

Engagement Summary



Citizen Advisory Panel – Public Engagement During COVID-19

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June 15, 2020



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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the delivery of many City services including public engagement. The City of Saskatoon indefinitely suspended all in-person and online engagement on March 17, 2020, and had no official plan on how or when public engagement would be reactivated, or how public engagement should be conducted during the evolving pandemic.

To help inform the City's plan to reactivate public engagement during the pandemic, an online survey was sent to the Citizen Advisory Panel (CAP) to gauge their readiness to be engaged with for the foreseeable future exclusively through virtual methods (e.g., online, mail, telephone) and which virtual methods would be preferred. In addition, CAP members were asked to provide insight on how to exclusively engage through virtual methods while best adhering to the engagement principle of inclusiveness. The survey was open for responses from May 7, 2020 to May 15, 2020. In total, there were 386 responses.

Highlights from the results include:

- 84.2% somewhat or strongly agreed that the City should engage online/virtually on projects/initiatives not related to COVID-19 during this time.
- 86.5% indicated they would be somewhat or highly likely to participate in City of Saskatoon engagement activities at this time on topics that impact our city (whether online/virtually, in writing, or by phone).
- The most preferred virtual methods of engagement (each with at least 100 selections by respondents) were: online survey; City website; emailing City staff; and/or an online discussion platform.
- The most preferred methods for inviting people to participate in engagement activities (each with at least 100 selections by respondents) were: City social media channels; City website; City e-newsletters; and/or by mail.
- Common themes expressed by respondents in regards to making virtual engagement more inclusive were:
 - Provide a variety of options for the public, both for receiving input/feedback and for communicating/promoting to the public;
 - Keep engagement tools and communications as simple as possible;
 - Work with community-based organizations and non-profits that would represent the interests of vulnerable and/or low income populations who would be less likely to participate in online/virtual engagement; and
 - Encourage community and organizational ambassadors to support and promote the City's engagement efforts and to help others participate.

The report [*Modifying Public Engagement in Saskatoon during the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#) was presented to the City's Governance and Priorities Committee on May 19, 2020. Preliminary results and analysis from the CAP survey (349 respondents) were included as an appendix to that report.

Engagement Summary

1 Background

On March 17, 2020, the City of Saskatoon indefinitely suspended all public engagement activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This suspension included in-person engagement activities to adhere to the Government of Saskatchewan's Public Health Orders regarding limits on social gatherings and physical distancing measures. New online public engagement activities were also suspended by the City at this time out of compassion for the stresses and more immediate public priorities during the pandemic.

On March 18, 2020, the Government of Saskatchewan declared a State of Emergency, placing several restrictions on businesses and activities including limits on social gatherings (currently set at 10 or less). These restrictions escalated over time as the pandemic evolved.

On April 23, 2020, the Premier of Saskatchewan unveiled the Re-Open Saskatchewan Plan. This 5-phase plan outlines a gradual easing of measures and restrictions that will occur in the province for businesses, services, and recreational activities. The plan continues to limit social gatherings and contains measures related to physical distancing, personal protective equipment, and sanitization throughout the various phases.

1.1 Citizen Advisory Panel “Public Engagement During COVID-19 Survey”

Saskatoon citizens are able to subscribe to the City of Saskatoon's Citizen Advisory Panel (CAP). Members of CAP are invited to participate in online surveys to provide input and ideas on improving City services. At this time, there are approximately 1,800 subscribed CAP members. To help inform the City's plan to reactivate public engagement during the pandemic, an online survey was sent to the Citizen Advisory Panel (CAP) to gauge their readiness to be engaged with for the foreseeable future exclusively through virtual methods (e.g., online, mail, telephone) and which virtual methods would be preferred. In addition, CAP members were asked to provide insight on how to exclusively engage through virtual methods while best adhering to the engagement principle of inclusiveness. The survey was open for responses from May 7, 2020 to May 15, 2020. In total, there were 386 responses.

1.1.1 Intended Audience

The stakeholder group included the following:

- Subscribed CAP members.

1.1.2 Marketing

This survey was directed specifically to the Citizen Advisory Panel to help gauge public readiness for reactivating virtual forms of public engagement. Since we had not yet gauged public readiness, the survey was only made available to subscribed members of the Citizen Advisory Panel and was not made available to the general public. A link to the online survey was provided to CAP members through email.

1.1.3 Data Limitations

- The survey was conducted online, which limited our ability to gain input from those with little to no computer access.
- Those who subscribe to CAP are more likely to be interested in public engagement and have the capacity to participate in online/virtual engagement than the general public.

Engagement Summary

1.1.4 What We Heard

Below are the questions and summaries of responses from the “Public Engagement During COVID-19” survey.

1. Do you agree or disagree that the City should engage online/virtually on projects/initiatives not related to COVID-19 during this time?

	Count	%
Strongly Agree	202	52.3%
Somewhat Agree	123	31.9%
Neutral	36	9.3%
Somewhat Disagree	9	2.3%
Strongly Disagree	7	1.8%
Not Sure	9	2.3%

2. *The 15 who responded Somewhat Disagree or Strongly Disagree to the previous question were asked: Why do you feel the City should not be engaging online/virtually on projects/initiatives that are not related to COVID-19 at this time? Select all that apply.*

	Count
It would be inappropriate to engage on projects/initiatives no related to COVID-19	7
It would be inappropriate to only engage the public online/virtually	6
Other	7

3. How likely or unlikely are you to participate in City of Saskatoon engagement activities at this time on topics that impact our city (whether online/virtually, in writing, or by phone)?

	Count	%
Highly Likely	173	44.9%
Somewhat Likely	160	41.6%
Neutral	25	6.5%
Somewhat Unlikely	14	3.6%
Highly Unlikely	8	2.1%
Not Sure	5	1.3%

4. *The 19 who responded Somewhat Unlikely or Highly Unlikely to the previous question were asked: Why are you unlikely to participate in engagement activities at this time? Select all that apply.*

Engagement Summary

	Count
Depends on the topic and impact to me	12
Other priorities at this time	8
Busy with additional work or personal responsibilities	7
This isn't an appropriate time for public engagement	3
Other	2
Limited or no access to online technology	1
Not sure	0

5. How do you prefer to engage with the City (as part of public consultation) during COVID-19? Select all that apply.

	Count
Online survey	321
City website	179
Emailing City staff	169
Online discussion platform	111
Telephone or video conferencing (e.g., Teams or Zoom)	86
Contacting City staff by phone	84
Telephone townhall or webinar	66
Facebook Live presentation and Q&A	42
Mailed survey	36
Not sure	12
Not interested in engaging at this time	7
Other	5

6. What is the best way to invite people to participate in any engagement activities that go ahead? Please select your top three only.

	Count
City social media channels	229
City website	222
City e-newsletters	214
Mail	186
Notices in a local newspaper	65
Other	46
Posters at community bulletin boards	19

7. We recognize that virtual engagement, whether online or otherwise, may be difficult for some people to access. We will be taking steps to help make our engagement activities more inclusive. What are your ideas for how virtual engagement can be more inclusive?

Engagement Summary

There were 196 responses to this question. An analysis of the responses identified the following most common themes:

- Provide a variety of options for the public, both for receiving input/feedback and for communicating/promoting to the public. Suggested options include:
 - Traditional mail, both for communicating to the public and for receiving input (e.g., paper surveys);
 - Telephone, whether these are telephone surveys, touchtone surveys, or conversations with City staff;
 - Email;
 - Utilize local radio and TV;
 - Social media platforms; and
 - Teleconferencing platforms (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Jitsi Meet).
- Keep engagement tools and communications as simple as possible.
- Work with community-based organizations and non-profits that would represent the interests of vulnerable and/or low income populations who would be less likely to participate in online/virtual engagement.
- Encourage community and organizational ambassadors to support and promote the City's engagement efforts and to help others participate.