



**A SIX-STEP  
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT GUIDE  
FOR CAPITAL PROJECTS**

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## About this Guide



This guide was developed to advance public engagement practice across Arlington County government.

Building on both the [Participation, Leadership and Civic Engagement \(PLACE\)](#) initiative and the [Community Facilities Study](#), this guide integrates more recent feedback received from both internal and external stakeholders regarding opportunities to improve public engagement for Arlington County Government capital projects.

The levels of engagement framework was influenced by engagement concepts produced by the International Association of Public Participation, available at [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org).

The guide was prepared by Arlington County's Office of Communications and Public Engagement, with input from both both internal and external stakeholders.

[topics.arlingtonva.us/engage](http://topics.arlingtonva.us/engage)

## What can be found in this guide?

About	2
Public Engagement Values	4
Six-Step Approach to Public Engagement	5
Clearly Define the Project	6
Identify Project Stakeholders	9
Determine Level of Engagement	10
Create and Implement Engagement & Communication Strategies	13
Conduct Analysis for Decision Makers	15
Complete Project Closeout & After Action Review	15
Appendix: Engagement Worksheets	16

## About this Guide

### Why does Arlington County have a public engagement guide?

Arlington County is a dynamic environment – a place where people are passionate about their community and committed to enhancing its policies and programs. With a community of more than 222,000 residents and an equal number of people who work here every day, our government is constantly planning for our future and advancing hundreds of projects.

Whether we're letting our residents know about plans to create a new park, looking for feedback on a transportation project or new facility, or seeking input on a policy update... **we want to hear from our community.** This guide is our commitment to meaningful engagement and provides the framework for successful engagement. It provides a range of techniques to engage the community in the activities and decision-making processes of the County.

### Where to find more

The [Engage Arlington](#) page on the County's website hosts an abundance of resources, including engagement opportunities, public meeting schedules, contacts and more.

Arlington Public Schools also organizes engagement initiatives. Learn more at [apsva.us/engage](https://apsva.us/engage).

County staff can access ready-to-use templates and resources from the County's intranet, *AC Commons*. Click on the Communications & Public Engagement tab.



### How to use this guide

This is a guide **to help Arlington County staff** or contractors in developing or completing County projects. With more than 60 formal commissions and advisory boards, residents and business representatives also work with the County Board and County staff as projects and policies are developed and implemented.

This guide will help project teams determine the appropriate level of engagement and communication, map appropriate strategies, and share information with stakeholders along the way.

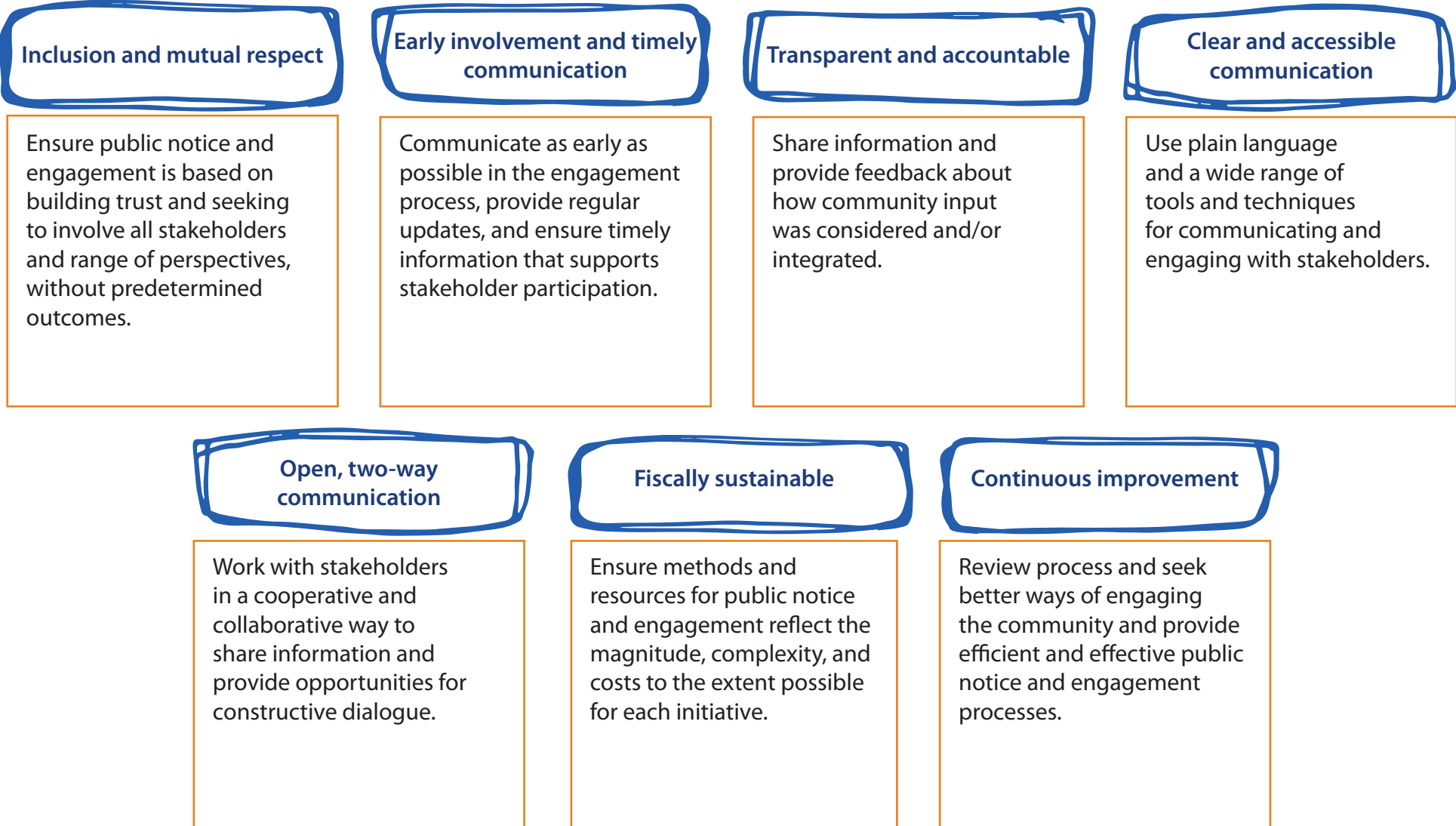
### When to use this guide

Arlington completes hundreds of projects -- small and large -- in any given year. Recognizing that **there is no one-size-fits-all approach**, this guide is intended to help align the level of public engagement based on characteristics, benefits and potential impacts of each project.

**Not every project will have a 6-step engagement process.** While all County projects are important, there will always be some routine tasks that the County will complete at its discretion while practicing an efficient use of time and resources.

# Public Engagement Values

These seven guiding values are the foundation for the County's engagement initiatives and strategies. These are followed by guiding principles, which are the most effective way to build trust and to demonstrate Arlington County Government's commitment to the community.



## Six-Step Approach for Public Engagement

The six-step approach for public engagement is an easy-to-use framework designed to help project teams articulate the project scope, identify impacted stakeholders, and communicate areas of opportunity for public input.



*\* These steps are a guide. As processes vary, not every engagement step may be possible.*

# Six-Step Approach for Public Engagement

## 1 Clearly Define the Project

The first step includes foundational information for the project, including:

- **Project basics**  
Name, location
- **Origin**  
How project was initiated and any relationship to other County plans or policies (include dates)
- **Project team**  
Name, role, department, email
- **Engagement & Communication Plan Sign-off**  
Identify who needs to review and sign-off on the completed plan. Include your communications team and, in some cases, senior leadership.
- **Description**  
Purpose, objectives, major components
- **Project partners**  
Other departments, Arlington Public Schools, outside agencies, utilities
- **Parameters**  
Schedule, budgets, regulatory constraints
- **Project Lifecycle** (see page 7)
- **Project Context** (see page 8)

### STEP 1 Clearly Define the Project

Project Name

Central Park Plan

Location

100 Arlington Avenue (crossstreet: Virginia Road)

Origin (include dates)

Identified in County Sector Plan; prioritized in 2018 CIP

Project Team

Name	Role	Department	Email
Jane Smith	project lead/planner	DP&R	
John Williams	planning supervisor	DP&R	
Jennifer Johnson	communications + outreach	DP&R	
James Jones	transportation planner	DES	

Engagement Plan Sign-off Required By

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Description (purpose, objectives, major components, relationship to other plans)

Arlington Central Park will be a new, public green space with recreational amenities, passive uses, enhanced pedestrian connections and diverse landscaping. The purpose of the planning process will be to develop a park design based on broad community input.

Related Plans: Public Spaces Master Plan; County Sector Plan; General Land Use Plan; Stormwater Management Plan; Public Art Master Plan

Project Partners (e.g., other departments, Arlington Public Schools, other agencies or organizations)

Dept. Parks and Recreation (lead)  
Dept. Environmental Services  
Dept. Community Planning, Housing, & Development  
Arlington Public Art

Parameters (schedule, budget, constraints)

- \$1.1 million in design and Phase I construction.
- Design Development: 16 months

Departmental communications lead should sign-off on engagement and communication plans. In some cases, senior leadership may also need to review and approve these plans.

Connect with your communications staff early for engagement support

# Six-Step Approach for Public Engagement

## 1 Clearly Define the Project *(continued)*

### Project Lifecycle

Determine what stages your project will have. Engagement and communication opportunities may occur at different points or stages in a project's lifecycle.

Common project stages involve:

- Planning & visioning
- Approval
- Scoping
- Funding
- Design
- Construction

*Large, complex projects often have different stages - with different engagement levels at those varying stages.*

There is no one-size-fits-all project cycle for the multitude of County projects and processes. Each will have their own stages, opportunities and levels of engagement.

You will determine levels of engagement in Step 3.

### STEP 1 Clearly Define the Project

Project Lifecycle Stages

Stage of Project Lifecycle	Engagement Level <i>(complete at Step 3)</i>	Engagement Opportunity? Y/N	Communication Opportunity? Y/N
Visioning	Collaborate	Y	Y
Concept alternatives	Collaborate	Y	Y
design refinement	involve	Y	Y
Approve funding		N	Y
Construction		N	Y

# Six-Step Approach for Public Engagement

## 1

### Clearly Define the Project *(continued)*

#### Project Context

Consider the context of the project using these starter questions.

Understanding the context of your project will help more thoroughly identify stakeholders, level of potential sign-off required and levels of engagement in the next steps.

#### STEP 1 Clearly Define the Project

Project Context	Yes	To Some Extent	No	Notes
Does this project relate to master, sector, corridor, Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and/or other plans?	✓			
Have members of the public had an opportunity to provide input into the project prior to this point in time?		✓		
Are there are other projects in the immediate geographic area that are important to be aware of? This includes county, regional, state, federal and utility projects.	✓			
Are there any potential benefits and/or concerns for nearby residents and/or businesses (e.g., health/safety, traffic, parking)?	✓			
Are there any greater needs that this project fulfills?	✓			
Is there community support for this project?	✓			
Are there community concerns and/or opposition for this project?		✓		



# Six-Step Approach for Public Engagement

## 2

### Identify Project Stakeholders

Identify all community members, groups and organizations that will be impacted by or have an interest in your project. Consider what their differing views and perspectives may be.

Be sure to consider the following:

- Commissions, Committees, Advisory Groups
- Civic Associations and Neighborhoods
- Condo/rental units and associations
- Adjacent neighbors
- Under-represented communities
- Other Community Members, Non-Governmental Groups, Businesses
  - Impacted or interested community members who may not be in the immediate impact area
- Non-governmental groups or NGOs
- Businesses, employers, employees, business improvement districts (BIDs)
- School and parent groups, local churches, religious group facilities

### STEP 2 Identify Project Stakeholders

Other Community Members, Non-Governmental Groups, Businesses

Organization/Stakeholder	Interest/Impact/Views	Chair	Email	Phone

### STEP 2 Identify Project Stakeholders

Commissions, Committees & Advisory Boards

Identify any commissions that may have an interest in this project and whether they would receive informational updates or possibly take action on the project at any point. (see <http://commissions.arlingtonva.us/>)

Commission/Advisory Board	Interest/Impact/Views	Chair	Email	Phone
Central Park Working Group				
Park & Recreation Commission				
Sports Commission				
Transportation Commission				
Planning Commission				
Arlington Commission for the Arts				
Pedestrian Advisory Committee				

Civic Associations and Neighborhoods

Stakeholder	Interest/Impact/Views	Point of Contact	Email	Phone

Who will be affected by the project and the decisions made?

# Six-Step Approach for Public Engagement

## 3

### Determine Level of Engagement

There are four levels of engagement for County projects: Communicate, Consult, Involve and Collaborate\*. The following indicators will help decide the appropriate engagement level for a project. More checks in a particular category, generally indicates that is the appropriate engagement level. If there's a tie, use the higher engagement level. It will be important to use both these indicators and the framework on page 11 to determine levels of engagement.

✓ Indicators for Engagement Level	
Communicate	Project <b>would not</b> interrupt service and/or traffic for an extended period of time (typically < one month)
	Residents and/or businesses <b>would not</b> be disrupted for an extended period (typically < 6 months)
	Project is a direct replacement of infrastructure, materials or other in the same location
✓ Indicators for Engagement Level	
Communicate & Consult	Project addresses a public health and/or safety concern
	Project <b>would not</b> cause loss of or significant** change to facility, program or service to community
	Project changes may be triggered by legislative, regulatory or policy requirements.
✓ Indicators for Engagement Level	
Communicate, Consult & Involve	Project included in approved County Plan (e.g., Master, Sector, Corridor, CIP)
	Project <b>would</b> fundamentally change the size, capacity, and/or intensity of use of space, roadway, etc.
	Project <b>would</b> cause loss of or significant** change to a facility/program/service for broader Arlington
	Project could have significant** impacts on nearby residents and/or businesses (e.g., health/safety, traffic, parking, loss of mature trees, adverse construction impacts)
	Strong community interest (support, concern, differing views, opposition) anticipated for project
✓ Indicators for Engagement Level	
Communicate, Consult, Involve & Collaborate	Project <b>not</b> a capital maintenance or operations project
	Multiple commissions and/or advisory boards would typically provide input on this type of project
	Project did <b>not</b> originate from a previously approved County Plan (e.g., Master, Sector, Corridor, CIP)
	County Board/County Manager has provided high-level direction (e.g., construction of public buildings, studies)

\* Levels of engagement are adapted from the IAP2 spectrum published by International Association of Public Participation; see [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org).

\*\* Significance can be assessed, in part, by answering context questions in Step 1.

# Six-Step Approach for Public Engagement

## 3 Determine Level of Engagement *(continued)*

While the extent of engagement increases each step from Communicate to Collaborate, the number of projects inversely decreases, with the highest number of County projects falling into the Communicate category and the least number of projects in the Collaborate category. Large, complex projects may have an overall engagement level, with different levels of engagement within stages.

### Levels of Engagement

### Project Examples

#### Communicate

Keep community informed on project updates, changes regulatory constraints and progress through the lifecycle of the project.



- Turf replacement (synthetic per 8-year replacement cycle or sod replacement for grass turf fields)

- Trail or parking lot milling and repaving
- Restroom renovation

- Paving
- Water main and storm sewer line replacement

- Facility maintenance impacting operations/ programs

#### Communicate & Consult

Keep community informed, listen to views and provide feedback on how the input influenced the project and/or decisions.



- Renovation of athletic courts or fields
- New fire hydrant installation

- Parks maintenance capital renovations with amenities in same general location
- Reconfiguration of roadways

- New LED installation in residential areas
- Replacement of athletic lights, playground, picnic shelter or trails

#### Communicate, Consult & Involve

Share how concerns/views were reflected in analyses and/or solutions and designs developed; share how inputs influenced the final decision or project.



- Capital maintenance projects where several amenities may potentially reorient or change location

- New location for athletic field lights or synthetic field conversions that implement policy from Board-adopted plans

- Design phases that implement Board-adopted plans
- Stream restoration
- Major transit facilities
- Major reconfiguration of roadways

#### Communicate, Consult, Involve & Collaborate

Seek community input in partnership with stakeholders.



- Sector, area, corridor, park master plans
- Neighborhood conservation projects
- New public facilities

#### Emergency and Repair Work

Many routine activities do not require an engagement plan.

Examples include:

- Water service line maintenance
- Routine signage, including replacement
- Routine restriping
- Routine park maintenance
- Streetlight and signal maintenance
- Minor facility maintenance with no impact to programs or services
- Concrete (sidewalk, curb, gutter, ADA ramp, catch basin) repair
- Pothole and patching
- Emergency or spot repairs (water, sewer or street)
- Fire hydrant repair/replace
- Valve exercising or repair

Increasing levels of engagement

Increasing number of projects

\* Levels of engagement are adapted from the IAP2 spectrum published by International Association of Public Participation; see [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org).

## Strategy

## Examples of Potential Tools

**Communicate**

Keep community informed on project updates, changes, regulatory constraints and progress through the lifecycle of the project.



- *Early, often and ongoing communication*

- Email updates and e-newsletters
- County news channels – *Citizen*; Insider, ATV, etc.
- Neighborhood and civic association newsletters
- Webpages – project-specific, topical
- Social media – Facebook, Twitter, Next Door, etc.
- Signage – sandwich boards, posters, flyers, door hangers, displays
- Printed media - fact sheets, brochures
- Mailings, mail inserts, letters

**Communicate & Consult**

Keep community informed, listen to views and provide feedback on how the input influenced the project and/or decisions.



- *1-2+ engagement opportunities*
- *Typically after concepts or options are developed*

- Listening sessions
- Public hearings
- Walking tours & field visits
- Listening sessions, civic association meetings, small meetings with stakeholders
- Online feedback – comment forms, email boxes, surveys/polls, CiviComment

*\* plus the strategies listed above in previous levels.*

**Communicate, Consult & Involve**

Share how concerns/views were reflected in analyses and/or solutions and designs developed; share how inputs influenced the final decision or project.



- *3-5+ engagement opportunities*
- *Over a defined period of time*
- *Typically prior to design development*

- Open houses
- Roundtables, focus groups, workshops
- Online dialogues
- Input from Commissions/Advisory Groups
- Interactive forums (in person and/or online)
- World cafes

*\* plus the strategies listed above in previous levels.*

**Communicate, Consult, Involve & Collaborate**

Seek community input in partnership with stakeholders.



- *Use multiple engagement opportunities that build on each other*

- Charrettes
- Working groups
- Citizen-led engagement and partnerships

*\* plus the strategies listed above in previous levels.*

# Six-Step Approach for Public Engagement

## 4

### Create and Implement Engagement & Communication Strategies

As you **create** your strategy:

- Outline your public engagement goals and the objectives for each one. Think about the higher vision and purpose of the engagement strategy.
- Align the appropriate tools with your engagement objectives.
- List your target audience, necessary resources, location and timeline details -- and identify the lead contact for each item.
- Ensure information about the project and related engagement opportunities are available to stakeholders.
- Develop and use outreach messages, or your "elevator speech", that summarizes the project in a few brief sentences.
- Feedback from commission, advisory or working group chairs may be helpful in this process.

Your communications lead can help identify and execute the most effective engagement strategies

### STEP 4 Create and Implement Engagement & Communication Strategies

Engagement Strategy

Objective #	Activity/Approach	Target Audience	Resources/Location	Timeline

Be sure to allow ample time for public feedback and meeting notifications

### STEP 4 Create and Implement Engagement & Communication Strategies

Public Engagement Goals and Objectives

- Goal: in 2-3 sentences, provide key goal for what the engagement process will yield for this project.
- Objectives: list elements for engagement opportunities and outcomes.

Public Engagement Goal		
Execute an energetic, inclusive planning + design process that capitalizes on broad input from every group that will use, enjoy & benefit from Arlington Central Park.		
Engagement Objective 1	Engagement Objective 2	Engagement Objective 3
Use new + creative methods to collect design ideas + input.	"go to them": proactively seek out potential groups/park users + invite participation.	maintain engagement: follow through + close feedback loops with process participants.



# Six-Step Approach for Public Engagement

## 5 Conduct Analysis for Decision Makers

**Review** and **analyze** all of the input you've received and summarize your findings.

It will be more important that the decision makers receive an analysis of the input received through public engagement. It is especially important for them to see all the perspectives and views that have surfaced throughout the process.

## 6 Complete Project Closeout & After Action Review

At the conclusion of a project, include notifying stakeholders of the status or outcome in your project closeout tasks. Ensure all public information locations (websites, signage, etc.) are updated to reflect the final information.

Take time to conduct an after action review. This type of review offers an opportunity to reflect on what went well and explore areas for improvement. Lessons learned can be used to adjust engagement strategies for future projects.

### STEP 6 Complete Project Closeout & After Action Review

*Each quarter (as applicable), teams are encouraged to review the engagement processes for Key Projects, and include internal and external stakeholders in this process.*

Project

Date

Project Status

What aspects of the Engagement process went well?

What were key concerns/ challenges that surfaced about the engagement process?

Were there aspects of the engagement process that could have been done differently? Or better?

How was stakeholder input provided during the public engagement process considered in the development of the final product?

What suggestions do you have for future engagements for 'similar' projects?



*Appendix:*

## ENGAGEMENT WORKSHEETS









# STEP 1

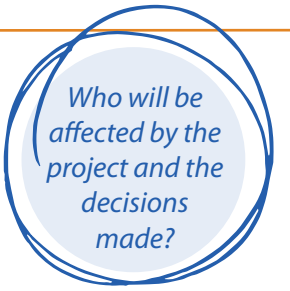
## Clearly Define the Project

(see page 8 in the Public Engagement Guide)

Project Context	Yes	To Some Extent	No	Notes
Does this project relate to master, sector, corridor, Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and/or other plans?				
Have members of the public had an opportunity to provide input into the project prior to this point in time?				
Are there are other projects in the immediate geographic area that are important to be aware of? This includes county, regional, state, federal and utility projects.				
Are there any potential benefits and/or concerns for nearby residents and/or businesses (e.g., health/safety, traffic, parking)?				
Are there any greater needs that this project fulfills?				
Is there community support for this project?				
Are there community concerns and/or opposition for this project?				

## STEP 2 Identify Project Stakeholders

(see page 9 in the Public Engagement Guide)



### Commissions, Committees & Advisory Boards

Identify any commissions that may have an interest in this project and whether they would receive informational updates or possibly take action on the project at any point. (see <http://commissions.arlingtonva.us/>)

Commission/Advisory Board	Interest/Impact/Views	Chair	Email	Phone

### Civic Associations and Neighborhoods

Stakeholder	Interest/Impact/Views	Point of Contact	Email	Phone



## STEP 3 Determine Level of Engagement

(see pages 10-12 in the Public Engagement Guide)

There are four levels of engagement for County projects: Communicate, Consult, Involve and Collaborate\*. The following indicators will help decide the appropriate engagement level for a project. More checks in a particular category, generally indicates that is the appropriate engagement level. If there's a tie, use the higher engagement level. It will be important to use both these indicators and the framework on page 11 to determine levels of engagement.

✓ Indicators for Engagement Level		Policy/Notes
Communicate	Project <b>would not</b> interrupt service and/or traffic for an extended period of time (typically < one month)	
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✓ Indicators for Engagement Level		Policy/Notes
Communicate & Consult	Project addresses a public health and/or safety concern	
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\*\* Significance can be assessed, in part, by answering context questions in Step 1.

## STEP 4 Create and Implement Engagement & Communication Strategies

(see page 13 in the Public Engagement Guide)

### Public Engagement Goals and Objectives

- *Goal: in 2-3 sentences, provide key goal for what the engagement process will yield for this project.*
- *Objectives: list elements for engagement opportunities and outcomes.*

Public Engagement Goal		
Engagement Objective 1	Engagement Objective 2	Engagement Objective 3









## STEP 6

# Complete Project Closeout & After Action Review

(see page 15 in the Public Engagement Guide)

Each quarter (as applicable), teams are encouraged to review the engagement processes for Key Projects, and include internal and external stakeholders in this process.

Date

Project

Project Status

What aspects of the Engagement process went well?	
What were key concerns/challenges that surfaced about the engagement process?	
Were there aspects of the engagement process that could have been done differently? Or better?	
How was stakeholder input provided during the public engagement process considered in the development of the final product?	
What suggestions do you have for future engagements for 'similar' projects?	