the process involves is still elusive. The findings also show that while the desire to improve planning and processes is there, several barriers are preventing meaningful and inclusive participation.

Currently, a lack of role clarity between Administration and Council around decision-making and participation roles in initiatives exists. Project teams and Communications are also experiencing tension in determining which area holds responsibility for public participation planning. The findings demonstrate that there are mixed feelings about public participation from fear and uncertainty to feeling it is important and needed.

Diversity and inclusion were challenging for the staff to distinguish and define. Interviewees acknowledged that most considerations for diversity and inclusion did not move past initial identification. The concepts of neutrality and doing what is right were also mentioned several times by participants and therefore are highlighted in the findings.

The next section continues to build current state understanding though the review of secondary data.

5.0 Findings: Current State – Secondary Data

Internal and external materials related to public participation approaches helped to enhance the understanding of current state when paired with the interviews. A total of 103 documents were provided by The City of Red Deer staff. These included the following documents:

- planning documents
- email correspondence
- promotion of public participation opportunities
- display boards at events, survey questions,
- reports
- design drawings
- news articles

In addition to these documents, the researcher reviewed publicly available information including news releases, council reports, and web content. Material was sorted by stage in the public participation process rather than by project; for example, planning documents, implementation materials, and reporting. There were no evaluation documents provided so this was not a category created. All the documents were reviewed for content based on key ideas from the literature review (see table 3). The discussion on the planning documents is more comprehensive than subsequent sections.

5.1 Planning Documents

In total, 3 projects provided planning documents for review. These included an RFP, public participation plans, a term of reference, and event plans. Examples of what was looked for in the planning documents include: participation plans essential components identified in the literature review such as context and stakeholder identification, consistency of planning, and assessment of need and extent for public participation.

The RFP outlined the need for the consultant to develop a public participation plan that included: research, issue statement, public participation goals and objectives, audience analysis, scope, level of influence, and a plan to share information during and after. A list of groups that may be included in consultation as well as the requirement for IAP2 principles to be upheld during design and implementation. The RFP also discussed analysis and factoring input into recommendations.

Of the public participation plans provided, two were in a similar template. All three documents included a project description, public participation outcomes, evaluation, the decision weave (see Figure 1), indication of level on the spectrum, and a timeline or ‘critical path’. None of the plans provided specifically identified why the input from the public was valuable to the decision or project. The evaluation for all three involved collecting anecdotal feedback from participants, media coverage, and results or actions of Council. One of the plans identified stakeholders and the rationale for why they were a stakeholder and tactics to reach specific groups. The rationale was in relation to their influence on the project. Certain groups were specifically identified because they were not likely to participate in other tactics and so require their own. The other

two plans did not identify stakeholders. All documents discuss enhanced approaches for key stakeholders. Two plans included a budget and identified one decision with Council listed as the decision-maker; however, the other plan also had Administration as the decision-maker for recommendations.

In two of the public participation plans, the level of influence of the public was indicated on a spectrum (Table 5) with a description of activities in each.

Table 4: The City of Red Deer’s P2 Plan Level of Involvement Selection

LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT:	This process predominantly fits in				
	Information Sharing	Input		Engagement	
	• Sharing information to build awareness	• Testing ideas or concepts to build knowledge	• Collaborating to develop solutions to build commitment	• Sharing decision making to build ownership	• Delegating decision making to build responsibility

Event plans included information such as date, time, location, material, elements, agenda, and room layout. One event plan from an external consultant did identify key stakeholder groups using a thematic approach but what stakeholders fell into those categories were not identified.

5.2 Implementation Materials

Implementation materials were any documents that were used in the active collection of input such as news releases, invitations to participate, display boards, and survey questions. Given the content provided, materials were reviewed for clear and transparent communication, understanding of the public’s level of influence, and types of techniques used, if noted.

The following are some key highlights:

- materials provided were generally text heavy and all with the exception of a couple projects were not at an elementary level
- level of influence was not indicated on any of the materials; however, a few did highlight how the input would be used (e.g. compiled in a report to Council)
- At open houses feedback was requested using sticky notes
- News releases published on The City of Red Deer website promoted opportunities to participate, gave an indication or what input was being collected, dates, times, and methods of participating such as public hearings, surveys, open houses, or mall drop-in.

5.3 Media Coverage

The media coverage provides insight into how The City of Red Deer is perceived and portrayed regarding their public participation efforts. The media reviewed were news articles. Overall, there was a neutral tone towards The City of Red Deer while one article did quote a resident that felt that the public participation “pitted neighbour against neighbour”. Other coverage included discussion of NIMBY (not in my backyard) mentality and highlighted negative social media posts about marginalized groups in Red Deer. The news coverage did mention when public input was used in a decision and promoted that The City of Red Deer wants to hear from residents.

5.4 Reporting

Reports were received from three projects. The reports were reviewed for indications of public’s influence on decisions, clear and transparent communication and commitment to keep the public informed, stakeholders involved, and equality of voice. The reports were very comprehensive in length and included detailed summaries of the input. They separated stakeholders to categorize their information. Two reports did not make any recommendations or have an executive summary. One project had a visual one page “What We Heard” document that summarized factors to consider, stakeholders involved, and stakeholder priorities. One report document was a compilation of emails and comments received with regards to a particular project. These reports, with the exception of the “What We Heard” document, appeared to be written for an internal audience and were not available online unless as an attachment to a Council report.

5.5 Summary Current State – Secondary Data

The documents provided show that planning is happening at fluctuating degrees and, in some cases, may not be happening at all. While a template appears to be available, plan content varied such as stakeholder or decision-maker identification. Promotional materials were generally text heavy and at a higher than grade 12 reading level. In addition, the material did not give an indication of the level of influence the public had on the decision. Overall, the media coverage from 2018 was positive and mentioned when input was used in decision-making processes. The reports were detailed summaries of the input collected through the participation process. Though, these reports did not appear to be public facing or easily accessible.

The following section looks are the interview findings for future desired state.

6.0 Findings: Future Desired State – Interviews

During the interview participants were asked two questions to gain insights and understand the future desired state of public participation within The City of Red Deer. The questions asked were about what success would look like and hopes for public participation in the future (Appendix A). The themes that developed came primarily from responses to these two questions; however, many participants highlighted hopes throughout the interview from identifying areas of growth to outcomes such as strong relationships with community. For those that partook in the interview, their vision for the future was generally consistent and clear themes emerged.

The main themes identified were:

- Strong Public Participation Processes
- Clarity
- Investment in Resources and Skills
- Inclusion

6.1 Strong Public Participation Processes

Several participants described the desire for stronger public participation processes. Their hopes focused on planning through to better evaluation and community outcomes. This theme is the largest and therefore is divided by stages as follows:

- Planning/ Design
- Implementation
- Post-implementation
- Outcomes/ General

Planning/ Design

Seven participants emphasized the importance of strong planning. These participants want participation activities considered and planned for early in the process and to start by asking if public participation is needed at all. Three would like to see Communications brought into the planning early and highlighted the need to have a sense of shared responsibility so that staff are on the same page with the public participation approach. One participant discussed the desire to have candid conversations internally to get to the space of shared responsibility. Another participant noted the importance of having foundational pieces (e.g., stakeholders, context, and level of influence) established before selection of tactics. In summary, participants indicated a desire for public participation to be well planned and strategic.

Implementation

During input collection, four participants felt that the public feeling heard and as though their time and perspectives were valued was an indicator of success. One participant stressed the need

for positive interactions between the public and Administration and to be able to have conversations that are emotionally safe. A few participants hope to continue to utilize different approaches to reach diverse audiences/ groups. Linked with creativity is the ability to fail; one participant emphasized the importance of trying new things and then seeing what works and what doesn't. Ensuring that the processes are coordinated with other public participation projects within The City of Red Deer was also brought up by a participant who also mentioned they hope The City of Red Deer is strategic about how they connect with people. Lastly, the ability to be flexible and adaptable was also highlighted by eight the participants.

Post-implementation

Participants stressed the importance of using the information collected from the public to improve decision-making. Comments focused on the value placed on input collected and how it is used. Eleven participants hoped that the public participation enhances decision-making and that the organization purposefully uses information. One participant reinforced the importance of validation and hopes to see a strong validation process in the future. Lastly, a couple participants would like to see a balance created between process and product. For example, creating a strong report for decision-makers that helps enhance decisions was mentioned.

Outcomes/ General

The idea of a 'check in the box' exercise was brought up by eight participants throughout the interviews both in discussing what they currently see but also what they aspire to move away from. A few quotes from the interviews help illustrate what is meant by a 'check in the box' approach:

- "No response is a good thing. You've given the opportunity...and we carry on." (Participant 301, personal communication, 2019)
- "If 12 people show up, 12 people show up. It means nobody cares." (Participant 304, personal communication, 2019)
- "We want to know what we are going to do and then go out and make sure the public is okay with that." (Participant 306, personal communication, 2019)
- "A lack of connectedness to a decision because it's just a check in the box so often when people are being asked to influence something we don't even necessarily question why." (Participant 312, personal communication, 2019)

Participant's demonstrated desire to move away from the 'check in the box' sentiments or the feeling that they are doing public participation without intention. Connected to this, two hope that public participation is embedded in corporate processes at all levels from the staff and leadership responsible for a particular project through to strong policy and procedures in place.

Five highlighted the need for shared understanding and responsibility within the organization. Specifically, a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities was emphasized. A few participants hope that public participation processes strengthen relationships and trust with the community.

6.2 Clarity

Five interviewees stated that clarity of intent and commitment to the public are needed to ensure there is meaningful participation. They hoped public participation is more purposeful and deliberate to ensure input is linked with decision-making and the public's level of influence. They hope that enhanced clarity leads to better question development and for the public to understand how and to what extent they can participate. Four participants hoped that the process becomes more transparent and open (e.g. keeping the public informed and consistently reporting back to the public how their input influenced the decision(s)).

6.3 Investment in Resources and Skills

All participants expressed a desire for The City of Red Deer to invest more into resources to support strong public participation and discussed the hope of better capacity within the organization in several areas. This section is divided into three themes that developed through the interviews:

- Investment in Resources
- Capacity Development
- Inclusion

Investment in Resources

Investment in resources was mentioned in terms of time, money, expertise, energy, and dedicated public participation position(s). Eight interviewees indicated that they want to see public participation realistically resourced based on the size and scope of the project and for leadership and Council to understand the realities of the time and energy needed to ensure effective participation approaches. Seven participants also discussed the need for investment in public participation practitioners that are internal to the organization. They see these position(s) as supporting the integrity of public participation even when outside consultants are involved. While there is desire that in the short-term there can be at least one position, participants hope that more positions are created long-term to ensure sustainability and comprehensive support to the organization.

Capacity Development

Five participants discussed the importance and vision for strong organizational capacity. When discussing their hopes for the future, capacity development mainly focused on soft-skills such as better communication, connection, and people skills. In addition, there was a desire to have staff with IAP2 training at all levels of the organization with a participant specifically discussing training for project managers. One participant also wants the organization as a whole to be open to evaluation, self-reflection, and continued learning and growth (e.g. looking at what voices are missing and conscious of perceived barriers to participation).

Inclusion

While a significant number of participants did not bring up the idea of inclusion directly in their interview with regards to future desired state, given the topic of this research what was mentioned is highlighted. In general, all participants brought forward the need for public participation to be inclusive to some degree though few went further than the general idea of the importance of inclusion. Five participants emphasized the need to remove barriers in future participation activities. One participant emphasized the value of recognizing diversity within groups while another hopes that all viewpoints are heard. The need to have strategic conversations during stakeholder analysis from an inclusive lens was also brought up by one participant, “it’s about having a common practice to look at how we can be inclusive in that process” (Participant 305, personal communication, 2019). As well, three participants identified their hope for public participation activities to be accessible.

6.4 Summary Future State – Interview

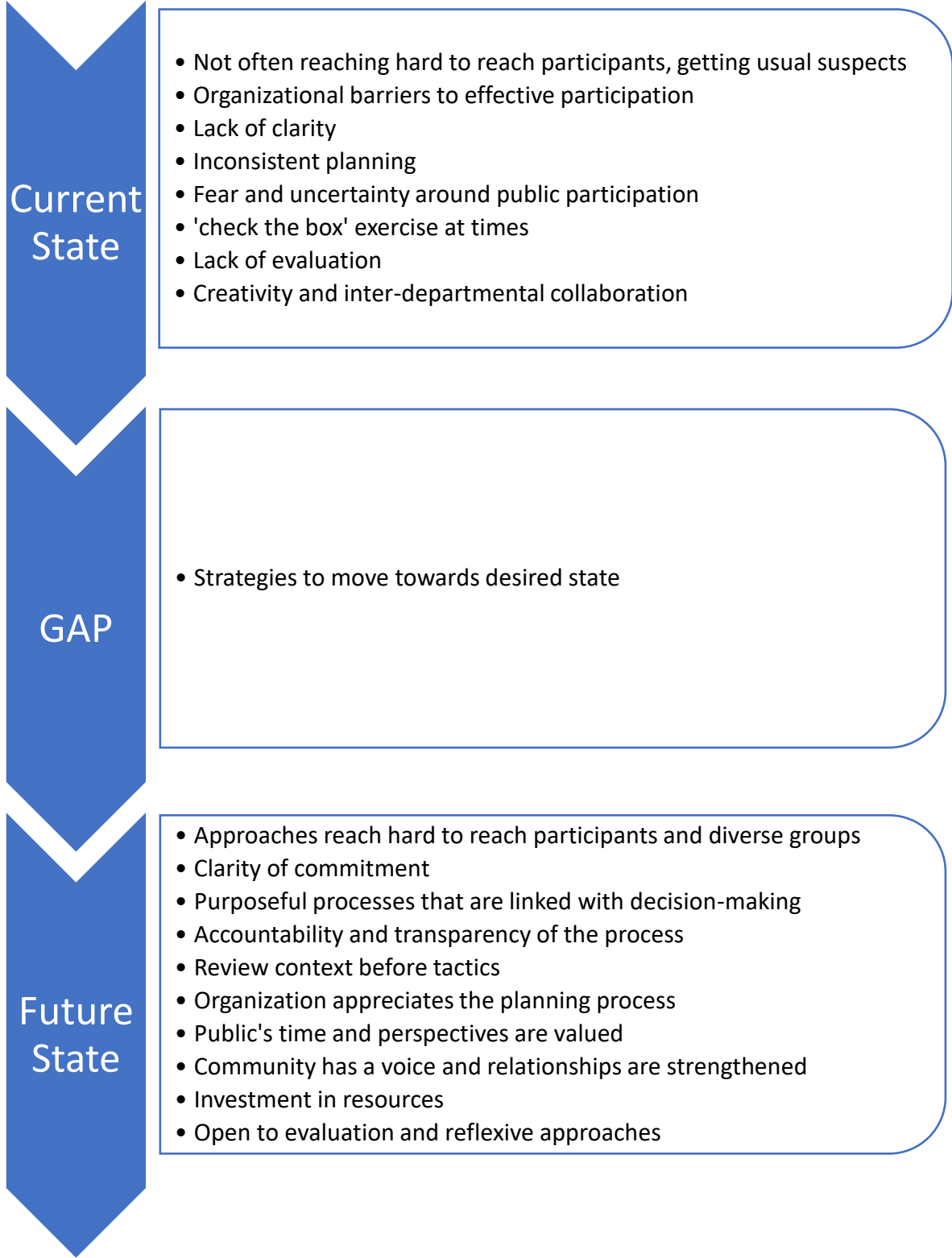
The interviews created a strong vision for the future with clear themes developing. Participants want clarity of intent, commitment to the public, and a defined link with decision making. They hope that this leads to better question development and the public understanding how they can participate. Participants also want transparency, openness, and strong approaches including purposeful and strategic planning. Within the public participation processes they also hope there is creativity, positive interactions with the public, organizational coordination, and not a ‘check in the box’.

Investment in resources and skills was also highlighted by participants and included time, money, expertise, energy, and human resources. The hope is that these investments lead to projects being realistically resourced for success. The need for dedicated public participation professionals was emphasized several times. In addition, there is a desire for capacity development of soft-skills and more openness to evaluation, self-reflection, and for continued learning. While it was not mentioned frequently, the hopes for inclusion were also showcased and include the importance of inclusive processes, recognizing diversity in groups, and analysing stakeholders through an inclusive lens.

A summary table on the next page compares the current state and future state findings.

6.5 Findings Comparison

Figure 6: Summary Comparison Future and Current State



7.0 Discussion and Analysis

The purpose of this section is to link findings with the literature review with the overall purpose of answering the primary and secondary research questions. The first section of this chapter is a SWOT analysis that identifies, based on the current state and the stated future desired state, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to reaching the desired state with a focus on enhancing public participation planning. The following section sheds light on what is needed to foster diverse and inclusive participation. The last section looks at considerations such as limitations and suggested further research.

7.1 Enhancing Public Participation Planning

The findings provide a strong picture of both the current organizational context within The City of Red Deer as well as the direction the organization would like to move with its public participation processes. While the research concentrates on the planning phase, the entire public participation process is interconnected and relies on the foundation of strong planning (Bryson et al., 2013; Creighton, 2005; IAP2, 2016) and organizational capacity (Morgan, 2005).

Given this, the SWOT analysis focuses on the planning phase as well as capacity development.

Strengths

The City of Red Deer has many strengths that support reaching their future desired state. Creighton (2005) argues that effective participation requires the use of multiple techniques to involve citizens (p.21-24). The City of Red Deer has demonstrated a willingness to be creative and try new approaches. In 2018 alone, 19 different techniques for involving the public were identified. In addition, all projects reviewed utilized two or more techniques for involving the public. In the literature, several authors contend that traditional methods typically encourage “usual suspects” (Barnes, Newman; Knops & Sullivan, 2003; Fung, 2015; Lerner, 2014; May, 2006; Nabatchi, 2012). Therefore, continuing to foster an environment that allows for the use of multiple and innovative methods supports the involvement of diverse groups, which is especially true when thoughtful consideration is made for approaches and techniques that work best for stakeholders identified as interested or affected (Bryson et al., 2013).

The findings also uncovered success through the implementation of training opportunities, specifically pertaining to IAP2. Successes mentioned include increased interest in undertaking planning activities and stronger links with decision-making. Graham and Phillips (1998) emphasize the need for training and experience to support effective processes. Commitment at all levels within the organization is also required (IAP2, 2016). Therefore, continuing to offer training to staff at all levels within the organization helps improve processes. Given some of the findings such as fear of challenging/ emotionally charged conversations and hope of more inclusive processes, training could expand to include complimentary topics such as conflict resolution, social justice issues (e.g., gender-based analysis (GBA+)), and facilitation.

The inter-departmental collaboration utilized for some projects in 2018 is a significant asset to The City of Red Deer. The positive experiences relayed through the interviews serve to reinforce

the benefits of working collaboratively such as improving efficiency and leveraging expertise from different groups. The invaluable contribution of the Communications team on projects, as mentioned during interviews, illustrates the importance of involving Communications early process to support enhanced planning and better project resource allocation.

These strengths serve to outline leverage points (Foster-Fishman, Nowell & Yang, 2007) that support attaining future goals. Continuing to foster collaboration, provide training opportunities, and using creative or multiple techniques in a process helps enhanced public participation.

Weaknesses

While it is essential to discuss what is helping get to the desired state, it is also necessary to look at what is also preventing The City of Red Deer from achieving their goals. The interviews uncovered several organizational barriers that are thwarting meaningful public participation during all stages, including planning. The top three barriers identified in the interviews were timelines, resources, and capacity of Communications. Smith (2009) argues that public participation often is done because it is expected in tight timeframes and without proper resources, support, and professional expertise (p.19). As well, several authors highlight the lack of time or resources as primary factors that stop effective participation (Graham & Philips, 1998; Juarez & Brown, 2008; Rowe & Frewer, 2000) and Creighton (2005) argues that projects with effective participation save time during implementation. The City of Red Deer has limited resources, like many municipalities (Fung, 2015), and therefore must establish methods that anticipate costs and resource requirements and use this to determine the scope and scale of public participation initiatives. For The City of Red Deer to enhance their processes, the organization needs to recognize that public participation takes time and energy and create strategies to allocate best the resources and time they have, add additional resources and longer timelines, or a combination of both.

The current state findings also highlight that there is a lack of clarity on the commitment to the public and the purpose of public participation activities. The key reasons for the IAP2 spectrum are clarity of how input influences decision(s) and to gain internal commitment (IAP2, 2016). The adapted spectrum The City of Red Deer is using is likely contributing to confusion as to the definitions of each level, and their coinciding commitments are subtly, but significantly, modified from the original IAP2 spectrum. The input and engagement zones on the adapted spectrum further misunderstanding as these zones are not clearly defined and the terminology, such as engagement, is used interchangeably. In addition to the spectrum, there was a lack of shared understanding around other topics such as public participation versus public engagement, and diversity and inclusion. Revising The City of Red Deer spectrum to better align with IAP2 definitions and removing the zones or defining them supports shared language and understanding. A public participation policy with clearly defined terminology and a complimentary process guide would also benefit the organization.

While The City of Red Deer utilized many methods for collecting input in 2018, the findings demonstrated that a majority of methods continued to be short-term and/or one-on-one interactions, such as open houses, interviews, intercept surveys, and online surveys. The interviews also revealed that many considered the tactic, such as an open house or a survey, as

the focus rather than seeing public participation as an ongoing approach. Walker (2014) and Graham and Philips (1998) characterize short-term, individual, and transactional methods as poor participation and Bherer, Gauthier, and Simard (2017) contend that often the focus is wrongly placed on events over the level of influence of the public (p.8). Creating more balanced approaches based on the specific context of the project supports diverse participation by considering the public's level of influence and finding tactics that align to the level of involvement (Hurlbert & Gupta, 2015). In other words, when the level of influence is minimal, the energy required from the public to provide input should also be minimal.

Opportunities

This section explores ideas that The City of Red Deer can implement to lessen the gap between their current state and future desired state.

The interviews demonstrated participant's willingness to be self-reflexive and improve their public participation approaches; however, The City of Red Deer is currently lacking evaluation measures and collection of information that support reflexive practice and continued learning. One project collected demographic information but, at the time of the interview, it was unclear how that data was utilized. Collecting demographic information is powerful and highlights groups that are missing or over-represented. Yet, requesting information can be contentious and needs clearly defined boundaries and purpose for use. In the public participation plans provided, evaluation measures included collecting anecdotal feedback from participants, media coverage, and the results or actions of the Council. Rowe and Frewer (2000) created a guide to assess effectiveness through the evaluation of two categories: acceptance and process criteria. Using these criteria, The City of Red Deer can identify and plan for the collection of crucial information to support evaluation. The data collected would inform discussion during a project debrief/ a lessons learned report.

Several authors contend that planning is essential for meaningful public participation (Bherer, Gauthier & Simard, 2017; Bryson, 2004; Bryson et al., 2013; Thomas, 1995; Quick & Feldman, 2011). Two methods for determining whether to implement public participation for a specific project are establishing if decisions are technical or value-based (Creighton, 2005) and the level of acceptability versus quality required (Thomas, 1995). As there are often more than one decision or decision-maker throughout a project, developing a decision map is beneficial. Preliminary planning to decide to move forward with public participation and to estimate the extent resources are needed is an essential first step to add to current processes.

It is clear from the literature that public participation is highly context dependent. Bryson et al. (2013) distinguished between general context (external) and specific context (internal) and note that assessment of both during planning is integral to determining the scope and scale of initiatives. While the dependence on context makes it difficult to standardize across projects, frameworks for public participation plans can establish a flexible structure while matching the complexity of the project with realistic resource allocation. Also, because context is integral, including internal and external contextual information to the public participation plans is a valuable addition.

Clark (2018) and Nabatchi (2012) discuss the need for intentional planning for inclusive public participation. Public participation plans can include components that assist with the removal of physical and social barriers and amplify marginalized voices before, during, and after implementation. Examples of ways diversity and inclusion could be addressed in planning include considerations for the formality of the activity (Juarez & Brown, 2008), planning for equality of voice and presence (Smith, 2009), and reviewing potential spaces from a lens of non-neutrality (Butler & Adamowski, 2015).

Suggested additions to a public participation plan framework include:

- Stakeholder map (Bryson, 2004); include known or predicted affects and interests of stakeholders, social and physical barrier identification, and action-orientated mitigation strategies
- Social, political, or demographic information (e.g. neighbourhood census data)
- Detailed estimate of staff time, cost, and resources required
- Data analysis methods
- Public participation objectives (IAP2, 2016).

During the planning phase, the entire public participation process can be mapped out including analysis methods and reporting. Adding these components to public participation plans allows individuals to think of the process in its entirety and beyond implementation. Given reporting is an integral piece for building public trust (Bryson, 2004) including a strategy for informing the public about how input influenced decisions is essential. Therefore, enhancing report mechanisms and Administration accountability builds momentum and trust leading to increased participation overtime (Mannarini, Fedi & Trippetti, 2010).

Threats

There are also risks that can threaten the ability to achieve the desired state. This section outlines some of those risks.

Effective participation planning relies on the involvement of public participation professionals (Creighton, 2005; IAP2, 2016; Bherer, Gauthier, & Simard, 2017). While, for local governments, this often includes contracting consultants, Bherer, Gauthier, & Simard (2017) emphasize the importance of having internal staff that support the design and evaluation of participatory processes and maintain integrity and continuity across the organization (p.4). The findings also showcase the value that a dedicated public professional had on capacity development within the organization with noted improvement to understanding, planning, processes, and policy development in 2018. This position was temporary, and consequently, there is a gap in which the organization has been without a dedicated resource. While a new position will be posted, the need for permanency is also vital to consider as this position must build trust, foster internal and external relationships, and create strategic plans that go beyond a one-year investment. As well, with temporary positions, there is an increased risk of vacancy and early exits from positions.

There is a push/pull relationship with regards to responsibility for public participation approaches between project teams and Communications. The project manager has an integral role in public participation planning; however, several other individuals within the organization play significant roles including leadership and public participation and communications professionals (Bherer, Gauthier & Simard, 2017; Creighton, 2005; IAP2, 2016; Graham & Philips, 1998). Both diffused and/or centralized responsibility can prevent effective public participation and as such participation needs to be shared throughout the organization and between departments involved in the public participation initiative (IAP2, 2016). A terms of reference agreement can assist in creating clarity around roles and responsibilities for projects and ensure that project teams' connection to the planning process.

Many participants expressed fear and uncertainty concerning public participation. These feelings are not unfounded as there are inherent risks associated with poor public participation (Masuda, McGee & Garvin, 2008). While The City of Red Deer has many strengths, there are examples in the findings of processes that are potentially harming more than benefiting (e.g., validation as a level on the spectrum, lack of adequate resources, lack of clarity on the purpose of public participation, and reinforcing power imbalances). Continuing in the current state jeopardizes relationships with the community and negates positive steps in other areas. Fortunately, many of these practices are mitigated through strengthened planning.

In summary, significant threats to achieving the organization's goals include the lack of internal permanent public participation professionals, insufficient role clarity, and continuing aspects that constitute poor public participation with a key one being implementing public participation without adequate planning.

7.2 Fostering Diverse and Inclusive Participation

This section seeks to answer the secondary question: how can The City of Red Deer plan public participation to foster diverse and inclusive participation? This topic also became broader as the need to consider capacity development emerged. Thus, this section will answer the original research question and discuss capacity pieces that further support diversity and inclusion.

Two concepts that uncovered through the interview findings were the concepts of validating and representativeness. The interviews revealed that, for some projects, there was an additional step added of validating what was heard which presents a risk of erasing marginalized voices (Butler & Adamowski, 2015). Already the usual suspects involved in public participation tend to be those that care deeply about an issue, are wealthy, educated, and professional (Fung, 2015). These same risks exist with the concept of representativeness which in the findings were two-fold: (a) an individual or organization speaking for an entire group (b) the information collected reflecting the perspectives of the population of Red Deer. Thomas (1995) notes that non-representative groups are often involved in public participation and May (2006) claims that given the numbers required to participate any claim of representativeness is futile (p.314). Thus, the concepts and actions of validating and seeking representativeness augment privileged groups and individuals influence on a decision and weakens unique or marginalized perspectives. An important consideration for The City of Red Deer is assessing how their approaches are empowering the already empowered (Clark, 2018; Juarez & Brown, 2008; Nabatchi, 2012;

Shortall, 2008; Smith, 2009). Other examples of areas to explore and challenge within the context of power dynamics include equality of voice and presence (Smith, 2009), staff and Council and participants, concepts of neutrality, equity versus equality, and what views and stakeholders are considered most important and why.

Bednar (1977) and Bishop (2015) illustrate the need for allies that create awareness of barriers and work to remove them. The City of Red Deer has allies and advocates within the organization. During the interviews, allies discussed getting worn down and highlighted organizational and personal barriers that prevent them from advancing inclusive approaches to public participation. Creating an inter-departmental community of practice can foster renewed and sustained energy and also improve capacity through mutual learning and growth. Topics that can focus on inclusive practices include barrier removal for marginalized groups, representation, power dynamics, and successes in public participation.

The removal of barriers for one group improves the experience for others (Bednar, 1977). Examples of this principle are the use of accessible language and gender inclusive washrooms. Using clear, concise, and elementary level writing removes barriers for youth, seniors, low-literacy and ESL individuals, and makes content easier to comprehend quickly for high-literacy folks. Gender inclusive washrooms remove barriers for transgender, gender-fluid, and non-binary persons, parents with young children, and improves accessibility for individuals with mobility issues. The following image (Figure 7) also illustrates this concept. Barriers were considered during public participation planning such as wheelchair access, transportation to the event, and childcare. In addition to those identified, the literature uncovered social barriers that exist as well. While the list of barriers can be daunting, considering specific groups that are interested and affected by a decision on a particular project during the planning phase and identifying action plans to remove barriers is a valuable planning component. In addition, working on the removal of 2 – 3 barriers that improve the overall public participation experience across projects, while considering organizational constraints, is a manageable goal.

Figure 7: Cartoon Illustration of Barrier Removal Improving Conditions for Everyone (Giangregco, 2002)



Juarez and Brown (2008) point out that an essential component of building inclusive approaches is developing an understanding of marginalized groups in the community and learning how best to engage them, which requires a consistent relationship building approach with marginalized communities. While relationship building can happen with projects, having internal staff that focus on long-term participation and relationships with marginalized communities strengthens understanding of biases and barriers that are preventing their participation, build trust, improve diversity, and empower groups to have a say in the process. Hence, including this as a focus for dedicated public participation professionals is ideal.

7.3 Limitations and Further Research

Council and Administration Role Clarity

The findings revealed that Council and Administration could enhance clarity regarding public participation roles and responsibilities. This project focused on Administration, and therefore governance between Council and Administration is beyond the scope. That being said, the ability of Administration to apply learnings from this report and enhance public participation processes is dependent on Council. The City of Red Deer recently passed a Council policy regarding public

relations and participation as well as a public participation policy for Administration. Approval of the Administration policy happened after the collection of data for this project. It is worth exploring in the future if these policies clarified roles and if any other governance components between Council and Administration are needed.

Smart Practices in Public Participation

The formalized work of public participation within municipalities is still new and emerging. As previously outlined, a smart practices scan was attempted for this research project. One municipality submitted internal documents, and an external scan was also conducted with municipalities across Canada which did not produce readily available public participation planning documents. Consequently, the smart practices scan was removed from the findings and analysis for this project and the research question remains unanswered. It is still an interesting and beneficial topic for further research especially in a few years as more municipalities establish smart practices and learnings.

Collection of Demographic Information

The collection of demographic information during public participation activities is beneficial for reflexive practice. Though, as cautioned, this needs to be done with sensitivity, clear boundaries, and purpose. Further research is required to look into the ethics and best approaches for collecting and analysing this information as well as define the purpose, appropriate language, and an implementation plan for the organization.

7.4 Summary

This discussion linked the findings with the literature review to establish knowledge within the context of The City of Red Deer. Through the development of a SWOT analysis, the findings demonstrated areas of strength, growth, gaps, and risks to get to their future desired state as well as strategies that can be implemented or added to existing processes to support meaningful participation. In addition to the SWOT analysis, considerations to foster diverse and inclusive participation were also explored. These considerations focused on the themes of uncovering biases and norms that are preventing the involvement of marginalized groups, barrier removal, and relationship building and highlight potential strategies for The City of Red Deer. Lastly, topics requiring further research include Council and Administration roles with regards to public participation, smart practices, and collection of demographic information.

8.0 Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

The discussion section aimed to answer primary and secondary research questions. Through the discussion potential strategies were identified. This section makes recommendations based on the suggested approaches to foster meaning public participation within The City of Red Deer and provide further details including the rationale for the recommendation.

These recommendations are grounded in the context of The City of Red Deer, and therefore capacity is taken into consideration; however, some recommendations need additional resources and require The City of Red Deer to assess the cost/ benefit of implementing the recommendation.

The order of the recommendations is from most critical to least critical; however, this does not mean that they need to be implemented in linear order as some are easier than others and recommendations can be applied in tandem.

8.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Create at least one permanent public participation coordinator position.

A dedicated public participation practitioner is critical for the organization and to support the development and implementation of subsequent recommendations. Without dedicated public participation professionals, the ability to implement recommendations in this report is limited due to capacity constraints of Communications. While a temporary position can suffice in the interim, the ideal is that at least one permanent position is established to support resource sustainability. In the long run, the cost of a permanent position can save money other places in the organization including staff training and onboarding costs due to rehiring temporary positions, reduced consultant fees, and through strategic planning of organizational public participation initiatives. One position is essential; however, given the number of public participation initiatives in 2018 and the growing demand for municipalities to involve citizens in decision-making (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014), one position may not be sustainable and long-term planning must consider the need for additional resources not only to support initiatives but to augment organizational capacity and foster diversity and inclusion.

Suggested timeline:

- Short-term (0 – 3 months): Hire a temporary public participation position.
- Mid-term (6 – 18 months): Create one permanent position.
- Long-term (12 months – 2 years): Develop business cases for additional dedicated public participation positions as needed.

Recommendation 2: Develop a public participation plan framework.

The importance and benefits of public participation plans are emphasised in the literature and reinforced within this report. Thus, ensuring the development of public participation plans for each project is considered a smart practice and a foundational piece to ensuring meaningful participation. The reason that a framework is being proposed rather than a public participation plan template is to allow documents to range in look and content depending on the complexity and the internal and external context. A framework also better matches resource and timeline realities than a template does. This framework outlines components that all plans need to include as well as supplementary (non-required) sections based on complexity and project need (see Appendix B for a sample framework).

Suggested timeline:

- Short-term (3-8 months): Draft and approve a public participation plan framework.
- Mid-term (8 – 12 months): Test with a few projects ranging in complexity.
- Long-term (12– 18 months): Revise/ add clarity based on feedback and implement across the organization.

Recommendation 3: Develop and implement a process guide for public participation planning and a roles and responsibilities terms of reference (TOR) template.

The City of Red Deer would benefit from looking strategically at major projects to identify collaboration points and evaluate resource allocation based on the context of projects. Communications, as a key link across the organization, needs awareness of projects early in the process. A process guide supports early notification and understanding of other primary public participation planning milestones.

Suggested milestones include:

- Notification of new project or initiative to relevant departments
- Assessment meeting to determine the need and potential scope of public participation
- Drafting a roles and responsibilities term of reference
- Development of a public participation plan
- Review and approval of the plan
- Development of additional materials – event plans, facilitation plans, questions, promotion, etc.
- Implementation
- Review, revise, or draft future stages based on the evaluation of the previous stage
- Repeat the cycle for new projects.

The development of a TOR template to outline roles and responsibilities is essential to ensure shared ownership without diffused responsibility. Given the contextual nature of public participation, this role clarity needs to occur on a case-by-case basis considering the capacity of the project team, consultant support, the complexity of a project/ decisions, potential risk, and capacity of the Communications department.

Suggested timeline:

- Short-term (8 - 12 months): Develop a planning processes guide and TOR template.
- Mid-term (12 – 18 months): Approve and disseminate the guide.
- Long-term (18 months +): Use the process guide and TOR. Modify/ update as required.

Recommendation 4: Implement an annual public participation strategic plan.

Developing an annual strategic plan for public participation activities helps Communications and the organization forecast resource needs as well as pinch points and efficiency/ collaboration opportunities. While not all projects are established at the time of planning, there are some annual and high-profile projects that would be known. Therefore, having an annual strategic plan mitigates capacity issues by ensuring proper resourcing (e.g. determining whether a consultant is needed).

Suggested timeline:

- Short-term (6 – 12 months): Do an environmental scan for projects and develop a timeline through the year of the projects and their estimated resource requirements.
- Ongoing: Update throughout the year to track gaps, repeat on an annual basis.

Recommendation 5: Consider the development of an organizational public participation training plan and/or a mentorship program.

IAP2 training opportunities are beneficial for improving capacity and understanding throughout the organization as the findings highlighted that investing in training for staff at all levels supported strengthened public participation approaches. That being said, public participation requires a dynamic set of skills including facilitation, conflict resolution, communication, and data analysis and evaluation. When considering diversity and inclusion people with a social justice lens are also an asset. While a single individual does not need to have all of these skills, a balanced public participation team does. Therefore, having opportunities to take courses to develop foundational understanding in IAP2 as well as skills to support strong processes builds capacity throughout the organization and help to breakdown some of the fear and uncertainty.

With an understanding that training is costly, an alternative would be the development of a mentorship program in which staff with experience and specific skills can meet with someone looking to develop those skills to discuss, practice, or observe on an ongoing or one-time basis.

This recommendation is given higher priority because of the leveraging power identified in the findings. A surge and investment and support for comprehensive training would result in the most gains in organizational capacity in the shortest time.

Suggested timeline:

- Short-term (3 – 12 months): Focus on foundational IAP2 training (including low cost options like free webinars).

- Mid-term (8 months – 18 months): Look for additional training opportunities and develop a training plan for proposed courses or develop the mentorship program.
- Long-term (18 months +): Continue offering IAP2 and other skill development courses where gaps are identified.

Recommendation 6: Identify 2 – 3 barriers to participation that improve the overall public participation experience across projects and set goals to remove them.

Often a high level of energy is spent on approaches for a specific group; however, as was noted removing barriers for one group can enhance the experience for the broader community of participants. Focusing energy on 2-3 barriers (physical or social) that all projects can remove enhances the general public and marginalized participant’s experiences and would be a quicker-win for the organization. Examples given in this report that would have a high return on investment are ensuring elementary reading-levels in participation materials and utilizing locations where gender-neutral washrooms are available.

Suggested timeline:

- Short-term (3-6 months): Identify 2-3 barriers with the goal to remove, reduce, or mitigate from public participation approaches. Use smart objectives to ensure the goal is achievable and measurable.
- Mid-term (6-18 months): Work to achieve the goals identified through planning for all projects in this timeframe.

Recommendation 7: Start an inclusive public participation community of practice.

A community of practice is “an organized group of professional people who share the same interests in resolving an issue, improving skills, and learning from one another” (Gonçalves, 2019). Distinct from the training opportunities in recommendation 5, the community of practice focuses on issues in diversity and inclusion within public participation such as barrier removal and power dynamics. Having a space for allies within the organization to connect, share ideas, learn, and reflect helps energize individuals in their work and support the development of public participation approaches that empower. The public participation coordinator would play a key role in bringing the community of practice together and sustaining it over time. The Municipal IAP2 Canada Network is an example of a community of practice.

Suggested Timeline:

- Mid-term (12 – 15 months): Decide on the timing and structural components of the community of practice (ex/ once a month over lunch or every two months for 1.5 hours during work hours; a meeting chair for a set term or rotating chairs).
- Long-term (15 months +): Invite interested staff to participate. During initial meetings develop mutual agreement on purpose, develop topics, ground rules, and co-create the format.

Recommendation 8: Focus on establishing mechanisms and approaches for ongoing relationship building with marginalized communities.

Building ongoing relationships with marginalized communities is beneficial for the organization and communities. The organization learns about barriers that they may not be aware of, gains a better understanding of language and customs, and can expand their social capital and network. The communities develop trust over time and are involved in a way that works for them and considers their unique needs. Earl (2008) discusses boundary partners as individuals, groups, or organizations in which there are mutual opportunities to influence one another. Earl (2008) goes on to highlight that boundary partners increase an organization's spheres of influence which means by focusing energy on developing relationships with marginalized groups the organization, over time, expands their reach and connects with additional individuals, groups and organizations that they would not otherwise access. An example of boundary partners are school boards and/ or school principals, as without a strong relationship with these groups/ individuals access to diverse young people is challenging or limited. Building relationships would be a beneficial role for a public participation coordinator. As resources are limited and the first year focuses internally on enhancing planning and capacity, this recommendation is suggested to start in a formal capacity after other recommendations are in place.

Suggested Timeline:

- Mid-term (18 months – 24 months): Develop a plan that identifies boundary partner individuals, groups, organizations as well as plan approaches for ongoing relationship building.
- Long-term (20 months +): Implement plan and revises as needed.

Recommendation 9: Conduct audit(s) by external organizations to assess how organizational rules, norms, and expectations are excluding certain citizens.

Often injustices are invisible and unconscious through societal, structural, and individual assumptions, practices, and norms (Baines, 2011; Bishop, 2015). Therefore, the first step to enhance diversity and inclusion in public participation is creating an awareness of ways the municipality is unintentionally excluding citizens. Examples of potential audits include a gender-based analysis, sexual and gender diverse safe spaces, accessibility, or decolonization. An audit, conducted by experts or groups connected to the focus of the audit, is essential. It is also necessary to consider the willingness and available resources to implement change as a result of the audit prior to conducting.

Suggested timeline:

- Mid-term (18 – 24 months): Identify 1 or 2 audits to conduct. Contract experts in that area/ field to conduct the audit which should include recommendations.
- Long-term (24 months +): Receive report from the audit, share with staff, and implement recommendations as able.

Recommendation 10: Revise the new public participation policy.

On January 17, 2019, The City of Red Deer approved an Administration Public Participation Policy (1104-CA). This policy is an excellent step towards a strong foundation in meaningful participation as it clarifies what public participation is, outlines public participation principles, the required use of identifying the level of influence on the adapted IAP2 spectrum, and role clarity. The IAP2 spectrum in this policy also removed inform to add further distinction. With the timing of this just being approved, the need to revise is the least critical of the recommendations. Though, as this policy is slated for review every three years or as needed there are still a few suggested modifications to this policy based on this research project.

These include:

- Revise the spectrum by removing input and engagement zones and create a promise statement for each level of how input will be used to create a clear distinction between levels.
- Build in accountability measures to the policy with the requirement of reporting to the public how input influenced the decision-making process at key decision points.
- Define “public” within the policy.

Suggest Timeline:

- Long-term (3+ years): Revise the next time the policy is up for revision or earlier if desired.

8.3 Summary

The recommendations in this section outline the steps The City of Red Deer can take to improve public participation planning to support the involvement of those most interested and affected. While not all recommendations pertain specifically to planning, the need for capacity development also emerged through this research, and therefore some recommendations are focused on this. The most critical recommendations are related to supporting strong public participation planning and capacity development. Diversity and inclusion are essential components especially considering public participation should empower; however, planning and capacity growth are cornerstone pieces that need to be in place before the organization expands to far into important but increasingly resource-intensive work of diversity and inclusion.

9.0 Conclusion

This report aimed to make recommendations to The City of Red Deer to improve public participation planning to support the involvement of individuals affected and interested in municipal decisions and promote diverse and inclusive processes. To address the research questions a literature review was conducted that created understanding of effective participation, planning for public participation in local government, and considerations for diverse and inclusive participation.

Data was collected to gain an understanding of the current state and context of public participation planning as well as the future desired state. Primary data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews, and secondary data was public participation documents provided by The City of Red Deer. A smart practices scan was also proposed initially but, due to a lack of data, did not produce any findings. The discussion brought together the findings and literature review to identify gaps through a SWOT analysis. Additional discussion focused on specific considerations for diversity and inclusion.

In total, ten recommendations are made and provide suggestions to the City of Red for enhancing public participation planning, organizational capacity development, and diversity and inclusion. These recommendations require varying degrees of resources such as time, staff expertise, and money and are meant to be specific but not overly prescriptive to allow The City of Red Deer to modify as is realistic within their organizational constraints. While ideally all recommendations are implemented, they all benefit public participation processes, and so The City of Red Deer can decide which recommendations are realistic and will have the most substantial effect on their organization.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

- 1) Can you tell me about your general experience to-date with public participation within The City of Red Deer?
- 2) With regards to public participation planning, what are some challenges you have experienced?
- 3) With regards to public participation planning, what are some strengths or successes you have experienced?
- 4) Can you tell me about your project/ program that implemented public participation in 2018?
 - a. Why was public participation needed?
 - b. Who were your target stakeholders? Why?
 - c. What was your process for determining the need and scale of public participation?
- 5) What does inclusive public participation mean to you?
 - a. Based on your definition, what considerations for inclusion were made while planning?
 - b. Why?
 - c. How was this planned for?
 - d. What was the result?
- 6) What does diversity mean to you?
 - a. Based on your definition, what considerations were made to diversity?
 - b. Why?
 - c. How was this planned for?
 - d. What was the result?
- 7) Was there planning consideration for reaching hard to reach participants? What was planned?
- 8) Do you feel that people interested and affected by this project/ program had an opportunity to share their input?
- 9) In your opinion, what role did planning play in the outcome of your public participation activities?
 - a. Would there be anything you would do differently with your planning?
 - b. Anything you would make sure to do again?
 - c. Overall what were your biggest lessons learned?
- 10) What would successful public participation look like to you?
- 11) What is your hope for what public participation will look like for The City of Red Deer in the future?

Appendix B: Sample Public Participation Plan Framework

Required:
Introduction: Background + Context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Description • External and Internal Context • Project timeline including participation activities and phases
Project Team and Support Roles & Responsibilities
Participation Needs and Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision Map – Map key decisions/ outline the overarching decisions, including who are the decision-makers for each. • Key opportunities collect public input from the public • Public’s level of influence for decisions/ project
Audiences and Stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic stakeholder map
Budget and Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Participation budget • Staffing requirements (skills +time)
Reporting and Evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation plan • Reporting plan (internal and external)
Internal Commitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and sign-off (project manager, Communications, and leadership)
Supplementary:
Introduction: Background + Context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWOT analysis/ risk assessment
Communications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication objectives • Key messages • Communication tactics • Reporting back to the public how input was used
Participation Objectives + Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision statements (IAP2, 2016) • Description of techniques
Audiences and Stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation barrier identification (physical and social) for the identified stakeholders • Strategies for barrier removal (describe using action words) • Outreach strategies • Power dynamics/ considerations
Phases & Timelines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline and plan time for the various phases including planning and design, implementation, analysis, reporting, and evaluation.

<p>Capacity Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal (Project team), organizational support, cost • External (Participants, audience, stakeholders)
<p>Data Sources, Management and Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will be sources of data for the project decisions (decision-weave) • How will public input/ data be collected • How will data be managed • How will data be analyzed
<p>Risks Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project complexity • Community/ stakeholders – degree that stakeholders are affected, stakeholder’s role in implementation
<p>Budget + Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity development required • Contracting/ procurement requirements

- Note this Framework is high-level and requires The City of Red Deer to add additional information such as descriptors or preferred tools (e.g., stakeholder mapping tools) to use.