

Overview of Public Engagement: 2022-2023 Resource Plan

ISSUE

In 2014, the City of Saskatoon (City) established a Risk-Based Management (RBM) Program and conducted a strategic risk assessment to identify various risk levels to the corporation. One of the high-priority risks identified during that process was, “the City’s engagement and communications initiatives and opportunities may not be effectively reaching its citizens.” The City has taken some measures to mitigate this high priority risk over the years, but feedback suggests that substantial gaps remain. As a result, what is a potential resource plan that could help to address the public engagement gaps in capacity and improve satisfaction and performance?

BACKGROUND

At its September 11, 2017 meeting, the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services resolved:

“That the report of the Acting General Manager, Corporate Performance Department dated September 11, 2017, be received as information.”

The Information Report titled [An Overview of the Communications Division](#) included a resource plan to add one public engagement consultant in 2018 for a total of two permanent staff. The additional FTE was approved as part of the 2018 Budget Deliberations.

At its July 29, 2019 meeting, City Council resolved:

“That City Council approve the Council Policy on Public Engagement as attached in Appendix 2 to the report of the Interim Chief Strategy & Transformation Officer dated July 29, 2019.”

As a result of that resolution, the Council Policy on Public Engagement ([C02-046](#)) came into effect on September 1, 2019 and has guided the City’s public engagement activities since that time.

CURRENT STATUS

The Public Engagement Section, housed in the Communications & Public Engagement Department, was established in late 2017. Since 2018, staff capacity within the section has remained largely static.

More specifically, the City currently has one Public Engagement Manager, one permanent Public Engagement Consultant, and one temporary employee hired as a permanent over-complement in 2020. An additional temporary Public Engagement Consultant is being pursued to support the Transportation Department as a short-term solution.

Public Engagement Consultants are fundamental to the engagement process. At the macro level, they plan events and devise engagement strategies. At the micro level

they manage logistics, develop materials and/or activities, host and facilitate support, and provide analysis, evaluation and reporting of results. They do this while supporting multidisciplinary project teams on over 100 engagement activities, events, and surveys per year. The nature and types of these are listed in Table 1 of Appendix 1. Given the number of engagement staff relative to the number of engagement activities, the corporation continues to rely heavily on staff within various departments to manage a significant portion of the City's public engagement activities.

The work of the Public Engagement Section is guided by City Council's Public Engagement Policy and the City's Strategic Plan, among other documents. The policy provides the general principles and outcomes to guide the engagement process, while the strategic plan, supported by the business plan and budget, generates the projects.

As a result of that general direction, Administration has made progress towards achieving the action in the 2018-2021 Corporate Strategic Plan, identified with the Culture of Continuous Improvement strategic goal: "Improve public participation in civic programs and services with the implementation of a Community Engagement Strategy". For example, Administration presented a Community Engagement Strategy in the form of an Engagement Framework for the City in 2019, which is shown in Appendix 1, Figure 3. The framework provides a model on which to structure public engagement efforts and development in a municipality. Within the framework, City Council provides guidance on an overall policy and related objectives. Administration then develops procedures and strategies in-line with the policy. In addition, the responsibility for developing tools, including templates and tactics, then rests with the Public Engagement Section.

Despite this progress, the available staff capacity has made it difficult to provide engagement project support, make significant movement on the development and implementation of a framework to achieve the principles, improve public engagement satisfaction, and mitigate the corporate risk.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

It is important to consider why we engage in the first place. Public participation is not just about producing consensus, but rather about building social capital while engaging the public and ensuring that policy development and decision making is informed (Berkes, 2009; Cuff, 2007; Putnam, 1995; Landrie-Parker, 2018). At minimum, public participation is about involving those who are affected by a policy in the decision making process. Decisions at the local government's level affect the daily lives of community members more than other levels of government, creating increased expectations around decision making, prioritizing, and opportunity creation. City Council and Administration require input from residents and stakeholders to adequately weigh the facts, data, options, public value, and trade-offs. To increase the likelihood of suitable decision making, it is critical that City Council and Administration are consistently seeking out and hearing input from residents and stakeholders.

The City has established a performance target of 90% for overall satisfaction with civic services. Given public engagement’s importance to delivering City services, three questions were added to the 2018 Civic Satisfaction & Performance Survey to better measure performance related to public engagement. These questions were designed to measure performance on strategy, planning/execution, and reporting out.

As Table 1 shows, engagement planning and execution is performing relatively well, but still requires improvement. It is within this category that it is more appropriate to tap into the use of staff with varying degrees of engagement experience to help facilitate the implementation of engagement events and activities. However, additional emphasis is required on developing engagement strategy and framework and reporting out the results. These areas are more appropriate to be led by professional public engagement staff, but current capacity is limited.

Table 1: City of Saskatoon Civic Satisfaction & Performance Survey

Performance Measure	2018	2021 (preliminary data)
City of Saskatoon does enough to get public input on decisions it makes. (Strategy)	53% Telephone 45% Online = 48% (weighted average) 29% Self-Selected(n=619)	48% Telephone 56% Online = 53% (weighted average) 43% Self-Selected (n=1100)
The City provides meaningful opportunities to participate in engagement activities (Engagement Plan/Execution)	87% Telephone 79% Online = 82% (weighted average) 85% Self-Selected (n=590)	76% Telephone 77% Online = 76% (weighted average) 66% Self-Selected (n=1022)
The City communicates how it will use public input to help make its decisions (Reporting Out)	68% Telephone 55% Online = 60% (weighted average) 53% Self-Selected (n=590)	62% Telephone 67% Online = 65% (weighted average) 40% Self-Selected (n=1220)

Based on preliminary results for 2021, the City achieved slightly higher satisfaction scores in the areas of strategy and reporting out, and lower results in planning and execution from 2018. The survey results indicate that more needs to be done to mitigate the high-level corporate risk on public engagement, as explained in an earlier section, and achieve the principles in the Council Policy on Public Engagement.

When looking at 2019 data, engagement projects within the Sustainability Department, Planning & Development Department and the Growth Plan accounted for 67.1% of the total available engagement staff time. Furthermore, 49.4% of the total available engagement staff time was required for three major initiatives including:

- Sustainability – Green Strategy 14.8% 119 days
- Sustainability – Waste ICI 13.2% 106 days
- Plan for Growth/BRT/Corridor Planning 21.4% 171 days
- Total 49.4% 396 days**

Although only 12% of the total number of projects in 2019 were broadly considered highly complex and with a high degree of sensitivity, they took up 49.4% of staff capacity available. This information demonstrates that the number of engagement initiatives does not adequately reflect the amount of staff capacity required to complete engagement from intake through to reporting.

How does Saskatoon compare to other cities? To determine the magnitude of the resource gap in public engagement, Administration prepared a comparative analysis to three other western Canadian cities. Although Calgary and Edmonton have much larger populations, they are included in the analysis because they are often seen as key benchmark cities in terms of their approach to engagement. Given the city population differences and thus organizational size, the data is adjusted to account for this different scale.

When comparing the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTEs), the Communications & Public Engagement Department is operating with six less public engagement staff than Calgary and Edmonton after adjusting for organizational size.

Saskatoon Current	Saskatoon Adjusted to be Comparable to Calgary	Saskatoon Adjusted to be Comparable to Edmonton
2	8	8

Adjusting on a per capita basis, the City is operating with at least four less public engagement staff compared to benchmark cities.

Saskatoon Current	Saskatoon Adjusted to be Comparable to Calgary	Saskatoon Adjusted to be Comparable to Edmonton
2	7	6

Finally, like the larger cities used in the comparative analysis, the City has adopted a Public Engagement Council Policy and Framework. Unlike them, the City is on average under resourced by a factor of four, making it very challenging to achieve the expectations.

2022-2023 Public Engagement Resource Plan

Administration is proposing a staff resource plan as part of the 2022-2023 Business Plan and Budget Options aimed at achieving better satisfaction results, meeting the principles identified in the Council Policy on Public Engagement, delivering on the approved framework, and mitigating the corporate risk related to public engagement.

- a) **Procedures, Framework Development & Implementation Stream:**
A primary goal of Public Engagement is to provide a common and consistent approach to engaging the public in the affairs of their city. Although all departments share this responsibility, the Communications & Public Engagement Department is viewed as the primary source of methodology, support and resourcing for those strategies and processes, especially those that have broad and strategic impact on the relationship of the City and the public. Focusing

attention on this stream through a new position would provide capacity to build the administrative procedures, framework, and the change management process to successfully implement at the project level. Furthermore, this stream would provide engagement support for large, complex, and high-profile, and/or politically sensitive projects. To achieve this would require a new FTE for a Public Engagement Advisor.

- b) **Engagement Projects, Plans, Implementation & Reporting Stream:**
The second stream would focus on application of the framework through the development of specific engagement project plans, implementation, and reporting to support the 30+ Departments across the organization. Public Engagement Consultants support multidisciplinary project teams, engagement activities and events that are developed in public engagement plans and reports. They deliver activities and events through logistics management, development of materials, hosting and facilitation support, and the analysis, evaluation and reporting of results.

This would require converting one temporary Public Engagement Consultant to a permanent position to support Departments such as Sustainability, Recreation & Culture, Transit, Saskatoon Fire, etc. In addition, the resource plan identifies hiring two additional Public Engagement Consultants to be assigned to Transportation and to Planning & Development Departments who accounted for an average of 50% of annual City public engagement events, excluding surveys.

The structure better supports the organization in all areas including strategy, planning and implementation and reporting out. The four additional resources would address the existing capacity gap and place the City in a more comparable situation to other western cities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The estimated annual operating budget impact is \$105,200 for each Public Engagement Consultant and \$107,700 for a Public Engagement Advisor, for a combined total of \$423,300. These positions will be part of the Business Plan and Budget Options that will be presented to the Governance and Priorities Committee in August.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The plan laid out in this report generates positive social implications because the development of a public engagement framework, consistently applied, would provide much greater success in achieving the guiding principles outlined in the Council Policy on Public Engagement. Achieving the principles, particularly around Inclusivity and Relationship Building, often requires connecting with those who are traditionally harder-to-reach communities in Saskatoon – this needs time, effort, resources, structure, and processes to be successful.

With more inclusive engagement, Administration and City Council will be more proportionately informed by the “easier-to-reach” communities and “harder-to-reach” or

under-represented groups to allow for adequate consideration and understanding of potential impacts.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal or environmental implications resulting from this report.

NEXT STEPS

Administration will submit the Public Engagement Resource Plan as part of the 2022-2023 Business Plan and Budget Options to Governance and Priorities Committee in August.

APPENDIX

1. Overview of Public Engagement – 2022-2023 Resource Plan

Report Approval

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Admin Report - Overview of Public Engagement: 2022-2023 Resource Plan.docx