

CHAPTER 1: Community Engagement Overview

Purpose of Community Engagement

The purpose of district community engagement is to ensure student-focused decisions are made while balancing multiple factors including, but not limited to, racial equity, budget, capacity management, and time constraints. The School Board and staff must weigh the multiple perspectives of the community against these real constraints and determine system level solutions that serve the majority of students well. The benefit of community engagement is that sustainability of decisions tends to endure when other factors, such as local knowledge and perspectives become part of the decision-making process. This toolkit was developed to support central office leaders, the board, and school leaders in engaging our community authentically and making better, more transparent system and school-level decisions.

Seattle Public Schools' Community Engagement Goals

- ✓ To improve district decisions by surfacing our communities' varied concerns and perspectives.
- ✓ To improve student outcomes.
- ✓ To improve the public's trust and satisfaction in Seattle Public Schools through more transparent engagement and communication.
- ✓ Facilitate understanding.
- ✓ Build sustainable and supported decisions for the school district.
- ✓ To keep racial equity front and center of district and school-level decisions.

SPS Community Engagement Guiding Principles

For true engagement to be realized, we must actively address institutional and structural racism. Authentic community engagement requires the sharing of power and intentional and targeted outreach to families and community who aren't currently engaged. Authentic community engagement is not just about making community members feel that they are part of the decision-making process; it actually involves them. This requires analyzing who is missing; who is most impacted; shifting where and how engagement is conducted; and if specific voices and perspectives are missing, extending and expanding the engagement process. In some situations, it may also mean weighting some voices more heavily to ensure fair and appropriate representation.

Below are seven guiding principles of authentic community engagement that have been prioritized by the Seattle School Board and staff. These principles will help community engagement designers and facilitators as they create their engagement and communication plans.

These principles were adapted from KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 10 principles of Authentic Community Engagement, www.kwfdn.org and recommended to Seattle Public Schools by the African American Male Advisory Committee.

PRIORITIZED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Involve all sectors of the impacted community including teachers and internal staff.

Important stakeholders come from all segments of the community, including parents, teachers, students, neighbors, businesses, community-based organizations, and others. Districts and schools perform best when all stakeholders are involved. Within your planning process, ensure the voices of all impacted stakeholders are represented.

Principle 2: Involve the community early in the planning and decision making process.

In order for community members to become educated on the subject at hand, and provide input and influence, they should be involved early in the planning and decision-making process.

Principle 3: Have a learning component that helps build community awareness and knowledge around the subject at hand.

Communities can make better decisions if they have access to current research and local information. In the planning process determine culturally relevant ways to share important, foundational information.

Principle 4: Utilize community partnerships and expertise.

Community-based organizations are often particularly well-suited to assist districts and schools in leading and facilitating the community engagement process due to their established credibility in a community and ability to engender trust. These organizations often understand a community's unique needs, aspirations, and context.

Principle 5: Employ clear, open, and consistent communication.

Districts, schools, their partnership community engagement organizations, and community members must be open and honest with each other in order to build the trust that is essential for this process. The goals and purposes of the initiative, and level of influence must be made clear to all and at the beginning of the engagement process. The engagement process, decision steps, meeting protocols, and commonly used language and terminology should be understood by all stakeholders.

Principle 6: Community engagement is driven by the aspirations that stakeholders hold for their future.

Authentic engagement should not be driven by the district or a school, but by the aspirations communities hold for their future. A community planning process should be informed by a community's values and aspirations. Ask the community what they value and what they are concerned about. You may find you are focused on the wrong problem or decision.

Principle 7: Ask the community to engage on important questions and acknowledge its views and contributions.

Authentic community engagement is not about getting a community to "buy-in" to a decision that has already been made; it is about soliciting community input to inform local decision-making. This is how the district and school can build trust. Critical to this principle is a feedback loop to the community. How and why their input was used and the decision was made needs to be shared back in a timely way.

Additional authentic community engagement practices to consider:

- **Offer opportunities for people to gather at convenient and comfortable locations at a variety of convenient times.** Work with community partners to host meetings in the community. Don't always ask community to come to the district or school. Integrate community engagement into pre-existing community meetings.
- **Ensure engagement consists of more than one meeting and includes time in the process to make informed decisions.** Authentic engagement takes time and trust building. Multiple opportunities to make meaning of data, confer with others, and build knowledge should be provided. While opinions can be developed quickly, it takes time over multiple meetings to form judgements that are based on a community's value system and a solid understanding of the relevant information.
- **When possible, allow for sustained involvement by community stakeholders.** Authentic engagement encourages stakeholders to remain involved in district and school-based decisions and future issues. This can be supported through various ways – advisory committees, newsletters, quarterly meetings – but should be included in the engagement design process.



Seattle Public Schools has many community-based partners who support authentic engagement with families and students. College Access Now provides mentorship and college readiness support in a number of our high schools.

CHAPTER 2: PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This toolkit has been developed to support you and your staff in determining the most appropriate level of community engagement for a variety of district and school-based decisions. This toolkit was designed to support decision-making that has an impact on external stakeholders (e.g. families, students and community partners). It can be modified to support internal engagement as needed.

In addition, this toolkit will support you in developing an effective communication plan. Communication is a major component of the district's community engagement commitment and framework. No matter what level of the community engagement framework you are working at, you will always need to communicate with various audiences and do so effectively.

Using this toolkit, you will determine the appropriate level of community engagement; what culturally responsive tools and strategies to employ; and develop a related communication plan – ensuring broad two-way engagement and communication with the community.

The engagement tools and strategies you select will depend on your audience, who is most impacted, your timeline and budget. The district's goal is to ensure we have representative perspectives in all major decisions. Achieving this goal will require the use of targeted, culturally responsive engagement and communication tactics. You can find a list of supporting communication tools on the Communication's [My SPS Page](#) (login required) and listed in the resource section of the toolkit.

The Communications and Engagement Department can also provide technical assistance, help you address concerns, and support you as you launch your engagement and communication plan. You may reach the team by emailing publicaffairs@seattleschools.org The department also offers professional development opportunities one to two times a month. You may view upcoming Community Engagement and Communications professional development opportunities here (schedule forthcoming).

It is important to remember that effective community engagement approaches will vary from project to project, decision to decision. No single approach will work for every project or decision. Spending time building a targeted community engagement and communication plan upfront will save time during implementation and help support the district's goal of improved decision-making and increase stakeholder trust.

Community Engagement Planning can be organized into three distinct steps

STEP 1: Initial Planning – Decision, Stakeholders, and Influence

STEP 2: Selecting a Community Engagement Level

STEP 3: Designing a Community Engagement Plan

Step 1: Initial Planning

The first step in developing your community engagement plan is to identify the problem you are working to resolve; the decision to be made; the current landscape; the final decision-maker (e.g. Department Lead, Superintendent, or School Board); the decision-making process; stakeholders; and what elements of the decision stakeholders (e.g., families, students, staff, broad community) can influence.

What is the problem to solve? What is the decision to be made?

Situation Analysis / SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

What is the current landscape or situation?

In your initial planning use the SWOT approach, assessing your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats — both in terms of the decision to be made and the current political and economic landscape that may impact the decision. You should also consider other district initiatives occurring simultaneously that may impact your work.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Opportunities:

Threats:

How will the final decision be made and who will make it? (e.g., recommendation to the School Board, Board vote). *Are there different decision makers at different points in the process?*

Which stakeholders will be impacted and how might they be impacted? *See list of possible stakeholders under resources. It might be helpful to think about stakeholders within categories based on their relation to the decision and potential impact (e.g. primary, secondary, tertiary).*

Stakeholder	Category of Impact	Potential Impact
(e.g., family)	Primary	Loss of childcare space

What level of engagement do you think stakeholders will expect? *Reach out to partners and key stakeholders to understand how they perceive the decision and related issues. This is also a question you can present to the Community Engagement Advisory Committee for guidance.*

Given the decision-making process, how can stakeholders (e.g., families, students, community partners) **influence the decision or elements of the decision?** *If the district's stakeholders can't influence the decision or elements of the decision – don't ask them! This erodes trust. Factors that may limit stakeholders' influence include: state mandates, timing, or budget.*

What do you hope to achieve by involving stakeholders in the decision-making process?

What positive or negative impact could this decision have on students of color, students experiencing poverty, ELL students, or students receiving individualized education supports? Please use the [Racial Equity Tool](#) to guide your response.

Do you have enough time and a supporting budget for authentic community engagement?

Step 2: Selecting a Community Engagement Level

Once you have completed your initial planning, including identification of potential stakeholders and issues that may concern them and a racial equity analysis, it is time to select the level of engagement most appropriate for the problem you are working to resolve and the decision that needs to be made. It is recommended you complete this section of the toolkit with at least one other person, preferably a small group of stakeholders to reduce bias.

Please complete the following worksheets as part of step 2:

- Internal Expectation Worksheet
- External Expectation Worksheet
- Expectation Summary Worksheet

The community engagement framework and tiers can be found on pages 12 and 13 of the toolkit. It might be helpful to review the framework before completing the expectation worksheets.

Internal Public Expectations Worksheet

Directions: Check the appropriate box for each statement based on the scale below (1-5). Then, follow the instructions within the worksheet to score your assessment.

Scale

- 1-2 Indicates very low to low; Tier recommendation: at least Tier 1, inform
- 3-4 Indicates low to moderate; Tier recommendation: at least Tier 2, consult/involve
- 4-5 Indicates high to very high; Tier recommendation: Tier 3, involve, consider opportunities to collaborate (e.g. Taskforce, workgroup, advisory committee)

Assessment Questions	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
What is the legally required level of stakeholder participation?					
How much interest have stakeholders expressed regarding this decision/project?					
What level of influence do stakeholders have on the final decision?					
What is the likelihood that decision makers will fully consider stakeholder input?					
How likely is it that resources will be available to support level 2 or 3 engagement?					
Is there funding to implement what stakeholders might want?					
What is the anticipated level of controversy if we don't engage our stakeholders?					
How likely is it that new information will come to light during community engagement?					
Scoring: Total the number of checks in each column					
Multiply the total of checks in each column by the weighting in each column	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5
Enter result for each column					

Go to page 2 of the worksheet

Add the weighted, column scores together and enter in box to the right.	TOTAL SCORE:
Divide the total by the number of questions	/8
Enter the result in the final score in the box to the right.	FINAL INTERNAL EXPECTATION SCORE:

External Public Expectations Worksheet

Directions: Check the appropriate box for each statement based on the scale below (1-5). Then, follow the instructions within the worksheet to score your assessment.

Scale

- 1-2 Indicates very low to low; Tier recommendation: at least Tier 1, inform
- 3-4 Indicates low to moderate; Tier recommendation: at least Tier 2, consult/involve
- 4-5 Indicates high to very high; Tier recommendation: Tier 3, involve, consider opportunities to collaborate (e.g. Taskforce, workgroup, advisory committee)

Assessment Questions	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
What is the probable level of difficulty in addressing the problem/decision?					
What is the potential for public outrage related to the project?					
How important are the potential impacts on the community?					
How much do stakeholders care about the problem/decision to be addressed and the decision to be made?					
What degree of participation does the public appear to want?					
Scoring: Total the number of checks in each column					
Multiply the total of checks in each column by the weighting in each column	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5
Enter result for each column					

Go to page 2 of the worksheet

Add the weighted, column scores together and enter in box to the right.	TOTAL SCORE:
Divide the total by the number of questions	/5
Enter the result in the final score in the box to the right.	FINAL EXTERNAL EXPECTATION SCORE:

SPS Community Engagement Expectation Summary

Using the summary document, finalize the level of community engagement most appropriate for the decision to be made. Please see the community engagement framework on page 12 and 13 that describes engagement tiers and public promises for each tier of the framework.

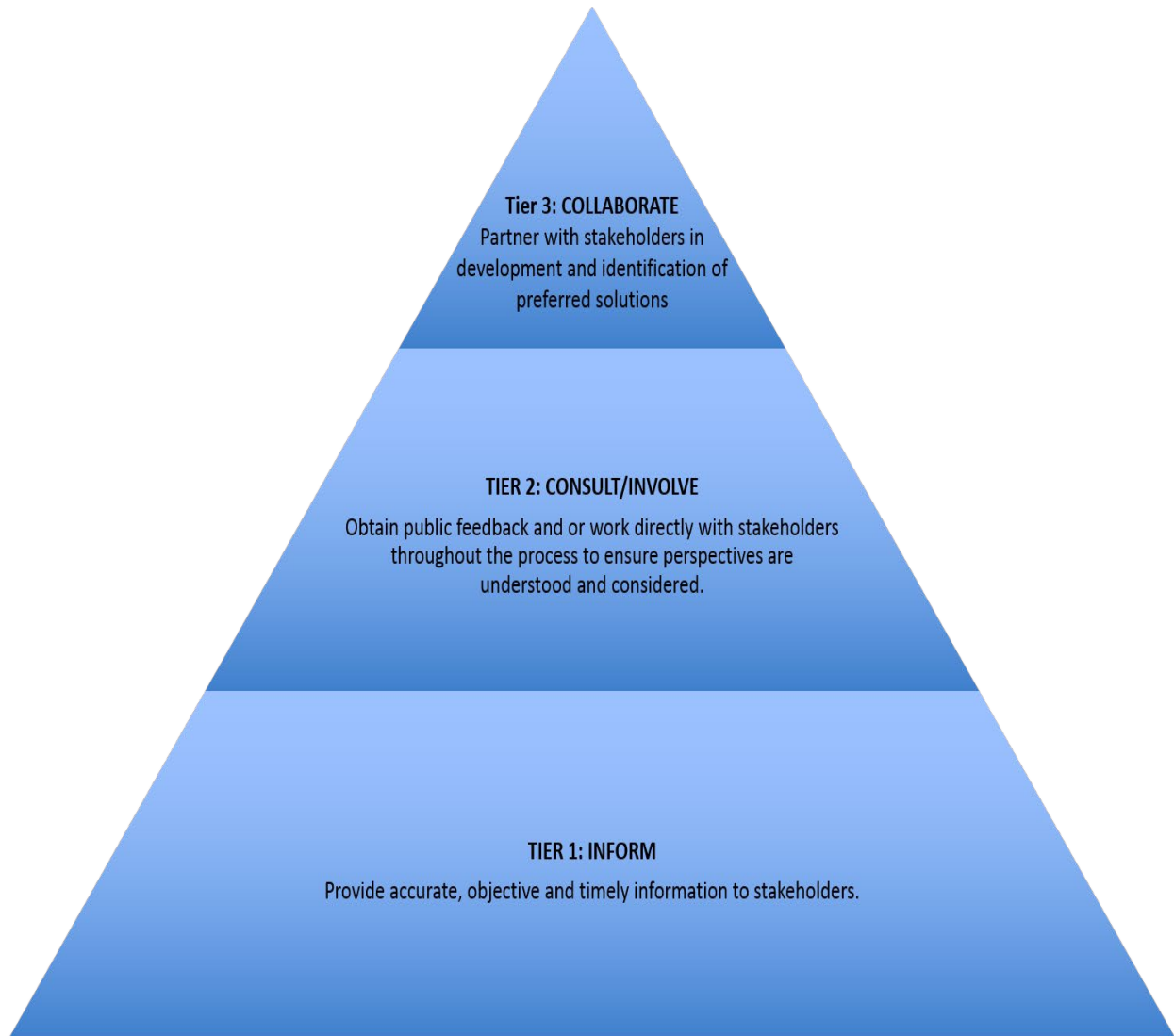
Expectations of the Key Participants	Inform	Consult/Involve	Collaborate
What tier is appropriate based on external expectations?			
What tier is appropriate based on internal expectations?			
Based on your racial equity analysis (see the SPS Racial Equity tool) or related question in Step 1 above what Tier seems appropriate?			

Based on the evaluation of external and internal expectations and analysis using the race and equity tool, what tier of engagement would you recommend?

Why?

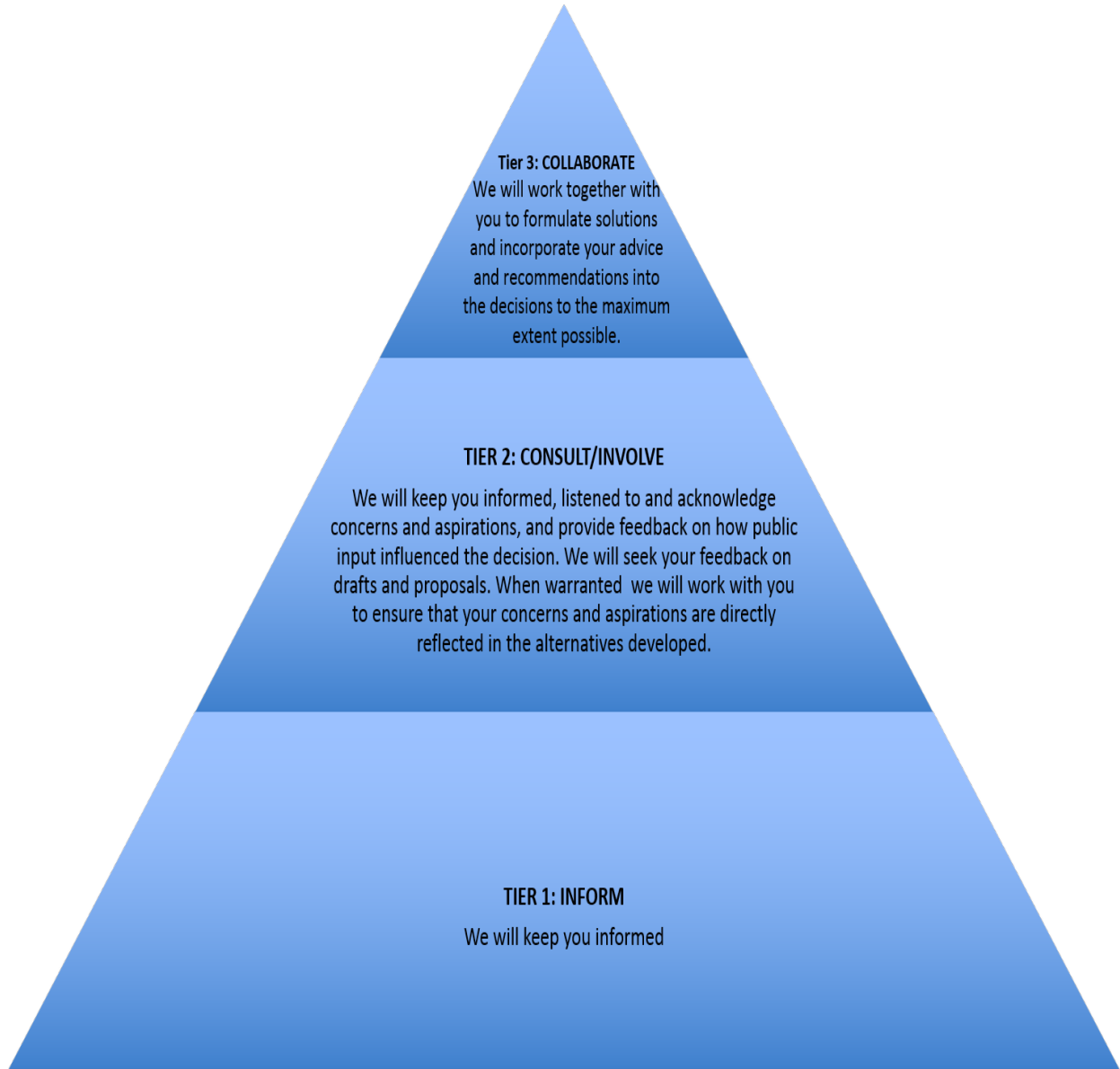
Are there some benefits and opportunities for some elements of the decision process to be at a higher tier? If so, what might they be? What would be the benefit? *Please keep in mind that for some projects/initiatives multiple decisions need to be made. The level of engagement of each decision may be different.*

SPS Community Engagement Framework: Tiers

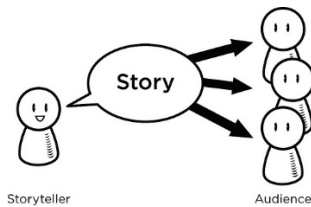


The SPS Community Engagement Framework represents a continuum of engagement from lower intensity levels at Tier 1 to the most intensive engagement at Tier 3. With an increase in engagement, there is a corresponding increase in capacity, time, and budget to effectively support each tier. The framework is not intended to create a false hierarchy between the three tiers. Each tier is important, with accurate and transparent communication as the foundation of the entire framework (i.e., Inform).

SPS Community Engagement Framework: Public Promise



Description of Community Engagement Tiers



TIER 1

The goal of Tier 1 engagement is to provide the public with balanced information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, and solutions. Tier 1 engagement might take the form of a briefing paper, School Beat article, Superintendent blog, or webpage post; it should be the first and most accurate source of information. If our stakeholders don't get the information from us, they will get it somewhere else. Transparency is key. **Tier 1 engagement is one-way.**



TIER 2

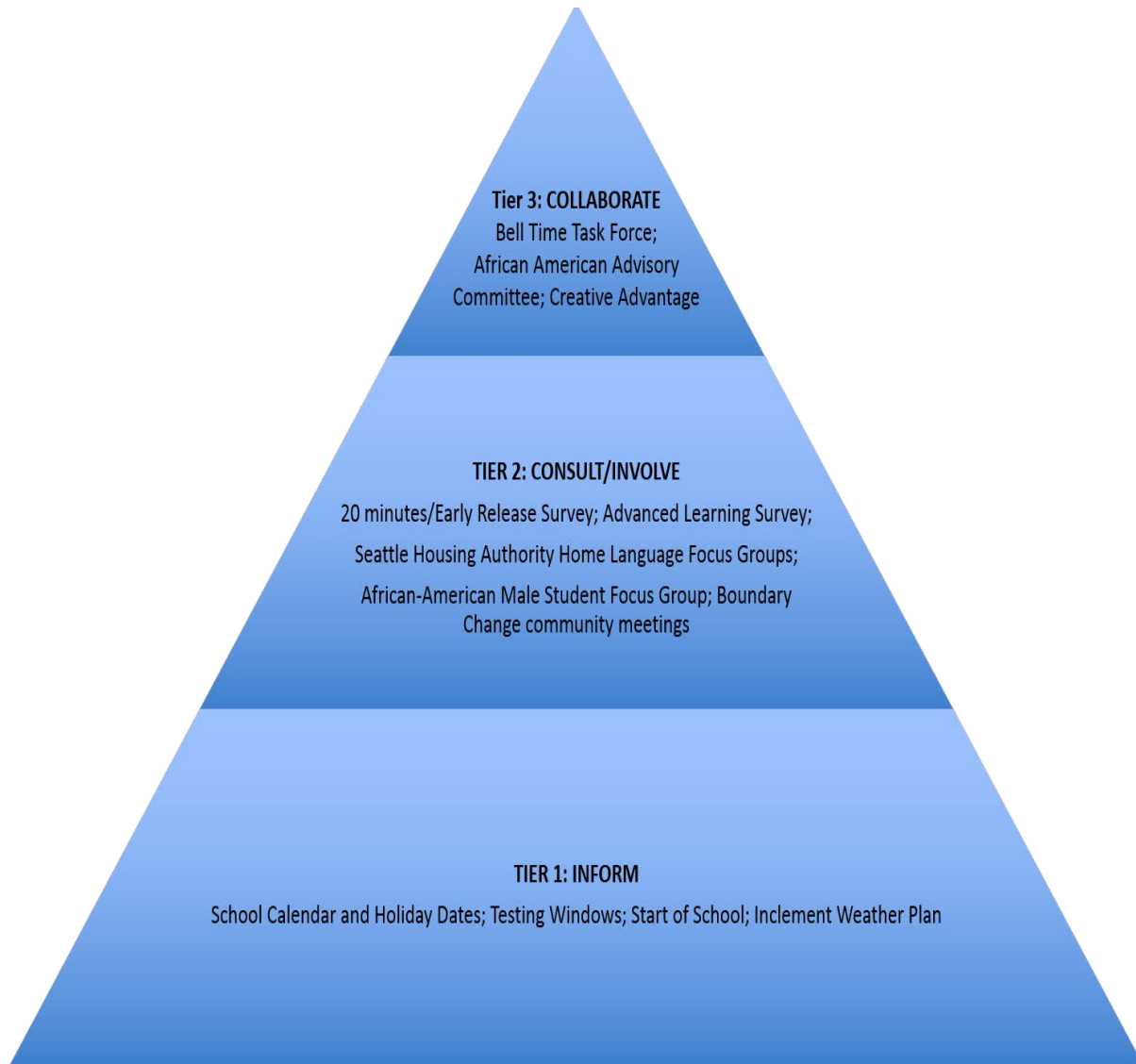
The goal of Tier 2 engagement is to gather stakeholder feedback on community values, initial staff recommendations, potential alternatives, or possible decisions. For deeper engagement, the decision-maker may choose to work directly with stakeholders throughout the decision-making process, gathering input multiple times and from various stakeholders. This approach ensures that the perspectives and concerns of the community are fully understood. Tier 2 engagement might take the form of focus groups, surveys, or interviews; and should include a consistent feedback loop to stakeholders, sharing back how their input shaped and influenced decisions. **Tier 2 engagement is two-way.**



TIER 3

The goal of Tier 3 is to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision-making process including the development of alternatives and identification of a preferred solution. Tier 3 engagement might take the form of an official taskforce, internal working group, or advisory committee to the School Board and Superintendent. Tier 3 collaborative groups are governed by [Board Policy 4110](#) and [Superintendent Procedure 4110](#). Tier 3 engagement may also integrate aspects of Tier 2 and 1 in order to bring more perspectives into the decision-making process and ensure a consistent and transparent feedback loop.

Community Engagement Tier Examples



Step 3: Designing a Community Engagement Plan

Now that you have clearly defined the decision to be made, the influence stakeholders can have on the decision, who the key stakeholders are, and the appropriate level of engagement based on internal and external expectations – **it is time to develop your engagement plan!**

An engagement plan is a **written document that acts as a roadmap** for successfully gathering input on decisions and communicating with key audiences. It describes what you want to accomplish and the best ways to achieve those objectives.

This is also a good time to review the authentic community engagement principles introduced at the beginning of the toolkit. Remember one of the primary goals of the School Board and Superintendent is to elevate underrepresented perspectives in our district decision-making. This means development and implementation of targeted engagement and communication strategies.

Effective community engagement is anchored by three simple practices:

1. **Values Driven:** Meaningful participation is focused on talking with people about what matters most to them and what matters most to the district or school. This helps build knowledge and understanding of the issues at hand.
2. **Decision Oriented:** From the beginning, the scope of the decision and the timeline should be clear to the stakeholders. This helps move stakeholders towards a final conclusion and helps set expectations.
3. **Goal Driven:** Transparency regarding stakeholders' role, potential to influence, and key decision points in each phase of the process helps to build trust.

Planning Components

Because the best engagement plans are tailored to support specific decisions and objectives, components can vary. To help you in your planning process, highlighted below are the most common and most important components of effective community engagement planning.

Step 1: What is your engagement objective? *What do you want to accomplish related to the decision to be made?* Once you have assessed your situation (see SWOT analysis above), identify the overarching objective that you would like to achieve during the community engagement process. **What is your objective? What do you hope to achieve?**

What would success look like?

Step 2: Who are your Key Stakeholder(s)?

Who do you need to engage with regarding this decision/issue in order to achieve your objective?

Refine your initial stakeholder list. Who are the most important people and groups for you to engage with regarding this decision? It's important to give your stakeholders careful thought—your list should be complete and include anyone who might be impacted by the decision, initiative, or project. A list of possible stakeholders is listed in the resource section of the toolkit.

Step 3: Developing your Key Questions/Messages

What are the most important questions that need to be asked of the key stakeholders in order for you to meet your engagement objective? What information do you need to know from them?

2-3 Key questions or information you want to gather:

What key messages need to be shared? Keep in mind that knowledge building is one of the guiding principles of authentic engagement. **Develop three to four key messages** that are concise statements that clearly communicate the decision, issues, alternatives and are tailored to the target stakeholders. It's important to not include too many messages in your plan. When crafting key messages remember that messages should:

- Be factual and specific.
- Align with your stakeholders' interests and motivations.
- Speak to your stakeholders' issues and concerns.
- Be clear, concise and easy for stakeholders' to understand and remember.
- Be easy to relay so spokespeople, representatives and your audience can help you deliver more broadly (avoid jargon and technical language as much as possible).
- Be memorable and persuasive.
- Foster consistent communications and tie into the broader landscape if possible (e.g. the strategic plan).

Three to four key messages:

STEP 4: Develop your Engagement Tactics and Select Tools

This is one of the most essential steps of authentic community engagement. The following should be considered when designing inclusive community engagement tactics:

- Age (students, families)
- Income (economic factors)
- Education
- Race and Ethnicity
- ADA accommodations

- Geography (host in a central location; in community; in a school; multiple regions – south, central north, all five regions of the district)
- Technology or low-tech (which approach best meets the needs of the audience)
- Language and linguistic diversity (home language conversation or focus groups, translation)
- Cultural norms or sensitives (food, structure of the meeting)
- Religious activities or obligations (make sure to check the [holiday calendar on the HR website](#) before planning a meeting.)
- Transportation
- Housing access (families living in shelters)
- Other:

As the engagement designer, consider offering multiple opportunities to engage and a wide range of engagement tactics. **If possible, be open to creative recommendations from the community.** Provide an email address specific to your engagement efforts so stakeholders can share ideas directly with you and your team.

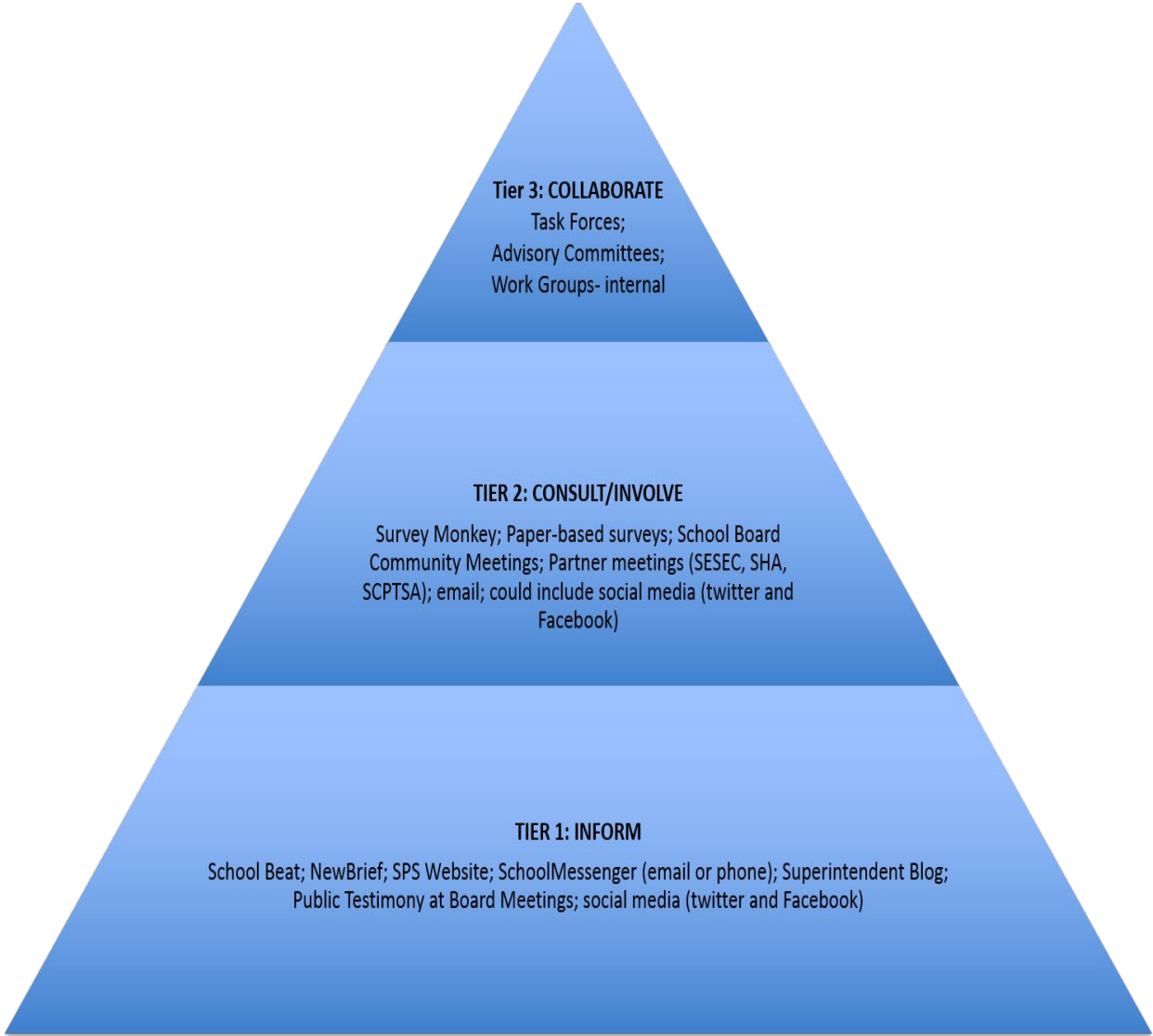
When developing your engagement tactics, remember the following:

- Each tactic you create should have measurable results.
- Think through the time required for each tactic and integrate into your timeline.
- Include who will implement each tactic and or action.
- Determine which tools best meets the goals of the tactic. See the list of engagement tools in the resource section of the toolkit.

Remember that it is often necessary to use an array of tactics in order to meet your audiences’ diverse needs. It might be helpful to organize your tactics by audience, for example:

Audience	Engagement Tier	Tactic	Tool	Deliverable Date	Project Owner and Contact Information
<i>Example:</i> families	Tier 1: Inform	Send information electronically	School Messenger Email (Home language)	Feb 1, 2017	Rachel
<i>Example:</i> families	Tier 2: Consult	Gather input via Survey	Survey Monkey and paper-based for ELL families	Feb 15, 2017	Carri

Possible Engagement Tools and or Strategies



Step 4: Engage Partners

Determine if there are groups or individuals that can help you facilitate engagement or carry your key messages. Identify partners that can help you either conduct engagement with a broader audience or help carry the key messages. This might be a district leader or representative, a parent group or community organization. Be sure to consider partners who may not currently be engaged in district issues but are relevant to the decision under discussion. If engaging with a small organization, a stipend or contract for their services is best practice.

After identifying spokespeople and partners, prepare this group to speak on the district's behalf — provide helpful materials including FAQs, background information, talking points, prepared presentations, and other relevant handouts.

Step 5: Develop an Engagement Timeline

How long does each aspect of the engagement process require? Develop a detailed timeline for your engagement plan to help you stay focused on your objective and engagement tactics, and to make the most efficient use of your time. In your timeline, include dates of important decision points, and dates for the implementation, and completion of each tactic. Timelines can be formatted in a variety of ways. You can create simple and effective timelines using Microsoft Word or Excel. A deadline prompt has been included in the community engagement plan template for your use.

Throughout the process of building your engagement plan, remember to be aware of the timeline for each process as well as the timeline in context of other key initiatives and projects occurring simultaneously. This will help you determine whether tactics are possible and appropriate within your allotted timeframe.

Step 6: Develop an Engagement Budget

How much will these engagement efforts cost? To begin, identify the level of funding that is available. Then, develop a detailed estimate of all the costs required to complete the engagement cycle. When developing a budget as part of your engagement plan, be as specific as possible — this will help prevent unexpected costs from arising and jeopardizing your overall budget. Expenses for engagement may include the following:

- Design, print and postage, if necessary, of communication materials including handouts, presentations, signage, mail pieces, etc.
- Production costs related to a video.
- Materials for community meetings including equipment rentals, refreshments, snacks, activities, etc.
- Accommodations and travel.
- Translation and interpreter fees.
- Photographer and videographer.
- Vendors, facilitators, or other consultants.

Consider including a 10 percent cushion in your budget to account for unforeseen costs. And if using vendors or contractors, be sure to thoroughly review contracts for terms and fees. We recommend developing budgets using Microsoft Excel, which allows you to easily update the budget with actual costs to ensure that the budget is on target.

Sample community engagement budgets are included in the resource section of the toolkit.

Step 7: Document your plan

The last step is to document your engagement plan. For your convenience a community engagement plan template is provided in the resource section of the toolkit, along examples of plans for each of the three tiers.



Martin Luther King Jr., City Year Community Service Day

Chapter 3: Evaluating Community Engagement

Develop Clear Measures

Develop concrete ways to track the progress and effectiveness of your engagement efforts. Doing so will help you identify tactics that work well and give you information to make adjustments in the future. Tracking your engagement results also helps you demonstrate success and improve future outreach.

Below are some ways to evaluate the effectiveness of community engagement:

- Audience reach, including how many stakeholders received email or print communications.
- Webpage Google Analytics including how many people opened the news story; length of time on page; and use of the translate tool.
- Social media analytics – percent of people that took an action (e.g., commented, reacted, or shared)
- The number of participants at a community engagement event. If possible, note the demographics of attendees to ensure that you are reaching all of your audience, rather than a select group. If known stakeholders are missing, go back to the tactics and engagement tools to figure out new ways to bring underrepresented voices to the decision-making process.
- Number of feedback responses from your audience through surveys, exit tickets, follow-up emails, phone calls, etc.
- Compare respondents' demographics to SPS demographics. Work to address over and underrepresentation of voices.
- Family Climate Survey ratings related to community engagement.
- Identification of new ideas, alternatives, and revised recommendations based on community engagement.

Concluding Community Engagement

One of the most important aspects of community engagement is closing the loop with stakeholders. If we ask for the opinions of our families, staff, students, or broader community we need to let them know how their input was used.

Throughout the engagement process, track and share back how stakeholder feedback is being addressed. Doing so builds trust and accountability even if the final decision is not what all stakeholders wanted. A consistent and timely feedback loop promotes ongoing involvement, one of the guiding principles of authentic engagement. One way to share back the decision-making process with the public and internal stakeholders is through a briefing paper. You can find a briefing paper template in the resource section of the toolkit along with a completed example.

Chapter 4: Community Engagement Resources

(all of these documents will be hyperlinked/stored on the community engagement webpage)

Community Engagement Plan Resources

- Community Engagement Plan Template
- Engagement cost samples
- Inform: Example Community Engagement Plan (*forthcoming*)
- Consult/Involve: Example Community Engagement Plan (*forthcoming*)
- Collaboration: Example Community Engagement Plan (*forthcoming*)

Stakeholders and Key Partners

- List of potential stakeholders – check list
- Internal stakeholders – 360 degree audit tool
- Potential community engagement partners

Engagement and Communication Tools and Supports

- Seattle Public Schools engagement tools
- Professional development and Capacity Building
- Briefing Paper

Additional Resources