

# Lake Superior Headwater Sustainability Partnership

# Community Engagement Toolkit

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# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT OVERVIEW

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## PURPOSE

The Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership (Headwaters Partnership, Partnership) is a voluntary, collaborative partnership of over 30 agencies, organizations, local governments, and tribal entities working together to protect, restore, and steward the natural resources of the St. Louis River Estuary and surrounding watersheds. As such, we approach community engagement as a shared practice that strengthens trust, collaborative capacity, and stewardship across the Headwaters region. This toolkit is part of the Headwaters Partnership's efforts to support partners' capacities for effective community engagement in conservation work.

The toolkit is designed to help project managers, organizations, and agencies create engagement plans that guide equitable community involvement to foster more meaningful and successful conservation efforts and to celebrate the strengths of communities.

Many factors make community-based conservation and community engagement challenging. There is no universal "best way" to engage communities. Your community engagement plan will depend on the unique context of your project, including your goal for engagement, the communities the project serves, the partners involved, funding, time, and capacity available, stage of the project, and more.

This toolkit is designed to be adaptable and flexible to help you create a community engagement plan that is achievable for your specific context. Use it in ways that are helpful and skip any part of it that is not.

## NOTE ON TERMS

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We use the word "**project**" in this toolkit to represent any specific natural resources activity done by members of the Headwaters Partnership ("partners"). Whether your project is big or small, if it encompasses restoration, protection, conservation, stewardship, monitoring, assessment, and/or planning, these worksheets will help you develop an appropriate community engagement plan.

We use the word "**program**" in this toolkit to represent developing relationships with a community using a set of activities, outreach events, information gathering efforts, or sharing that is not specifically tied to an individual project.

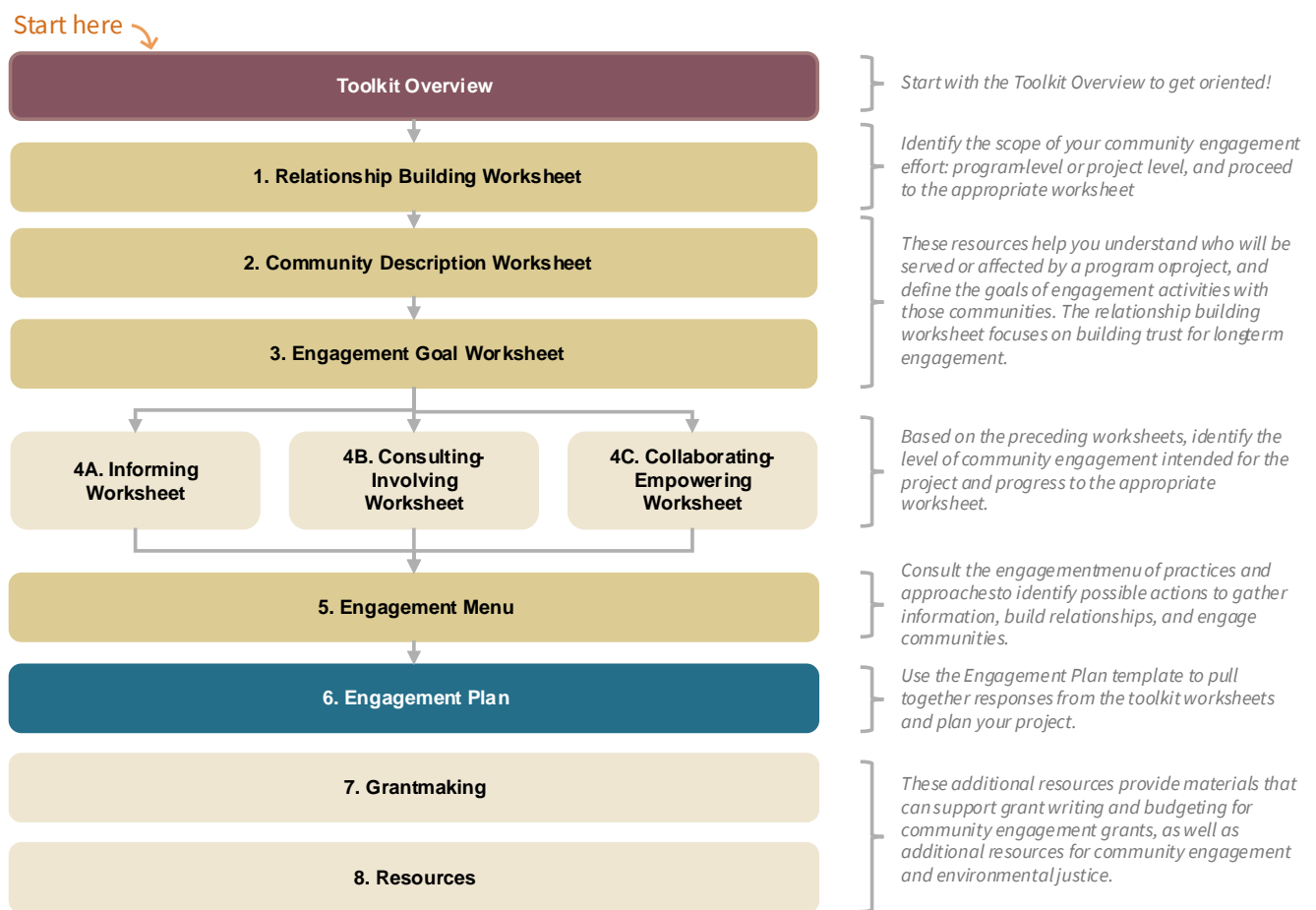
We use the word "**community**" in this toolkit to mean any group of people connected by something shared (geography, interests, sociodemographic identity, circumstances, values, etc.). Within this toolkit, we focus on the public community beyond the Partnership, but we acknowledge that the members of the Partnership also engage with one another as members of a community.

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit has eight sections, many of which are worksheets, but you will only use the sections that apply to the type of project you are doing. This overview provides an introduction to the rest of the toolkit and a flow-chart that will help you identify which sections to use. It also includes a primer on community-based conservation and best practices for engagement.

Working through the worksheets in the toolkit will ultimately help you develop an engagement plan using an established template. The answers to the questions in the worksheets can be copied and pasted directly into the template. **It may be helpful to review the template (see Section 6. Engagement Plan Template) first before working through the worksheets.**

This toolkit is best applied early in a project by a project team. Because community engagement can require a major investment, we recommend including funding for community engagement in grants. See **Section 7. Grantmaking** for more information. Figure 1 provides an overview of the Toolkit as a flowchart that shows how to proceed through the sections of this document.



**Figure 1.** Overview of the Community Engagement Toolkit.

## WHY ENGAGE COMMUNITIES IN CONSERVATION

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### What is community-based conservation?

While ecological sciences have often treated people as external to ecosystems, people are embedded within deeply interconnected social-ecological systems (Fox & Cundill, 2018; Ferguson et al., 2022). Human and community well-being depends on the health of the ecosystems from which our physical (food, water, shelter) and social, emotional, and spiritual (belonging, esteem, self-actualization) needs are derived. **Community-based conservation** recognizes these inherent connections and how the outcomes of conservation are more successful when done **with** communities rather than **for** communities. It empowers communities to participate in decision-making processes, which can enable results that are more sustainable and have greater benefits. When community voices are welcomed and community needs are considered, conservation has opportunities to generate not just provisioning, regulating, or supporting services, but also cultural ecosystem services like sense of place, belonging, intergenerational knowledge, recreation, and shared stewardship (González-Molina et al., 2022), with greater benefits for both ecosystems and people.

### What is community engagement?

Community engagement for conservation is the concept of **working with** community members who may be impacted by environmental decision-making to ensure that community members **know about** environmental decision-making, and to ensure that their **perspectives, knowledge, and input are incorporated** into environmental decision-making.

### Why is community engagement important?

A substantial and growing body of research demonstrates that effective environmental decision-making requires active participation of communities at every stage of project design, implementation, and evaluation. Benefits of community engagement include:

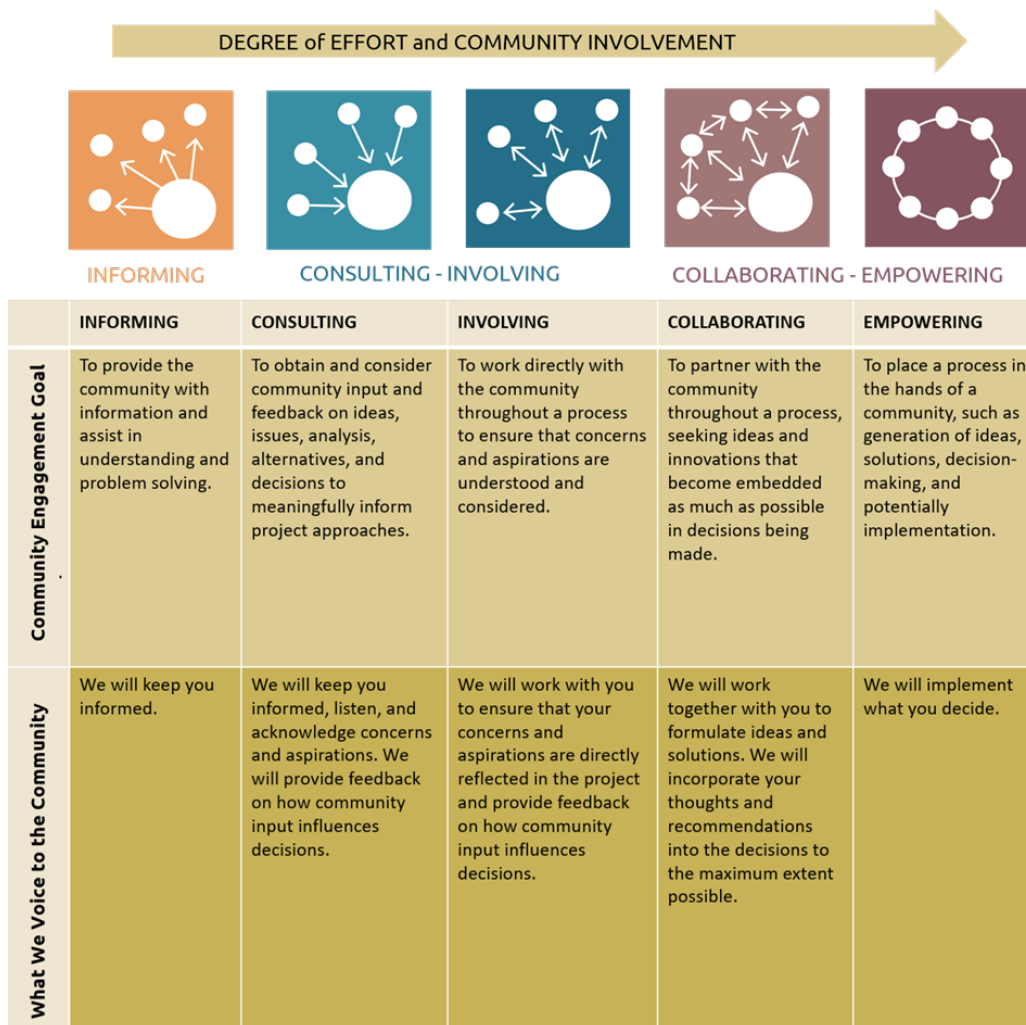
- The community engagement process itself can provide opportunities for fostering social connections that support well-being and build community capacity for future environmental projects and initiatives.
- Engaging with community members helps ensure that projects or decisions address community-identified priorities.
- Community engagement can help identify and avoid potential unintended consequences of environmental decisions, such as accidentally eliminating informal access points or making access more difficult for some groups.
- Community members hold local, cultural, place-based knowledge that agency/organization staff may not hold that can inform projects that greater benefits for both ecosystems and people (McFarlane et al., 2024; Windhoffer et al., 2024).
- This local knowledge can also lead to projects with greater adaptive capacity and persistence in the face of future disturbances (McFarlane et al., 2024; Windhoffer et al., 2024).
- Community input can help identify synergies with other community projects, actions, groups, or initiatives that help provide added benefits and/or reduce costs.
- Community engagement can build public ownership over a project and result in communities that are

proud of outcomes and possible future stewardship, rather than communities that could be surprised or upset at outcomes after implementation. This can help ensure the long-term success of both ecological and social outcomes (e.g., Schultz et al., 2022).

- Community input can help demonstrate community needs and public support, which can make funding applications more likely to be successful.

## Levels of Community Engagement

There are various approaches to engagement that represent a range of ways that communities can be engaged, spanning from informing the community to community empowerment. This toolkit considers three levels of engagement: ‘Informing’, ‘Consulting-Involving’, and ‘Collaborating-Empowering’. The Spectrum of Public Participation in Figure 2 was adapted from graphics and language originally developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) to bring greater light to the role of communities in planning and decision-making. Each approach can be seen as a level of engagement, with increasing amounts of effort (time and capacity) and also increasing levels of community involvement as you move to the right in the spectrum. It is important to recognize that these are levels, not steps. Each level, or type of engagement, can be appropriate depending on the context for engagement.



**Figure 2.** Spectrum of Public Participation, adapted from the International Association for Public Participation.

Projects or programming may, and likely will, involve multiple levels of engagement during different stages. For instance, informing may take place for all levels to communicate about a project or outcomes. For this toolkit, we offer three worksheets to help determine your level(s) of engagement, even if more than one may be appropriate.

In addition, goals for community engagement, and information on what each level means to the public, are given for each level of participation (Figure 2).

### **Informing (see [Section 4A. Informing Worksheet](#))**

This approach to community engagement is focused primarily on communicating about anticipated outcomes to residents or the public, generally with limited opportunities for broad public involvement in decision-making. This could include press releases, media communications, interpretive and educational materials, public meetings, and public comment periods. These are typically minimum institutional requirements for projects funded with public dollars. In this approach, decision-making power is held by conservation agencies and organizations.

This has been the approach of most conservation historically but has been criticized when used as a sole method of engagement because it is ineffective at ensuring community perspectives are represented in decision-making. Public meetings are often sparsely attended due to many reasons: poor advertisements or communication, meetings scheduled in afternoons or evenings when people are unavailable or lack childcare, community members having other higher personal priorities, etc. Public meetings or comment periods are also often scheduled after major decisions have been made, limiting the possibility for public input to meaningfully influence decisions.

However, there are situations when this approach is appropriate. For example, for projects on private property, projects without public access, or projects not funded with public dollars, an approach that focuses on informing the public rather than incorporating broad community perspectives in decision-making might be appropriate. In that case, effective communications are still necessary, and it may be appropriate to limit public input opportunities to the specific groups who will be directly affected by the project.

### **Consulting-Involving (see [Section 4B. Consulting-Involving Worksheet](#))**

A Consulting-Involving approach focuses on community engagement to solicit input that can meaningfully inform project approaches, visions, plans, designs, implementation, and/or monitoring. This could include facilitated public workshops or focus groups, one-on-one interviews, surveys or questionnaires, intergenerational advisory groups, or participatory action research. This approach offers reciprocally beneficial opportunities for community members and groups to learn about and offer input on conservation work while minimizing unnecessary extraction from or burdens on community members.

This type of engagement relies on long-term trusting and respectful relationships among community members/groups and natural resource professionals. In this approach, some decision-making power is shared with communities engaged in conservation, although conservation agencies and organizations still largely retain decision-making power. This approach to conservation and environmental action is becoming increasingly popular because it leads to projects that have greater ecological and social impact.

## Collaborating-Empowering (see [Section 4C. Collaborating-Empowering Worksheet](#))

This approach facilitates community-driven, co-produced projects and activities that meaningfully share decision-making power with, or delegate decision-making power to, a community. Projects are created by building ideas from expressed community desires or co-produced by communities and environmental agencies/organizations from the time of project initiation. At its best, this approach results in a low chance of unintended consequences, high community support, greater equity in outcomes, meeting community needs, better ecological outcomes, and momentum that may lead to other positive community actions or projects in the future.

While a wealth of research points to the benefits of community engagement efforts that move towards shared decision-making power, there are also significant limitations to implementing shared decision-making power, making this approach rare in conservation. This approach requires close and durable trust- and respect-based relationships among a community and organizations/agencies. Such relationships require major investments in time, coordination, and funding. Grant funding, timelines, capacity, and expertise limitations often make collaborating-empowering engagement challenging.

## WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

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The following Principles and Practices for Engagement, developed with community leaders and the Headwaters Partnership Community Council, offer a shared foundation for building relationships, supporting inclusive participation, and working alongside communities in ways that reflect shared stewardship of the Headwaters Partnership region.

### Headwaters Partnership Principles for Engagement

The Principles for Engagement (Principles) presented here were developed based on conversations with community leaders at a special event hosted by the Headwaters Partnership in January 2025. The Principles, listed below, are intended to guide engagement both within the Partnership and with the broader St. Louis River estuary landscape community:

- Center place: Gichigami-ziibi (the St. Louis River) and her connected ecosystems
- Build community
- Act with integrity & mutual respect
- Foster reciprocal connections
- Foster belonging for all
- Center joy, hope, and love

### Headwaters Partnership Practices for Engagement

The Practices for Engagement (Practices) presented here were developed by the Headwaters Partnership Community Council, which was convened in October 2025 to guide the Partnership's community engagement efforts. The Practices for Engagement translate the Principles for Engagement into practical ways partners can

implement engagement efforts. More information on the Practices, including strategies and approaches can be found in [Section 5. Engagement Menu](#).

The Practices were developed by the Community Council based on two core beliefs: 1) strong community engagement grows from authentic relationships with people and with place, and 2) engagement must begin by recognizing and honoring community strengths. The Practices include the following:

### Communicate in Ways that Resonate

Clear and simple communication helps people connect with your work. Explain ideas in ways that feel familiar to your audience. People learn in different ways, so use tools like music, maps, stories, or art to make your message clear and personal. Clear communication builds understanding and helps people feel included.

#### Strategies:

- 1. Plain Language Communication:** Use clear, simple language in all public communication. Limit technical terms and define them when needed. Avoid acronyms. Share key information and provide ways for people to learn more.
- 2. Multimodal Storytelling:** Use art, music, theater, maps, and storytelling to share information. Invite community members to share their own stories and creative work. Seek out community organizations that already connect with community members in unique ways.
- 3. Cultural and Cognitive Framing:** Recognize that people process information differently. Listen to the community of people you are connecting with. Use examples, visuals, and stories that reflect their culture and lived experience. Choose words that connect with your audience and explain how the work may affect their community.

### Grow Trust and Long-Term Relationships

Building trust takes time. It grows when partners show up, listen, and follow through. People build trust with each other through repeated interactions, shared values, and honest communication. Long-term presence helps relationships deepen and grow stronger over time.

#### Strategies:

- 1. Relationship Centered Engagement:** Listen with curiosity and humility as a member of the community. Create space for open conversation without a set agenda. Ask open questions and invite stories. Reflect back what you hear in future communication. Share what inspires or excites you in this work. Align projects with community values and involve multiple levels of your organization to show commitment.
- 2. Consistent Presence:** Be visible and reliable. Attend community events and stay connected with the same groups over time. Share information through flyers, digital platforms, and in person outreach. Repeat key messages.
- 3. Low-Barrier Participation:** Make participation easy and welcoming. Host free, family-friendly events like meals, art activities, outdoor activities, or hands-on workshops in familiar places. Provide needed supplies and gear. Reduce common barriers like cost, transportation, food, and childcare. Invite all ages. Provide clear directions, visible signage, and greeters so people feel confident and welcome.

## Acknowledge Community Strengths

Authentic engagement begins by recognizing the strengths and assets within a community. Every community has knowledge, traditions, members, and leaders who care deeply about their place. Good partners take time to learn local history and culture and honor community strengths, including working alongside Indigenous communities and others with deep ties to the land and water. Starting with strengths builds trust and shared leadership over time.

### Strategies:

- 1. Local Strengths Focus:** Learn who lives in the area, what matters to them, what programs are already in place, and where the community gathers. Shape outreach and programs around local needs and strengths. Consider **mapping community assets** such as skills, spaces, culture, stories, and organizations.
- 2. Culturally Rooted Approaches:** Respect traditions and cultural practices. Work alongside Indigenous leaders and trusted local voices.
- 3. Institutional Acknowledgment and Reciprocity:** Seek to understand historical, political, and economic forces that affected communities. Acknowledge past harms and disconnection.
- 4. Shared Leadership Pathways and Community Activation:** Include community members in planning and decisions. When possible, pay people for their time and expertise. Create clear paths for deeper leadership roles. Partner with trusted local groups and build on existing efforts.
- 5. Interactive Learning and Participation:** Use hands on activities such as community science, stewardship projects, outdoor events, and interactive maps to help people develop personal connections to the land and water around them.

## Build Organizational Readiness and Shared Learning

This Practice provides the foundation for all others. Organizational readiness is essential to support authentic community engagement. Organizations must prepare before engaging the public. This means building skills, understanding power, and aligning on shared values. Staff need time and training to prepare. Readiness helps teams engage with care and respect.

### Strategies:

- 1. Internal Capacity Building:** Provide or seek out training in equitable engagement, open conversation skills, facilitation, trauma-informed communication, and responding to hard questions.
- 2. Partner Alignment Sessions:** Plan time for partners to align on values, language, roles, and expectations before public engagement begins.
- 3. Power Awareness, Repair, and Accountability Practices:** Reflect on how institutional power may affect trust and participation. Use language that reduces hierarchy, for example describe an invited speaker as “knowledgeable community member” instead of “an expert in the field.” Acknowledge mistakes and repair harm when needed. Create clear processes for feedback, conflict, and accountability.
- 4. Feedback and Evaluation Loops:** Regularly gather input through surveys, listening sessions, or other tools. Use feedback to improve future efforts. Let the community help define what success means.

These Principles and Practices helped shape the development of this toolkit and should be considered by partners when using the toolkit to develop community engagement plans. Additional information on the Headwaters Partnership’s community engagement approach can be found in the [Headwaters Partnership Community Engagement Framework](#).

## Engaging Tribal and Indigenous Communities

Indigenous communities are key partners in conservation. As sovereign nations and peoples, Indigenous communities hold rights to self-determination, affirmed by the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). Indigenous communities have experienced long histories of harm because of colonial practices. The St. Louis River estuary landscape falls within ceded territory, where the Ojibwe people have treaty-enshrined rights to practice traditional lifeways. (For information on the boundaries of ceded territories near the St Louis River estuary, see the ‘Jurisdictions: Ceded Territories’ layer in the [Headwaters Partnership Community Atlas](#).) In addition to all the best practices above, the guidance below is a brief overview of best practices for engaging tribal and Indigenous communities. If your project engages or impacts tribal communities or will impact tribal resources, also review the tribal engagement, braiding knowledge systems, and tribal data sovereignty and governance resources (see Section 8. Resources).

- Do your homework. Tribal and Indigenous partners should not be expected to educate new partners about their history, norms, and culture. Seek information and educate yourself on topics like:
  - Tribal sovereignty including data sovereignty and rights to self-determination
  - The government or organizational structure of potential tribal partners
  - The community’s strengths, priorities, and needs
  - The community’s culture including language, norms, values, and traditions
- The community’s history and relationships with other partners or the surrounding community
  - Protocols for approaching and working with tribal partners (e.g., gifting, asemaa offering)
- Respect Indigenous self-determination. Work through appropriate channels, seek appropriate approvals, honor Indigenous data sovereignty, and respect decisions of tribal and Indigenous partners.
- Strengthen Indigenous governance. Dominant culture naturally favors Western traditions, knowledge, and practices. Consider how your partnership will address these inequities. How will Indigenous knowledge or perspectives be considered equitably in project decision-making? How will your project help build capacity and shift power towards Indigenous leadership and control?
- Consider a trauma-informed approach to help address historic harms (For more, see IPCA’s section on [trauma informed Indigenous collaborations](#)).

## NEXT STEP

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Move through the following worksheets to answer questions that can be used to create your specific Community Engagement Plan using the template in [Section 6. Engagement Plan](#). First, begin with [Section 1. Relationship Building Worksheet](#) to define your reasons for building relationships through community engagement, and to consider any past or current relationships, as well as future goals.

# 1 RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WORKSHEET

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**Purpose:** This section includes questions to define your reasons for building relationships through community engagement and to consider any past or current relationships, as well as future goals. Relationship building depends on long-term engagement with communities beyond individual grants or projects, and this worksheet may be beneficial for both program-level and project-level work. This work is often catalyzed by key boundary-spanning organizations, but it is also important for implementing agencies or organizations to build trusting relationships directly with communities.

The following questions are intended to help you identify actions to build relationships with new communities.

- 1. What communities would you like to build relationships with?** Consider communities defined by shared geography, interests, sociodemographic identity, circumstances, and values. The communities you identify will depend on what communities are likely to be impacted by your goal. This question will also be more fully defined in [Section 2. Community Description Worksheet](#).
- 2. What are your goals for relationship building?** Consider both short-term (less than 1 to 5 years) and long-term (5+ years) goals.
- 3. What is your or your organization's existing relationship with the communities of interest?** Do you have an existing relationship with the communities of interest? Is your current relationship positive, negative, variable, or complicated? In what ways? What has your relationship with the communities of interest been like in the past? Consider the personal relationships of your team and relationships of the organization(s) broadly.
- 4. Has your organization (or parts thereof) caused harm or perceived harm to the relationship with this community in the recent or distant past?** What was/is the nature of those harms? How might they be acknowledged or repaired?
- 5. Who can help you begin?** How might existing personal or organizational connections, partners, capacities, skills, or expertise be best leveraged to build relationships?

## NEXT STEP

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After answering the above questions, move to [Section 2. Community Description Worksheet](#) to help you become familiar with the strengths, assets, and characteristics of the communities you identified.

## 2 COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION WORKSHEET

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**Purpose:** This worksheet will help you learn more about the community that your project will serve or affect. We suggest several resources, developed by the Headwaters Partnership and others, as a first step to help you answer the following questions. This initial step will provide a beginning glimpse into the community. Working with community organizations already connected in the community or working together with the community itself to discover its unique assets will provide a deeper understanding and collaborative outcomes. Time and resources will dictate the level of community discovery that you are able to complete. See **Section 7.**

**Grantmaking** for more information on budgeting for time and resources. Communities that your project may serve include:

- Geographic groups, such as a specific neighborhood, township, or city
- Tribal Nations and their enrolled and descendant members
- People who live near a restoration or remediation site or have a specific concern
- Service/action-oriented groups, such as people who recreate with the resource

One community-led resource is Asset-Based Community Development and, specifically, Asset Mapping. This is an approach to understanding communities through the lens of gifts, skills, strengths, resources, and priorities versus needs and deficits. Asset Mapping is best conducted by or alongside the community to be fully effective. Working together with the community to discover traits that make the community unique will strengthen relationships and ultimately provide better outcomes.

For more information, see the following resources from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Community Catalyst Initiative:

- **[Asset-Mapping User Guide](#)**
- **[Asset-Mapping Tools for Discovering Resident Led Associations](#)**
- **[Tools for Agency-Led Asset Mapping with Communities](#)**

*As with all worksheets provided in this toolkit, these questions are intended to assist you in developing and articulating an approach to community engagement. If a question is not relevant or helpful, or if you've already answered it in your response to a previous question, you are free to adapt the question to better suit your situation or to skip over it.*

## Community Description Worksheet

**Project Name:**

**Date:**

**Project Lead & Partners:**

Use the [Headwaters Partnership Community Atlas and Mapping Tool](#) (specific datasets from the Community Atlas and Mapping Tool are listed in [blue](#)):

- 1. Where is the project located?** (use the “[Jurisdictions: Municipalities](#)” layer)
- 2. What are the neighborhoods that might be affected (positively or negatively) by the project?** (for the Duluth-Superior area, use the “[Jurisdictions: Duluth-Superior Neighborhoods](#)” layer)
- 3. What relevant Ceded Territory is affected?** (use the “[Jurisdictions: Ceded Territories](#)” layer)
- 4. What is the primary land use (developed, agricultural, open space) and what are the specific areas of industry where your project is located?** (use the “[Land Cover & Land Use: Future Land Use \(Gov’t\)](#)” & “[\(Gov’t & Port\)](#)” layers)
- 5. What are the population characteristics or possible vulnerabilities of potentially affected neighborhoods?** (use the “[Community Atlas: Dashboard](#)” layers)
  - Consider age, race & ethnicity, gender, income and poverty rates, transportation burdens, housing. What challenges and barriers might exist?
- 6. What groups might be affected (positively or negatively) by the project?** (use the “[Community Atlas: Supplemental](#)” layers)

- 7. Where do people regularly gather and what do they do together?** Consider religious, ceremonial, social service, sporting, entertainment, informal or routine activities, and schools, libraries, community clubs, civic clubs, local cafes, outdoor spaces, and other types of gathering places or events.

*Here are a few ideas for finding that information:*

- Use the “[Transportation: Key Destinations](#)” layer to find K-12 schools, grocery stores, medical centers, universities, and civic buildings.
- Use the “[Land Cover & Land Use: Parks](#)” and “[Jurisdictions: Public Parcels](#)” layers for information on public outdoor spaces.
- Use the “[Recreation: Water Access MN, Douglas Co Boat Accesses, Trails and Trailheads, and SLR Estuary Water Trail Access Points](#)” for information on additional places for outdoor recreation.
- Explore the local area and take note of key gathering places (Use the [Neighborhood Walking Tour Exercise](#)).
- Visit local libraries or community centers to learn about community programs, events, and activities. Check bulletin boards at these locations or other locations in the neighborhood. Check out online community calendars and printed neighborhood newsletters.
- Use the [Tools for Agency-Led Asset Mapping With Communities](#) for step-by-step methods for deeper learning and community-led approaches.

- 8. Can you connect with local programming to learn more about the community, share your ideas, and potentially develop partnerships for your project?** Consider local community clubs, community organizations, municipal parks and recreation departments, community education programs, and schools.

*Here are a few ideas for finding this information:*

- For ideas on community events, businesses and organizations, use the Community Links pages of each municipality [Superior, Duluth, Proctor, Hermantown, Fond du Lac Band](#)
- For a user-friendly template on opening conversations with community associations to learn about their organization and the potential for collaboration opportunities, use the resource [Asset-Mapping Tools for Discovering Resident Led Associations](#), specifically, page 11.

**9. Are there existing community plans or resources relevant to your project or project area?**

*Here are a few ideas for finding this information:*

- *Check with city, township, county, or regional planning and community development departments or entities*
  - **City of Duluth small area and neighborhoods plans**
  - **City of Superior community development**
  - **Duluth Seaway Port Authority**
  - **Arrowhead Regional Development Commission**
  - **Duluth-Superior-Metropolitan Interstate Council**
- *Check with local parks and recreation departments*
- *Check with community development and engagement organizations*
  - **Community Action Duluth**
  - **Ecolibrium3**
  - **St. Louis River Alliance**
  - **Zeitgeist Arts**

**10. Additional questions to consider:** If you do not know, who could you ask that might?

- What is unknown or uncertain about the communities who might be affected by this project?
- Who are the voices that have not been heard or have been underrepresented in the community?

## NEXT STEP

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After answering the above questions,

- Move to **Section 3. Engagement Goal Worksheet** to describe your project and determine the most appropriate level of engagement.

## 3 ENGAGEMENT GOAL WORKSHEET

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**Purpose:** This worksheet will help you describe your goal's for engaging with communities and guide your decision about which level of engagement (Informing, Consulting-Involving, or Collaborating-Empowering) is best suited to your project.

Community engagement on natural resources projects can take many forms including, informing the public about activities, consulting with or involving the public for development or feedback on a project, or collaborating or empowering the public to design projects or lead activities. For a description of what each of these entails, see **Section 0. Overview** in his toolkit, or the associated worksheet for each (**Sections 4A, 4B, and 4C**).

There is no universal right way to conduct community engagement. The best approach will depend on the goals and context of each project. In some cases, multiple approaches may be used throughout a project timeline or for different parts of a project or program. The questions below are meant to provide general guidance to help you determine which category of engagement might be most appropriate for your project.

*As with all worksheets provided in this toolkit, these questions are intended to assist you in developing and articulating an approach to community engagement. If a question is not relevant or helpful, or if you've already answered it in your response to a previous question, you are free to adapt the question to better suit your situation or to skip over it.*

## Engagement Goal Worksheet

**Project Name:**

**Date:**

**Project Lead & Partners:**

For each question, check the box next to the answer that best fits your project.

### 1. At what stage is your project?

	<b>4A</b> (responses suggesting Informing)	<b>4B</b> (responses suggesting Consulting-Involving)	<b>4C</b> (responses suggesting Collaborating-Empowering)
Check the options that best describe your project stage.	<input type="checkbox"/> Design stage - 70% design - to contractor <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation or construction stage <input type="checkbox"/> Post implementation / evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning/Pre-design/Roadmap development <input type="checkbox"/> Concept-design stage - 30 % design - sketch	<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-project or program (not yet determined) <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Visioning

**Also consider whether there are any requirements (e.g. legal, organizational) for public engagement for your project.** This may inform levels of community engagement necessary for your project.

### 2. How would you describe your project site?

	<b>4A</b> (responses suggesting Informing)	<b>4B</b> (responses suggesting Consulting-Involving)	<b>4C</b> (responses suggesting Collaborating-Empowering)
Check the options that best describe your project site.	<input type="checkbox"/> Located in a private area. <input type="checkbox"/> Currently inaccessible to the public. <input type="checkbox"/> Not publicly accessible after project implementation.	<input type="checkbox"/> Located in a public area. <input type="checkbox"/> Currently accessible to or used by the community, regardless of ownership. <input type="checkbox"/> Planned to be publicly accessible or used by the community during or after project implementation. <input type="checkbox"/> Of interest to a specific community or group.	<input type="checkbox"/> Located in a public area. <input type="checkbox"/> Currently accessible to or used by the community, regardless of ownership. <input type="checkbox"/> Planned to be publicly accessible or used by the community during or after project implementation. <input type="checkbox"/> Highly visible or of interest to the wider community. <input type="checkbox"/> Funded with public dollars.

## Capacity

The next several questions relate to your organization’s capacity for community engagement. Effective community engagement takes funding, time, and expertise to:

- Develop or foster relationships with community members.
- Develop effective communication materials.
- Engage with or collect input from community members.
- Analyze, evaluate, and synthesize input for incorporation into project plans and designs.

Reaching out and building new trust-based relationships takes time and should ideally start well before decision-making proceeds. See [Section 1. Relationship Building Worksheet](#) and [Section 2. Community Description Worksheet](#) of this toolkit for more support.

### 3. Do partners have relationships with the communities impacted by the project? Is time built into program or project timelines to build relationships with communities?

	4A (responses suggesting Informing)	4B (responses suggesting Consulting-Involving)	4C (responses suggesting Collaborating-Empowering)
Check the option that best describes your project timeline.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, time is a constraint.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, some time has been built into project timelines, but to a lesser extent.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, time has been built into project timelines for early relationship building with communities.

### 4. Does your organization or do partnering organizations, or available contractors have professional capacity for community engagement and public communications? Creating a team of partners with community engagement skillsets, such as in science communication, community organizing, meeting facilitation, or social science can greatly benefit community engagement.

**What resources does your organization (or partnering organizations) have for community outreach and engagement?**

- Are there staff who can assist with community engagement?
- Is funding included in your project or program to hire or consult with others who have beneficial community engagement skillsets?
- Are there specific requirements or deliverables to consider based on your funding source?
- Are there others with experience in similar projects who can be consulted?

**What groups might you connect with to help with community engagement? What relationship building or funding might be required to partner with them?** (e.g., community organizations, committees, nonprofits, environmental educators at the city, state, school district, or recreational user groups)

**5. Is dedicated funding available for community engagement? Can it be secured as part of grantmaking?**

Funding is typically needed to contract with community organizations, compensate community members for their time or feedback, host community events, analyze community feedback, etc. See **Section 7. Grantmaking** for support in securing grant funding for community engagement.

	<b>4A</b> (responses suggesting <i>Informing</i> )	<b>4B</b> (responses suggesting <i>Consulting-Involving</i> )	<b>4C</b> (responses suggesting <i>Collaborating-Empowering</i> )
Check the option that best describes your project or program funding.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, funding is not secured for engaging with the public other than information sharing.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, some amount of funding is available/secured for community engagement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, dedicated funding is available/secured for community engagement.

**6. To what extent will community feedback influence decisions?**

	<b>4A</b> (responses suggesting <i>Informing</i> )	<b>4B</b> (responses suggesting <i>Consulting-Involving</i> )	<b>4C</b> (responses suggesting <i>Collaborating-Empowering</i> )
Check the option that best describes the level of influence the community will have on your project or program.	<input type="checkbox"/> Community feedback will not be able to influence or will have minimal influence.	<input type="checkbox"/> Community feedback will help inform project decisions.	<input type="checkbox"/> Community-generated ideas will influence project direction, decisions, and outcomes.

**7. What is the intention of community engagement for your project?** If it is to meet organizational or agency requirements, which community engagement type best matches any requirements that your organization or agency already has in place?

	<b>4A</b> (responses suggesting <i>Informing</i> )	<b>4B</b> (responses suggesting <i>Consulting-Involving</i> )	<b>4C</b> (responses suggesting <i>Collaborating-Empowering</i> )
Check the option that best describes your intention for community engagement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Communicate initial ideas about the project or program. <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate the current status of the project or program. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure the public is not surprised or caught off guard by the project.	<input type="checkbox"/> Ask for review or comments on a design or document, or develop, approve, or modify recommendations. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure there are no unintended consequences of the project. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify additional community needs that could be met through the project or improve outcomes of the project.	<input type="checkbox"/> Generate initial ideas. <input type="checkbox"/> Improve or build community connections, involvement, or resilience. <input type="checkbox"/> Have full community participation in planning, design, implementation, and outcomes of a program or project.

- 8. Review your responses to the questions on this worksheet to help you choose your community engagement approach.** You may want to count the number of responses that point to each column (4A, 4B, 4C) and see if they suggest a specific community engagement approach.

4A	4B	4C
Number of responses ____	Number of responses ____	Number of responses ____

- 9. Craft your goal statement.** After answering the above questions and considering your community engagement approach or multiple approaches, craft a statement of your community engagement goal(s). If you've been following along from the beginning of the Toolkit, your answers from the previous worksheets can help you fill out this information.

Consider the following additional questions:

- *What is the purpose or intention of engaging?*
- *Who is the community of interest you intend to engage?*
- *How does engagement serve your shared goals?*
- *How will it equitably improve or build community and environmental resilience?*

## NEXT STEP

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Considering your goal statement, move to one of the following sections that best fits your approach:

- **Section 4A. Informing Worksheet**
- **Section 4B. Consulting-Involving Worksheet**
- **Section 4C. Collaborating-Empowering Worksheet**

## 4A INFORMING WORKSHEET

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**Purpose:** This worksheet will help you identify components for your project’s community engagement plan for communicating information to communities.

*As with all worksheets provided in this toolkit, these questions are intended to assist you in developing and articulating an approach to community engagement. If a question is not relevant or helpful, or if you’ve already answered it in your response to a previous question, you are free to adapt the question to better suit your situation or to skip over it.*

Informing Worksheet	
<b>Project Name:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Project Lead &amp; Partners:</b>	

### 4A.1 DESCRIPTION: INFORMING

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This approach to community engagement is focused primarily on communicating information about projects to the public with limited opportunities for broad public involvement in decision-making. This could include press releases, media communications, educational outreach, public meetings, public comment periods, and other efforts primarily designed to communicate to the public or specific groups about a project or program.

**Requirements for informing approach to community engagement:**

- Facilitation of public meeting(s) as defined by organization or institutional policy
- Effective communication or outreach

**Additional considerations for informing approach to community engagement:**

- Event facilitation
- Coordination capacity

### 4A.2 COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS & COMMUNICATIONS

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Project managers have varying familiarity with or understanding of community characteristics, depending on their connections to and position in relation to the community. The questions below may help identify the best ways to publicize public meetings and develop project communications materials. These do not have to be answered completely or perfectly, but in some cases where this information is not easily available, it may be helpful to include information gathering efforts in your engagement plan.

Answers to these questions can be pasted into [Section 6. Engagement Plan Template](#) to create your Community Engagement Plan.

**1. Are there important (positive or negative) social and environmental histories of the community that should be considered?**

- *What are the perceptions of/sentiments towards the project partners? Have there been previous instances of broken trust in partnering organizations? What happened?*
- *What resources or individuals can be consulted to better understand this history?*
- *How should this history be considered or conveyed in communications about the project?*
- *Are there groups whose input has been historically neglected?*
- *What kinds of community action have successfully helped protect or advocate for the environment?*

**2. Who is your audience? What affected community or user groups or organizations would be interested in this project?** This may be all, or a subset of the people or groups identified as potentially affected by the project in [Section 2. Community Description Worksheet](#). Include this in your engagement plan.

**3. In what ways is information shared in the community?** (e.g., Community bulletin boards, popular media, social media, community organizations, faith organizations, word of mouth, etc.) You may have identified these locations in [Section 2. Community Description Worksheet](#). Include this in your engagement plan.

**4. Who are the formal and informal leaders of the community who could support communication efforts?**

- *Who do people respect and regard? Who knows everyone?*
- *Are there community organizations that you can partner with to communicate with the public?*

5. **How will you ensure these groups identified above are made aware of the project, and any public meetings or comment periods?** Include this in your engagement plan. (See [Section 5. Engagement Menu](#) and [Section 8. Resources](#) for information on this.)
  
6. **How will communications be designed to be accessible to the defined audience?** Include this in your engagement plan. (See [Section 5. Engagement Menu](#) and [Section 8. Resources](#) for information on this.)
  
7. **What, if any, influence will feedback have on the project?** Anytime you are collecting feedback, it is important to be transparent about how that feedback will be used. If feedback will not impact project outcomes, it is important to say so (and consider why you are soliciting feedback).

## NEXT STEP

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After answering the above questions, move to [Section 5. Engagement Menu](#) for an overview of possible approaches to engaging with the community in an informing way.

The information and responses to the questions above and possible engagement approaches in the Engagement Menu can then be used to develop a Community Engagement Plan for your project using [Section 6. Engagement Plan Template](#).

## 4B CONSULTING OR INVOLVING WORKSHEET

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**Purpose:** This worksheet will help you identify components for your project’s community engagement plan while pursuing consulting with or involvement of the affected communities.

*As with all worksheets provided in this toolkit, these questions are intended to assist you in developing and articulating an approach to community engagement. If a question is not relevant or helpful, or if you’ve already answered it in your response to a previous question, you are free to adapt the question to better suit your situation or to skip over it.*

Involving or Consulting Worksheet	
<b>Project Name:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Project Lead &amp; Partners:</b>	

### 4B.1 DESCRIPTION: INVOLVING OR CONSULTING

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A consulting or involving approach to community engagement leverages communities to inform project approaches, visions, plans, designs, implementation, monitoring, or stewardship. For more information on this type of engagement, we recommend reviewing **The One Block Toolkit’s** section on **Community Listening and Visioning**. As they describe, “Engagement that centers community relies on practices and methods to garner community input and support, while minimizing unnecessary extraction and/or burdens.” This type of engagement relies on building “long-lasting relationships, community trust, reciprocity, and an understanding of how your expertise and/or services uplifts community resilience in the way or form the community is seeking.”

This approach to conservation and environmental action has been rare in the past but is becoming increasingly common and supported, because of its benefits: ensuring projects have intended benefits, reducing chances of unintended consequences, addressing community needs, incorporating local or traditional knowledge not held by organization partners, increasing more equitable project outcomes, and ensuring community support for the project, which can strengthen grant applications.

**Requirements for Consulting-Involving approach to community engagement:**

- Effective communication and outreach
- Coordination capacity

**Additional considerations for Consulting-Involving approach to community engagement:**

- Facilitation skills (logistics, communications, development, and implementation)
- Funding for supporting community participants

## 4B.2 COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

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Project managers will have varying familiarity with and understanding of community characteristics. The questions below are intended to help identify gaps in understanding. While they do not need to be answered completely or perfectly, they should be understood well enough to effectively collaborate with or empower the groups of interest. If that is not the case, consider building this into your engagement plan through efforts to gather information or build relationships.

Answers to these questions can be pasted into [Section 6. Engagement Plan Template](#) to create your Community Engagement Plan.

**1. Are there important (positive or negative) social and environmental histories of the community that should be considered?**

- *What are the perceptions of/sentiments towards the project partners? Have there been previous instances of broken trust in partnering organizations? What happened?*
- *What resources or individuals can be consulted to better understand this history?*
- *How should this history be considered or conveyed in communications about the project?*
- *Are there groups whose input has been historically neglected?*
- *What kinds of community action have successfully helped protect or advocate for the environment?*

**2. What are the unique strengths of the community?** This may include skills, knowledge, leadership, networks, relationships, partnerships, organizational capacity, economic assets, institutional resources, Ceded Territory rights, sense of place, held values, educational resources, etc. You may have identified this information in [Section 2. Community Description Worksheet](#). Include this in your engagement plan.

- *What relevant knowledge is held in the community?*
- *What unique geographic features exist in the community?*
- *What strong connections exist among community members, groups, places, businesses, landmarks, etc.?*
- *What services are provided in the community? Who provides them?*
- *What products are made in the community? What businesses are in the community?*

**3. Who are the formal and informal leaders of the community?**

- *Who do people respect and regard? Who knows everyone?*
- *Are there community organizations that you can partner with to meet local leaders?*
- *Are there people in the community who share their skills or knowledge with others?*

**4. In what ways is information shared in the community?** (e.g., Community bulletin boards, popular media, social media, community organizations, faith organizations, word of mouth, etc.) You may have identified this information in **Section 2. Community Description Worksheet**. Include this in your engagement plan.

**5. What information is missing about the community? What don't you know?** Use this information to select appropriate information gathering actions to incorporate in your engagement plan.

## 4B. 3 WHAT DOES COMMUNITY MEAN?

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No project can effectively engage every community member or even most members, so it is important to define what “community” means for any given project. Consider questions in **Section 1. Relationship Building Worksheet** (e.g., project type, funding, project site, capacity), and the considerations above (what parts of the community have strengths that could contribute to the project(s)?) when answering the following questions.

**6. Who will be the focus of engagement for your project?** Name individuals, groups, organizations, etc. If additional information is needed to determine this, include steps in your engagement plan outlining how these will be defined.

**7. What parts of the community will not be represented with this focus?** No effort will be fully inclusive. These perspectives may be captured through other efforts (e.g., information gathering). If that is not possible, it is nonetheless important to be clear about who is and isn't represented and the valid reasons why not. This increases transparency for the public and helps future projects learn how to be more inclusive.

## 4B.4 ROLES AND ENGAGEMENT

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- 8. How will community members be consulted or involved in the project?** This could include that organizations will work one-on-one with representatives, partner with existing groups or organizations, or facilitate the formation of a group or organization, or some combination of these. These have varying levels of coordination and communication requirements that should be considered and included in the engagement plan. Consider [Section 5. Engagement Menu](#) for ideas.
  
- 9. How will community member input be compiled, analyzed, synthesized, and communicated back?** Who will lead this effort?
  
- 10. What role will the community have in decision-making?** What decisions or parts of decisions will be influenced by public involvement or consultation? Decision-making roles and processes should be defined in engagement plans and communicated to members of the community transparently.
  
- 11. Who holds local or traditional knowledge relevant to the project? How will such knowledge be considered in decision-making?**

## NEXT STEP

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After answering the above questions, move to [Section 5. Engagement Menu](#) for an overview of possible approaches to consulting/involving with community.

The information and responses to the questions above and possible engagement approaches in the Engagement Menu can then be used to develop a Community Engagement Plan for your project using [Section 6. Engagement Plan Template](#).

## 4C COLLABORATING OR EMPOWERING WORKSHEET

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**Purpose:** This worksheet will help you identify components for your project’s community engagement plan while pursuing collaboration or empowerment of the affected communities.

*As with all worksheets provided in this toolkit, these questions are intended to assist you in developing and articulating an approach to community engagement. If a question is not relevant or helpful, or if you’ve already answered it in your response to a previous question, you are free to adapt the question to better suit your situation or to skip over it.*

Collaborating or Empowering Worksheet	
<b>Project Name:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Project Lead &amp; Partners:</b>	

### 4C.1 DESCRIPTION: COLLABORATING OR EMPOWERING

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This approach facilitates community-driven conservation projects when decision-making power is shared with or delegated to community. While investments in this approach may be large in terms of capacity, time, coordination, and funding, community-driven projects may pose the greatest potential for positive outcomes on communities they impact. This means lower chances for unintended consequences, higher likelihood of community support, greater likelihood of equity in outcomes, and momentum for continued positive community actions or projects. This approach to conservation work relies on strong, long-lasting, trust-based relationships among community partners and your organization. It also is best applied at the very beginning of projects.

For more information on this type of approach, see the Tamarack Institute’s [Understanding Community-Led Approaches to Community Change](#) report.

**Requirements for collaborating-empowering approach to community engagement:**

- Coordination capacity
- Time
- Funding for supporting community participants
- Facilitation of shared decision-making processes (including logistics, communications, etc.)
- Strong, trust-based relationships between your organization and community partners

## 4C.2 COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

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Project managers will have varying familiarity with and understanding of community characteristics. The questions below are intended to help identify gaps in understanding. While they do not need to be answered completely or perfectly, they should be understood well enough to effectively collaborate with or empower the groups of interest. If this is not the case, then consider taking additional time to build relationships with the community or shifting to a goal of involving/consulting rather than collaborating/empowering.

Answers to these questions can be pasted into [Section 6. Engagement Plan Template](#) to create your Community Engagement Plan.

**1. Are there important (positive or negative) social and environmental histories of the community that should be considered?**

- *What are the perceptions of/sentiments towards the project partners? Have there been previous instances of broken trust in partnering organizations? What happened?*
- *What resources or individuals can be consulted to better understand this history?*
- *How should this history be considered or conveyed in communications about the project?*
- *Are there groups whose input has been historically neglected?*
- *What kinds of community action have successfully helped protect or advocate for the environment?*

**2. What are the unique strengths of the community?** This may include skills, knowledge, leadership, networks, relationships, partnerships, organizational capacity, economic assets, institutional resources, Ceded Territory rights, sense of place, held values, educational resources, etc. You may have identified this information in [Section 2. Community Description Worksheet](#). Include this in your engagement plan.

- *What relevant knowledge is held in the community?*
- *What unique geographic features exist in the community?*
- *What strong connections exist among community members, groups, places, businesses, landmarks, etc.?*
- *What services are provided in the community? Who provides them?*
- *What products are made in the community? What businesses are in the community?*

**3. Who are the formal and informal leaders of the community?**

- *Who do people respect and regard? Who knows everyone?*
- *Are there community organizations that you can partner with or that can connect you with other organizations, local leaders, or community members?*
- *Are there people in the community who share their skills or knowledge with others?*

4. **In what ways is information shared in the community?** (e.g., Community bulletin boards, popular media, social media, community organizations, faith organizations, word of mouth, etc.) You may have identified this information in **Section 2. Community Description Worksheet**. Include this in your engagement plan.
  
5. **What information is missing about the community? What don't you know?** Use this information to select appropriate information gathering actions below to incorporate into your engagement plan.

### 4C.3 WHAT DOES “COMMUNITY” MEAN?

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To collaborate with or empower a community in shared decision-making, “community” must be well-defined. No project will effectively engage every community member or even most members, so diverse representatives of that community should be invited. Appropriate individuals or entities to represent the community will depend on many factors. Consider questions in **Section 1. Relationship Building Worksheet** (e.g., project type, funding, project site, capacity), and the considerations above (what parts of the community have strengths that could contribute to the project(s)?) when answering the following questions:

6. **Who will represent and communicate with the community in partnerships or decision-making?**  
Name individuals, groups, organizations, etc. If these are not yet known, or commitments are not yet certain, your engagement plan should include steps to identify these representatives, including steps to gather knowledge and build relationships first as needed.
  
7. **What parts of the community might not be included in this group?** No effort will be fully inclusive. These perspectives may be captured through other means (e.g., information gathering). If that is not possible, it is nonetheless important to be clear about who is and isn't represented and the valid reasons why not. This increases transparency for the public and helps future projects learn how to be more inclusive.

## 4C.4 ROLES AND ENGAGEMENT

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- 8. How will community members work together and with partnering organizations?** This could include that organizations will work one-on-one with community members, partner with existing groups or organizations, or facilitate the formation of a group or organization, or some combination of these. These have varying levels of coordination and communication requirements that should be considered and included in the engagement plan. Consider **Section 5. Engagement Menu** for ideas.
  
- 9. What role will community members have in decision-making? Will they be the ultimate decision-makers?** Will they have an equal say in decisions compared to agencies/organizations? If they will not have at least an equal say in decisions, then the consult/involve approach is likely more appropriate (see **Section 4B. Consulting or Involving Worksheet**). Decision-making roles and processes should be defined in your engagement plan and can be facilitated through actions outlined in **Section 5. Engagement Menu**.
  
- 10. How will information learned during the process be compiled, analyzed, synthesized, and communicated back?** Who will lead this effort?
  
- 11. Who holds local or traditional knowledge relevant to the project? How will such knowledge be considered in decision-making?**

## NEXT STEP

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After answering the above questions, move to **Section 5. Engagement Menu** for an overview of possible approaches to collaboration with/empowerment of community.

The information and responses to the questions above and possible engagement approaches in the Engagement Menu can then be used to develop a Community Engagement Plan for your project using **Section 6. Engagement Plan Template**.

## 5 ENGAGEMENT MENU

**Purpose:** Every community holds gifts, strengths, stories, leadership, and deep knowledge of the places they live and love. Authentic community engagement begins by recognizing these strengths and investing in the people, relationships, and traditions that already sustain the community. As community members help guide decisions and lead action, relationships deepen, trust grows, and shared stewardship becomes stronger and more sustainable.



**Figure 3.** Headwaters Partnership Practices for Engagement Developed by the Community Council.

The Headwaters Partnership has established four Practices for Engagement (Figure 3). The Practice of **Build[ing] Organizational Readiness & Shared Learning** is the foundation that is essential for this work. As we develop and strengthen our community engagement skills, it is essential that we recognize the need for flexibility and adaptability as we learn and grow together. By taking the first step to engage with community in expansive ways, you are beginning a journey toward shared learning. There is no one right way to approach community engagement, nor do all of these Practices need to take place at once.

The remaining three Practices (**Communicate in Ways that Resonate**, **Begin with Community Gifts & Strengths**, and **Grow Trust & Long-Term Relationships**), along with associated Strategies, and a menu of Community Engagement Approaches in tables outlined below can be used as a starting point and guide. Select a diverse array of engagement methods that accommodate a broad, diverse set of communities. Each action may require specific skills or capacities. Ensure your team or partners hold those skills and capacities.

## 5.1 COMMUNICATION/INFORMATION SHARING

### Practice for Engagement: Communicate in Ways that Resonate

Clear and simple communication helps people connect with your work. Explain ideas in ways that feel familiar to your audience. People learn in different ways, so use tools like music, maps, stories, or art to make your message clear and personal. Clear communication builds understanding and helps people feel included.

#### Strategies:

- 1. Plain Language Communication:** Use clear, simple language in all public communication. Limit technical terms and define them when needed. Avoid acronyms. Share key information and provide ways for people to learn more.
- 2. Multimodal Storytelling:** Use art, music, theater, maps, and storytelling to share information. Invite community members to share their own stories and creative work. Seek out community organizations that already connect with community members in unique ways.
- 3. Cultural and Cognitive Framing:** Recognize that people process information differently. Listen to the community of people you are connecting with. Use examples, visuals, and stories that reflect their culture and lived experience. Choose words that connect with your audience and explain how the work may affect their community.

#### Approaches:

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
Press releases	Increase wide awareness, help control narrative, build ties with media.	News media may not pick up the release if it is a busy news day, potential misrepresentation; some populations do not see traditional news.	<a href="#">Guide to Writing a Press Release for Conservation News</a>
Popular local media (television news and weather, newspapers)	Connect with media contacts to offer a story.	Depends on relationships with reporters, need to find a good hook.	<a href="#">Media engagement best practices for conservation organizations</a>

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
Small Local media (e.g., Perfect Duluth Day, the Woman Today, Duluth Reader, etc)	Can advise on the narrative; reach alternative audiences.	Effort to craft your own story, requires narrative science expertise.	Example: <b>One River, Two Islands: A History &amp; culture Tour on the St. Louis River</b>
Project-specific Website	Infinite possibilities for communicating and visual or narrative storytelling about projects or initiatives.	Effort needed to direct visitors to site, website development and management expertise.	Example: <b>St. Louis River Alliance project pages</b>  <b>The Stories and the Science</b>
Agency or Organization websites	Easy public access to information.	Often restricted in what content is possible and how that content is managed and slow review processes.	Example: <b>WDNR AOC webpage.</b>  <b>Lake Superior NERR site profile</b>
Social media	Easy to share information about a project to wide audience.	Not everyone has social media, requires expertise and investment in multiple platforms, institutions may have limitations or requirements for posting on their social media.	Example: See St. Louis River Alliance’s social media
Mailings or letters	Direct mailings can reach a random set of people where they are.	Printing and mailing can be expensive, multiple mailings are most effective, may not be sustainable.	<b>Conservation Action Marketing Tools and Techniques</b>  <b>Direct Mail Design Tips</b>  <b>Tips for Designing Direct Mail Pieces</b>

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
<p><b>Signage</b></p>	<p>Deliver information in situ where information is applied or needed.</p>	<p>Requires expertise to design visually pleasing and informational signs, requires maintenance as signs can be vandalized or deteriorate over time. Requires coordination to include culturally appropriate information.</p>	<p><b>Seven Tips to Create A Heritage Trail.</b></p> <p><b>USFWS Sign Handbook</b></p> <p>American Trails <b>Advice for Planning Interpretive Trail Signs and Exhibits</b></p> <p><b>Outdoor Interpretive Sign Design</b></p> <p><b>Marking History: Guidelines and Best Practices for Interpretive Signage</b></p> <p><b>Inclusive Interpretive Materials Guidelines – Coastal Conservatory</b></p> <p><b>How to Create Accessible Exhibits</b> (with additional resources)</p> <p><b>NPS Wayside Exhibits Guide</b></p>
<p><b>Brochures, handouts, fliers, etc.</b></p>	<p>Easy to bring to events, colorful images and visuals draw people in, people like to take something home to read later, can use apps like Canva to make visually appealing designs with little expertise.</p>	<p>Good design requires graphic design expertise, printing can be expensive</p>	<p><b>Fundamentals of Graphic Design</b></p> <p><b>Designing Science Graphics</b></p> <p><b>The Art of Visual Design in Science Communication</b></p> <p><b>Design 101 for Science Marketers</b></p> <p><b>Flyer Design</b></p> <p><b>Six Rules for Good Leaflets</b></p>

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
<p>Maps or other wayfinding materials</p>	<p>Great way to communicate about wayfinding.</p>	<p>Need to figure out how to get the map in users' hands, printing may be expensive.</p>	<p>ESRI <a href="#">Make Maps People Want To Look At</a></p> <p>Felt – <a href="#">How to Design a Beautiful Map</a></p> <p>MapBox's <a href="#">How to design a Map</a></p>
<p>Specialized applications (e.g., an app that helps you determine if a fish is suitable for consumption, wayfinding applications)</p>	<p>Deliver custom tailored information to meet specific information needs or demands.</p>	<p>High cost to develop, requires specialized expertise, Effort to publicize and maintain.</p>	
<p>Public meetings</p>	<p>Meet institutional requirements to introduce project to community and provide participants opportunity to voice issues, concerns or suggestions.</p>	<p>Limited in size, often poorly attended, attended by those with most power in community, can be overpowered by dominant individuals.</p>	<p>American Planning Association- <a href="#">Tips for Inclusive Public Meetings</a></p> <p>Institute for Local Government – <a href="#">Preparing for Successful Public Meetings</a></p> <p><a href="#">Best Practices for Holding Efficient and Engaging Public Meetings</a></p> <p><a href="#">Strategies for Managing Difficult Public Meetings</a></p> <p><a href="#">USEPA Public Participation Guide: Public Meetings</a></p>
<p>Briefings</p>	<p>Generally designed for groups that have a specific interest in a project/initiative.</p>	<p>Coordination with multiple groups, very targeted communication, relies on individuals sharing information in their networks.</p>	

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
Direct contact with key individuals	Direct contact with key individuals to share information directly in conversation.	Requires significant time if there are many contacts, relies on individuals sharing information in their networks which may not happen.	
Information Hotlines, Estuary hotline - A direct line to for people to get their questions about the river or Lake answered.	Easy way for public to access information about the river that is most relevant to them, offer opportunity for community members to develop relationships with those working on the river.	Requires major commitment and resources.	
Virtual newsletters	Deliver information directly to those who have requested to be informed, opportunity to partner with organizations with existing distribution lists.	Requires compiling a distribution list, requires ongoing content creation.	Examples: <b>The River Voice</b> (SLRA), <b>Where the River Meets the Lake</b> (FOLSR)

## 5.2 RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

### Engagement Practice: Grow Trust and Long-Term Relationships

Building trust takes time. It grows when partners show up, listen, and follow through. People build trust with each other through repeated interactions, shared values, and honest communication. Long-term presence helps relationships deepen and grow stronger over time.

#### Strategies:

- 1. Relationship Centered Engagement:** Listen with curiosity and humility as a member of the community. Create space for open conversation without a set agenda. Ask open questions and invite stories. Reflect back what you hear in future communication. Share what inspires or excites you in this work. Align projects with community values and involve multiple levels of your organization to show commitment.
- 2. Consistent Presence:** Be visible and reliable. Attend community events and stay connected with the same groups over time. Share information through flyers, digital platforms, and in person outreach. Repeat key messages.
- 3. Low-Barrier Participation:** Make participation easy and welcoming. Host free, family-friendly events like meals, art activities, outdoor activities, or hands-on workshops in familiar places. Provide needed supplies and gear. Reduce common barriers like cost, transportation, food, and childcare. Invite all ages. Provide clear directions, visible signage, and greeters so people feel confident and welcome.

#### Approaches:

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
Educational gatherings such as talks, seminars, classes, and workshops	Opportunity to educate community members about ecosystems and their value and health, helps people build skills or knowledge about a place, opportunity to facilitate community connections with nature which is associated with fostering an environmental ethic, gives back to community (reciprocity), offers informal opportunities to learn about community sentiments.	Coordination & facilitation can be time-consuming and complex, food can be a challenge to pay for with grant funding.	Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve & Wisconsin Sea Grant River Talks Series, St. Louis River Alliance regularly hosts events like this.

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
Guided recreation opportunities or field trips	Offer opportunity for community members to have experiences on the water or to visit places they may not normally be able to access; helps people build skills or learn about nature or ecosystems, opportunity to connect with nature which is associated with fostering an environmental ethic, gives back to community (reciprocity), can be designed to include information sharing or gathering exercises.	Coordination & logistics can be time-consuming and complex for opportunities that require specialized outdoor training or gear and transportation can be a challenge.	St. Louis River Alliance regularly hosts events like this.
Picnics, bonfires, or meal gatherings	Sharing food (especially in nature!) connects people. Recommended by Heart of the Estuary participants. Can be designed to include information sharing or gathering exercises.	There can be challenges with purchasing food on grants, coordination & logistics can be time-consuming and complex.	Heart of the Estuary event hosted by Headwaters Partnership, Waankam: People for the Estuary gatherings, St. Louis River Alliance has also hosted events like this.
Project team members volunteer with local organizations	Opportunity for project teams to learn what potential partner organizations do and about their work to identify synergies, builds reciprocity.	Limited time and capacity for staff on project teams.	
Engaging with local community leadership forums	Identify and connect with organizations that frequently bring together community or faith-based leaders.	Reach many people who are already involved to see where intersections coincide.	Eco-Rotary, faith-based groups, Leadership Duluth, Leadership Superior-Douglas County
Interviews with community organizations	Community organizations and their staff, who work actively in a community, may have valuable insight they can share on behalf of their community.	Community organizations may have a good but still limited understanding of the clientele they serve, and they may not feel comfortable speaking on their behalf, requires time and coordination.	See <a href="#">Section 8. Resources</a> for a full list of resources for analyzing and synthesizing community input data including survey data.

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
<b>Tabling (general)</b>	Opportunity to both share information about projects and learn about what visitors care about or get feedback from them.	Capacity limitations: Many events, not always enough time, may be difficult to capture conversations and feedback accurately (include note takers, or ask for feedback on a map or document).	Local events could include Ice Festivals, Lake Superior Days, Dragon Boat Races, etc.
<b>...at nature-based events</b>	Often partnering organizations are already tabling at these events. Reach many people who already are involved or care about nature, rather than those who could be.		Lake Superior Day, Fond du Lac's Resource Management 13 Moons Powwow each January, Jaegerfest, etc.
<b>...at cultural or faith-based events</b>	Partner at events where connections may not have been previously made.		
<b>...at public events</b>	Good place to reach people with families.	Having an activity for children and families may draw more visitors but may require coordination and logistics.	Ice Festival, Harvest Fest, etc.
<b>...at public locations like grocery stores, gas stations, library, etc.</b>	These places may facilitate access to broader array of people who do not attend events.	In this context, people may not be as willing to stop and chat.	
<b>...at public access locations (trails, launches, parks, etc.)</b>	Reach current visitors to the resource, ideal if future changes are planned at the site.	Only reaches current visitors to the resource who already have nature-centric bias. Depending on the site, number of visitors reached may be lower than at events.	

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
Regular neighborhood listening sessions	Opportunity to connect with community members on regular basis may allow to evaluate changes in needs, sentiments, attitudes over time.	May need to provide food or family friendly activities to encourage participation, consider range of times to reach people with different work schedules, requires regular coordination and logistics, and the need to meet people where they already gather.	St. Louis River's Water Wednesdays
Festival or nature-focused events	Cultural event centering on celebrating the river and bringing people together around the river could offer many opportunities to offer reciprocity to the community while engaging with and learning about residents.	Requires significant coordination and funding.	Lake Superior Day
Youth-focused engagement, in classrooms or through field trips	Youth who care about something will often teach their families or convince their parents to care, youth have unique and innovative perspectives, youth engagement was priority for Heart of the Estuary participants, opportunities for reciprocity with community, opportunities to foster wider partnerships with organizations that serve youth.	Requires capacity - funding required for field trips/bussing, coordination with schools/teachers, and integration into curriculum.	Rivers2Lake Education program at the Lake Superior NERR, River Quest, <b>Youth Engagement in Policy, Research, and Practice</b>
Facilitated public workshops or focus groups	Workshops can be a good way to engage in deeper or more complex conversations with communities about projects should be developed or implemented.	Community members should be compensated for their time, requires facilitation skills, those invited may not adequately represent the broader community, consensus-based methods may exclude typically underrepresented voices.	See <b>Section 8. Resources</b> for a full list of resources facilitating pub workshops or focus groups.

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
<p><b>One-on-one coordination or interviews with community leaders or key community members.</b></p>	<p>Some community members may be well-connected or have a lot of knowledge or insight and may be able to share valuable input on behalf of their community.</p>	<p>Requires knowledge and connection with well-networked community leaders or members, may require significant coordination/time, need to go visit these representatives rather than require they come to you. Depending on time commitment and how information will be used, consider compensating interviewees.</p>	<p>See <b>Section 8. Resources</b> for a full list of resources for analyzing and synthesizing community input data including survey data.</p>
<p><b>Project Advisory Team or Project ambassadors</b></p>	<p>Identifies key individuals who are willing to sit on an advisory team or as project ambassadors to act as a go-between and representative with the community. Can help with communication/info sharing directly with friends/family/neighbors or other networks.</p>	<p>Difficult to identify people that will represent the full range of diversity in the community, requires coordination and facilitation, team/ambassadors should be compensated.</p>	<p>HUD's <b>Questions for Building a Community Advisory Team</b></p>
<p><b>Estuary Elders Group</b></p>	<p>Engages knowledge holders in advising decision-making, engaging elders was a priority identified by Heart of the Estuary participants. Can help with communication/info sharing directly with friends/family/neighbors or other networks.</p>	<p>Requires facilitation and compensation for participants. This group may be better suited for long term strategic advisory roles, rather than engagement on an individual project.</p>	<p><b>Tools and Resources for Project-based Community Advisory Boards</b></p> <p>HUD's <b>Questions for Building a Community Advisory Team</b></p>

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
<p><b>Estuary Youth Leaders Group</b></p>	<p>Engages knowledge holders in advising decision-making, engaging youth was a priority identified by Heart of the Estuary participants. Can help with communication/info sharing directly with friends/family/neighbors or other networks.</p>	<p>Requires facilitation and compensation for participants. This group may be better suited for long term strategic advisory roles, rather than engagement on an individual project.</p>	<p><b>Tools and Resources for Project-based Community Advisory Boards</b></p> <p>HUD's <b>Questions for Building a Community Advisory Team</b></p> <p>See also: <b>Youth Engagement in Policy, Research, and Practice</b>. This toolkit explains how to engage young people and includes benefits of youth engagement, methods and tools, guiding questions, and a project evaluation worksheet.</p>

## 5.3 INFORMATION GATHERING

### Engagement Practice: Acknowledge Community Strengths

Authentic engagement begins by recognizing the strengths and assets within a community. Every community has knowledge, traditions, members, and leaders who care deeply about their place. Good partners take time to learn local history and culture and honor community strengths, including working alongside Indigenous communities and others with deep ties to the land and water. Starting with strengths builds trust and shared leadership over time.

#### Strategies:

1. **Local Strengths Focus:** Learn who lives in the area, what matters to them, what programs are already in place, and where the community gathers. Shape outreach and programs around local needs and strengths. Consider **mapping community assets** such as skills, spaces, culture, stories, and organizations.
2. **Culturally Rooted Approaches:** Respect traditions and cultural practices. Work alongside Indigenous leaders and trusted local voices.
3. **Institutional Acknowledgment and Reciprocity:** Seek to understand historical, political, and economic forces that affected communities. Acknowledge past harms and disconnection.
4. **Shared Leadership Pathways and Community Activation:** Include community members in planning and decisions. When possible, pay people for their time and expertise. Create clear paths for deeper leadership roles. Partner with trusted local groups and build on existing efforts.
5. **Interactive Learning and Participation:** Use hands on activities such as community science, stewardship projects, outdoor events, and interactive maps to help people develop personal connections to the land and water around them.

#### Approaches:

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
<b>Historical or archival review or analysis</b>	May reveal patterns or events from the past that have influenced attitudes or opinions of residents today.	Access to documents may be challenging, time consuming, historical documents may include historical biases.	<b>Reconnecting Communities to the River: Exploring Barriers to Benefits of a Restored Waterfront in a Post-Industrial Community by Sophia Green.</b>  HUD's <b>Visiting an Archive</b> tool.

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
Community asset mapping	Understand the strengths and capacities within a community.	Requires time, facilitation or specialized skillset, funding.	See Asset-Based Community Development in this Toolkit in <a href="#">Section 8. Resources</a>
Neighborhood tours	Contributes to better understanding of community by observing people and places.	Best done with community members, who may have limited time and capacity.	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Understanding Community Context – <a href="#">Initial Informal Research</a> and <a href="#">Neighborhood Walking Tour</a> exercises.
Collecting stories or interviews with elders or community members	Offers insight into local sentiments, attitudes, perceptions, etc.	Time consuming, requires interview skills, interviewees may be responding to many requests and should be compensated.	Interview Design, Recruiting, and Pilot Tests <a href="#">Handout</a> and <a href="#">Slides</a> by Stephanie Galindo, Ed.D.
Oral History	Some community members may be well-connected or have a lot of knowledge or insight and may be able to share valuable input on behalf of their community.	Requires knowledge and connection with well-networked community leaders or members, may require significant coordination/time, need to go visit these representatives rather than require they come to you. Depending on time commitment and how information will be used, consider compensating interviewees.	See <a href="#">Section 8. Resources</a> for a full list of resources for analyzing and synthesizing community input data including survey data.
Ethnography	Gathers rich data of the feelings and ideas or people experiencing eventful situations	Time consuming, expensive, difficult to predict the right place and the right time.	Harvard University <a href="#">Resources for Ethnographers</a>

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
Surveys or questionnaires to collect feedback or input	Gather input on specific questions from community members, can be collected virtually, on paper, or in person through brief interviews (intercept surveys).	Survey design and data analysis requires social science expertise and significant capacity, response rates often low without incentives or compensation, requires marketing or publicity materials and strategy. Caution should be applied when considering using AI to analyze data.	See <b>Section 8. Resources</b> for a full list of resources for collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing community input data including survey data.
Social network analysis	Facilitates a nuanced understanding of relationships and flows between groups and communities.	Requires specialized social science expertise.	<b>Social Network Analysis 101: Ultimate Guide – Visible Network Labs.</b>
Mixed methods approach (implementing two or more of any of the above methods)	Offers highly robust data on social patterns and trends to address an information need.	Expensive and requires extended timeframes, requires specialized skillset and expertise.	<p><b>Waterway Benefit Study</b></p> <p><b>Pickle Pond Revitalization Study</b></p> <p>St. Louis River Fishing Study (in progress)</p>
Participatory action research	Integrates information gathering and action for targeted groups or community members.	Requires compensation for participants, coordination and logistics, and funding.	<b>Participatory Action Research Template</b>
Comment periods	Allows community members to submit formal statements in reaction to proposed changes in the community.	Can have low response rates, responses biased towards those with knowledge of comment period and time and capacity to respond, requires publicity and knowledge sharing and a user-friendly submission process to be effective.	

Actions	Benefits	Challenges	Examples or Resources
<p><b>Participatory Mapping-</b> approach can be useful to solicit feedback from community members about a place in general, or about a proposed plan for a place.</p>	<p>Can be applied in many different settings for different purposes (virtual or in person, at workshops, at tabling events, etc.), can capture qualitative geospatial information about a place.</p>	<p>Geospatial representation may not always be an appropriate way to collect information, may require large-scale maps to annotate in-person, community members may not be adept at digital mapping tools (i.e., in-person efforts may be more effective and may require coordination and logistics).</p>	<p>Nicholas Institute <b>Participatory Mapping Methods</b></p> <p>Maptionnaire <b>Participatory Mapping: Best Practices, Tools, and Examples</b></p> <p>NOAA <b>Stakeholder Engagement Strategies for Participatory Mapping</b></p> <p>Methods for Change: <b>Participatory Mapping</b></p> <p>CECAN <b>Participatory Systems Mapping</b> (for mapping systems rather than places)</p>
<p><b>Public meetings</b></p>	<p>Allows community members to respond to proposed changes in the community.</p>	<p>Often low participation rates, responses biased towards those with knowledge of public meeting and time and capacity to respond, can be dominated by certain individuals, requires additional publicity and increased meeting opportunities at different times and places to be effective.</p>	<p>American Planning Association- <b>Tips for Inclusive Public Meetings</b></p> <p>Institute for Local Government – <b>Preparing for Successful Public Meetings</b></p> <p><b>Best Practices for Holding Efficient and Engaging Public Meetings</b></p> <p><b>Strategies for Managing Difficult Public Meetings</b></p> <p><b>USEPA Public Participation Guide: Public Meetings</b></p>

## 6 ENGAGEMENT PLAN TEMPLATE

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**Purpose:** This template can be used to develop and document a community engagement plan for your project or relationship building efforts. **Use your answers to the previous worksheets to help complete the engagement plan.**

*Text in blue italics is intended to describe how to complete the community engagement plan and can be deleted in final drafts.*

Plan Template	
PROJECT NAME:	DATE:
PROJECT LEAD & PARTNERS:	

### 6.1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

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**Project/Initiative Name:**

**Version Number/Date Finalized:**

**Prepared by:**

**With assistance from:**

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*Prepared with support of the Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership Community Engagement Toolkit*

## Introduction

### Project Overview

*A brief overview of the project including the overall project goals, location, approach, methods, funding mechanisms, and anticipated outcomes.*

### Community Engagement Goals – use **Section 3. Engagement Goal Worksheet**

*Use the Goal Statement you crafted in the Engagement Goal worksheet or a summary/list of goals. These goals are intended to help inform the approach, or multiples approaches, to engagement described in subsequent sections. These may include things like: develop connections with community members that lead to trust, generate community awareness of certain parts of the project, gather feedback on existing uses, barriers, perceptions, sentiments, needs, preferences, or changes observed related to the project site, gather feedback on a specific project design or plan, gather feedback about outcomes, impacts, unintended consequences, satisfaction, or dissatisfaction associated with a program or project.*

### Decision-Making

*Describe key decision-making milestones anticipated for the project and briefly summarize how community engagement goals and activities will dovetail with those decision-making points.*

### Project Team and Partners

*Describe the partners engaged in the project and briefly summarize their roles and strengths in contributing towards community engagement. Identify any new partners or roles that need to be filled through community engagement efforts.*

### Community Description – use **Section 2. Community Description Worksheet**

*Describe the communities that could be impacted by the project based on your answers to the Community Description Worksheet. Focus on primary neighborhoods impacted but also include any relevant context about larger scales like the city, region, state. This section could include textual descriptions, tables, maps, or other materials.*

### Focus Communities

*While many communities could be impacted by the project, it is likely that community engagement will focus on a subset of communities most likely to be impacted or impacted in certain ways relevant to the project. Describe those focus communities here, including why they were selected. Include if communities are selected to meet different engagement goals (e.g., communication is focused on the larger neighborhood, while deeper engagement to solicit input is focused on the paddling community solely).*

## Community Engagement Tasks

The following tasks will be identified based on **Section 1. Relationship Building Worksheet** and **Section 2. Community Description Worksheet** and worksheets **4A, 4B, or 4C** (engagement type worksheets), paired with **Section 5. Engagement Menu**. Adapt this outline as needed to best describe planned community engagement activities.

### Information Gathering

*Describe activities that will be done to gather information. This could include efforts to better understand community characteristics, identify potentially impacted communities, or gather information to develop educational information or messaging.*

Task Lead: *Describe who will lead information gathering*

Task Support: *Describe who will support information gathering*

Timeline for completing task: *Describe the timeline for completing information gathering. This may occur as an initial task, or throughout the duration of the project as needed.*

Communicating results to project team: *Describe the plans and timeline for communicating results to the project team. Make sure to include any data analysis, synthesis, summarizing, along with how and when information will be shared with the project team to inform decision-making.*

Communicating results to relevant communities: *Describe the plans and timeline for communicating results to communities. Make sure to include any data analysis, synthesis, summarizing, along with how and when information will be shared with the public or engaged communities.*

Resource needs: *Describe hours of staff time, funding for working with others, etc. to document where budget is needed.*

### Relationship Building

*Describe the specific activities that will be done to build relationships with communities, community organizations, or community members. Relationship building may be closely related to, and/or carried out through engagement activities listed in the next section; refer to other sections as needed. Include how relationships will be maintained over time. You may want to include separate sections for different actions or focus communities. Along with the description of activities, include task lead, task support, and timeline.*

Task Lead: *Describe who will lead relationship building tasks*

Task Support: *Describe who will support relationship building tasks*

Timeline for completing tasks: *Describe the timeline for completing tasks related to relationship building.*

Resource needs: *Describe hours of staff time, funding for working with others, costs of materials, etc. to document where budget is needed.*

## Community Engagement in Decision-Making

*Describe activities that will be done to engage communities in decision-making. These activities may be carried out in conjunction with relationship building or communications; refer to other sections as needed. Include separate sections for different actions or focus communities as needed. Along with each activity, include task lead, task support, and timeline.*

**Task Lead:** *Describe who will lead each community engagement activity.*

**Task Support:** *Describe who will support engagement activities. If needed, include possible new or additional partners engaged through relationship building who might be able to support efforts.*

**Timeline for completing task:** *Describe the timeline and milestones for communication throughout the project.*

**Communicating results to project team:** *Describe the plans (including any data analysis, synthesis, summarizing) and timeline for communicating community input to the project team to inform decision-making.*

**Communicating results to relevant communities:** *Describe the plans and timeline for communicating results to communities. Make sure to include any data analysis, synthesis, summarizing, along with how and when information will be shared with the public or engaged communities.*

**Resource needs:** *Describe hours of staff time, funding for working with others, costs of materials, rental space, food, childcare, etc. to document where budget is needed. See **Section 7. Grantmaking** for support.*

## Communications

*Describe activities that will be done to communicate project information with the public. This could include efforts to communicate about engagement opportunities, communicate project plans or results, or communicate results of past efforts. See **Section 8. Resources** for support developing science communication resources for the public.*

**Task Lead:** *Describe who will lead communications.*

**Task Support:** *Describe who will support communications. Include possible new or additional partners who might be able to support communication to relevant communities.*

**Communication products to be developed:** *Describe or list the products that will need to be developed to support communication. This could include presentations, programs, mailings, newsletters, social media posts, arts, popular media articles, press releases, etc.*

**Timeline for completing task:** *Describe the timeline and milestones for communication throughout the project.*

**Resource needs:** *Describe hours of staff time, funding for working with others, costs of materials, etc. to document where budget is needed.*

## Schedule

Include a summary of tasks outlined above in table format. Adapt the table below as needed for tasks.

**Table 6.1. Community Engagement Plan Schedule**

Activity	Jan (YEAR)	Feb (YEAR)	Mar (YEAR)	Apr (YEAR)	May (YEAR)	Jun (YEAR)	Jul (YEAR)	Aug (YEAR)	Sep (YEAR)	Oct (YEAR)	Nov (YEAR)	Dec (YEAR)
<b>Information Gathering</b>												
Task 1												
Task 2												
Task 3												
<b>Relationship Building</b>												
Task 1												
Task 2												
Task 3												
<b>Community Engagement</b>												
Task 1												
Task 2												
Task 3												
<b>Communication</b>												
Task 1												
Task 2												
Task 3												

## NEXT STEP

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Use the Toolkit's **Section 7. Grantmaking** for language to incorporate into requests for funding, requests for proposals, and for budgeting considerations.

Take a look at **Section 8. Resources** for more information and additional methods for community engagement.

## 7 GRANTMAKING

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When seeking project funding, the language in this section of the toolkit can be used in grant applications and requests for proposals (RFP) to describe how the Community Engagement Toolkit was or will be used. Language can be adapted or supplemented with language from other sections of the toolkit as needed.

You might also consider including additional information from literature cited on why to engage communities in conservation. This information is found in [Section 0. Overview](#).

*Note: Different granting institutions may respond to different language. "Community" and even "engagement" may be watchwords for some granting institutions or partner agencies - consider the identity of the funder and adapt wording as appropriate. Consider also how much detail is good to include - some granting institutions may be more receptive to a more sparse/less explicit statement of community engagement.*

### 7.1 GRANT LANGUAGE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

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*“Community engagement for conservation is the concept of **working with** community members who may be impacted by environmental decision-making to ensure that community members **know about** environmental decision-making, to ensure that their **perspectives, knowledge, and input are incorporated** into environmental decision-making, and to create community-centered or community-led projects. A substantial and growing body of research demonstrates that effective conservation and restoration require active participation of communities at every stage of project design, implementation, and evaluation. We leveraged the Headwaters Partnership Community Engagement Toolkit for best practices on how our organization can effectively include community engagement in the context of this project.*

*The Toolkit was used to identify and better understand the communities that may be affected by this project and our organization’s existing relationship with them, including marginalized groups that may have historically or are currently overlooked by community engagement processes. Based on the Toolkit’s three levels of engagement (informing, involving/consulting, and collaborating/empowering), we developed an appropriate community engagement plan, which documents our goals for engagement, action items for information gathering and relationship building, and potential activities that will involve community members in decision-making.”*

### 7.2 RFP LANGUAGE FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

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When issuing an RFP to obtain contractor support for a project, you can use the following language to set expectations for use of the toolkit:

*“Community engagement for conservation is the concept of **working with** community members who may be impacted by environmental decision-making to ensure that community members **know about** environmental decision-making, and to ensure that their **perspectives, knowledge, and input are incorporated** into environmental decision-making, and to create*

*community-centered or community-led projects. A substantial and growing body of research demonstrates that effective conservation and restoration require active participation of communities at every stage of project design, implementation, and evaluation. Contractors will be expected to leverage the Headwaters Partnership Community Engagement Toolkit for best practices on how our organization can effectively include community engagement in the context of this project.*

*The Toolkit can be used to identify and better understand the communities that may be affected by this project and our organization’s existing relationship with them, including marginalized groups that may have been historically or are currently overlooked by community engagement processes. Based on the Toolkit’s three levels of engagement (informing, involving/consulting, and collaborating/empowering), the contractor will develop an appropriate community engagement plan, which documents goals for engagement, action items for information gathering and relationship building, and potential activities that will involve community members in decision-making.”*

## 7.3 HOW TO BUDGET FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

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### Funding

When obtaining grant funding for community engagement activities, consider using general language, rather than prescriptive language, that allows your process to evolve as the project progresses. Community engagement requires adaptability and flexibility; outlining objectives too early in the process (such as in a grant application) can create unhelpful limitations later in the project.

Consider the following list of items when building your community engagement budget. It is not comprehensive, and not every item will be applicable to your project.

- Compensation for community members (stipends, honoraria, etc.)
- Transportation costs (parking, public transit, gas, etc.)
- Childcare
- Food and/or drinks
- Facilitation costs
- Materials (paper, markers, printing, clipboards, etc.)
- Facility rental fees
- Technology (projector, tablets, etc.)
- Giveaways/Freebies/Swag
- Materials for tabling (tent, table, tablecloth, etc.)

## Time

How much time and effort are asked of community members who wish to be involved?

1. How much time will community members be expected to spend? Consider the number of meetings and how long each meeting will last, how frequently meetings will happen, the total duration of the engagement process, and any time outside of meetings that community members will be expected to commit. Come up with a total number of hours expected of each participant.
2. Are you prepared to communicate clearly to community members regarding time commitments, meeting dates, and communication preferences so that people who wish to be involved can be well supported in making the effort?
3. Are funds available to compensate community members for their time? Consider the number of hours calculated in Question 1 and multiply that by a reasonable rate of compensation. **The Value of Volunteer Time**, by the Independent Sector, is one resource that can be consulted. You could also choose to compensate community members at a similar rate to what you are being compensated by your organization for participating in the project. Consider asking community leaders for input on a reasonable rate of compensation. Note, if community members work for certain organizations in their capacity or role in the project, they may not be able to accept compensation.
4. Plan for how and when you will compensate community members (e.g. via check at the end of the project, via direct deposit on a monthly basis, etc.) and communicate that clearly to participants from the beginning. Also be sure to coordinate with your accounting team to understand what personal information will be needed from participants in order to pay them, forms to be filled out, how taxes will be accounted for, etc.
5. Once time commitment, schedule, compensation rate, and payment method/timelines are determined, create a written document of expectations for community members. Share the document with them before the project starts. You can consider asking them to sign an agreement stating that they understand and agree to the expectations.

**Table 7.1. Example Budget for Community Engagement**

Type	2023 (\$)	2023 (%)	2024 (\$)	2024 (%)	2025 (\$)	2025 (%)
<b>Funding Sources</b>						
Grants						
Other Resources						
<b>Total Funding</b>						
<b>Operating Expenses</b>						
Lead Coordinator						
Community Facilitator						
Community organizations partners						
Payroll (taxes etc.)						
Programming: Community hub						
Programming or Activity						
Programming or Activity						
Outside Services:						
Outside Services:						
Outside Services:						
<b>Other Expenses to Consider</b>						
Community Engagement Supplies						
Marketing (Advertising, Website)						
Car, Delivery and Travel						
Accounting and Legal						
Facilities (Rent, Utilities,						

Type	2023 (\$)	2023 (%)	2024 (\$)	2024 (%)	2025 (\$)	2025 (%)
Furniture, Cleaning)						
IT/IS						
Insurance						
Taxes (real estate etc.)						
Interest						
Depreciation						
Membership Fees						
Mail, Postage						
<b>Total Expenses</b>	\$		\$		\$	

## NEXT STEP

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Add any information from this worksheet into your Community Engagement Plan ([Section 6. Engagement Plan Template](#)) or funding requests. Take a look at [Section 8. Resources](#) for more information and additional methods.

## 8 RESOURCES

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**Purpose:** This library of resources is intended to help conservation partners develop community engagement plans. Although many of these toolkits apply community engagement in different contexts like health care or housing, the principles and methods will be the same or similar for applications in conservation. Some of these resources are linked in sections of the toolkit where they are most applicable.

### 8.1 ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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- IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative **Asset-Mapping User Guide**
- IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative **Tools for Agency-Led Asset Mapping With Communities**
- IMLS Community Catalyst Initiative **Asset-Mapping Tools for Discovering Resident Led Associations**
- Tamarack Institute **From the Ground Up Readiness Tool**
- Tamarack Institute **Resource Hub**
- Fall Brook Centre **Guide to Asset Mapping**

### 8.2 BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS IN COMMUNITIES

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- Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership **Community Engagement Framework**
- Urban Institute's **Fostering Partnerships for Community Engagement**
- Urban Institute's **Changing Power dynamics among researchers, local governments, and community members**
- Institute for Local Government's **Partnering with Community-Based Organizations for More Broad-Based Public Engagement.**

### 8.3 CASE STUDIES AND EXAMPLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLANS

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- Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership **Community Atlas** and **Case Studies**
- **Allouez Bay and Wisconsin Point Community Engagement Plans**

### 8.4 CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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- **Community Engagement 101: Ultimate Beginner's Guide** – This Guide is designed to be your go-to

resource, offering insights, tools, and actionable plans at every stage of the community engagement lifecycle—from planning and stakeholder analysis to implementation and long-term relationship management. Find answers to common questions in our FAQs, with additional resources suggested by experts.

- **International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)** advocates for best practices in public participation with tools, techniques, and mentorship.
- **Minnesota Department of Health Principles of Authentic Community Engagement**
- **Nine dimensions of authentic community engagement** from Camden Coalition – Inspire
- **OneBlock Community Engagement Toolkit** - The OneBlock project in Lincoln Park is a great local example of authentic, meaningful community engagement, and they put together a toolkit with resources to apply what they did elsewhere.
- USEPA’s **Public Participation Guide**: provides tools for public participation and public outreach in environmental decision-making.
- **Principles for Authentic Community Engagement**: This tool outlines six principles of authentic community engagement, provides examples of how the principles work in practice, and offers practical strategies for scaling.

## 8.5 INCLUSIVE PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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- **Ten recommendations for inclusive practices** from Go Vocal.
- **Trauma-informed Community Building and Engagement** from The Urban Institute.
- **Youth Engagement in Policy, Research and Practice** from The Urban Institute.
- **Tools and Resources for Project-based Community Advisory Boards** from the Urban Institute.
- When considering how to compensate participants, review Center for Health Care Strategies’ **Guide to Equitable Compensation**
- Review the Urban Institute’s **Equitable Compensation for Community Engagement Guidebook**
- Consider using the **National Health Council Compensation Tools** to calculate fair compensation for engagement activities
- Check out Camden Coalition’s **Compensating Consumers and Considerations for Public Benefit Recipients**.

## 8.6 DIVERSITY RESOURCES

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- **Equity Lens Framework** – a worksheet from Cream City Conservation to apply to evaluate equity of decisions
- **White Dominant Culture Components** – a Cream City Conservation tool to consider dominant cultural norms that may not resonate with people from non-White backgrounds

- **Mapping Proximity to White Dominant Culture** – a worksheet from Cream City Conservation to help consider dominant cultural norms that may not resonate with people from non-White backgrounds.
- **White Dominant Culture Worksheet** – a worksheet from Cream City Conservation to identify ways to adapt to more inclusive cultural practices.
- Leaders for Outdoor Equity, The Nonprofit Institute, University of San Diego (**recordings from the 2021 series on webpage**) This program dives into the historical and contemporary issues of exclusion and inequity as they relate to our public lands, and highlights current efforts to address these issues. Participants will learn how they can increase equity within their organizations, network with each other and have opportunities to collaborate with other outdoor leaders.

## 8.7 COLLABORATING OR EMPOWERING APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (POWER-SHARING)

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- Sam Kaner’s **Guide to Participatory Decision-making**
- **Understanding Community-Led Approaches to Community Change** from the Tamarack Institute

## 8.8 TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

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- **Partnering With Native Nations in a Good Way Guide** – Native Governance Center
- **Beyond Conservation: Building Relationships for Collaboration** – IPCA Knowledge Basket. This toolkit includes links to many additional tools and resources for Indigenous collaborations.
- **Best Practices for Tribal Engagement** – Marine Protected Areas Collaborative Network
- **Best Practices for Tribal Engagement** – San Francisco Estuary Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program
- **Top Ten Considerations When Engaging with American Indian Tribes** - Cultural Heritage Partners

## 8.9 BRAIDING KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS OR TWO-EYED SEEING

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- **“Two-Eyed Seeing”: An Indigenous framework to transform fisheries research and management** (Reid et al., 2020)
- **20 Essential Reads to enable Two-Eyed Seeing in Aquatic Research and Management** by Andrea Reid, Jesse Popp, Deborah McGregor, Jacquie Miller, and Albert Marshall
- **Transforming research and relationships through collaborative tribal-university partnerships on Manoomin** (Matson et al., 2021)
- Ecological Society of America **Traditional Ecological Knowledge Webinar Series**

## 8.10 TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY AND GOVERNANCE; RESEARCH AND DATA SOVEREIGNTY

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- **What is Tribal Sovereignty?** Video created by Native Governance Center and The Minnesota Humanities Center
- **Frequently Asked Questions about Tribes in the United States**, US Bureau of Indian Affairs.
- **The Right to Hunt and Fish Therein – Understanding Chippewa Treaty Rights in Minnesota’s 1854 Ceded Territory**, 1854 Treaty Authority
- **CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance**
- **Navigating University Openness in Research Policy Inconsistent with Indigenous Data Sovereignty: A Case Analysis** (Wick et al., 2024)
- **Collaboratory for Indigenous Data Governance Resources**

## 8.11 EFFECTIVE SCIENCE COMMUNICATIONS

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- NSF **Inclusive Science Communication Starter Kit**
- National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center’s **Communications Toolkit**
- **Wisconsin Sea Grant Science Communications Toolkit**
- 500 Women Scientists **Library of Science Communication Toolkits, Training, and Resources**
- **Considerations for Effective Science Communication** – Cooke et al., 2017; includes a library of resources for science communication
- Harvard’s **Scientific Communication Competencies**
- Climate Science Communication:
  - ICLEI Canada **Climate Communications Toolkit**
  - NPS **Climate Change Communication Toolkit**
  - C40 Cities **Inclusive Climate Action Communications Toolkit**
  - AFS **Best Practices in Communicating Climate Science**
  - RARE - **Eight Principles for Effective and Inviting Climate Communication**
  - Columbia Climate School **Talking Climate: a New Guide to More Effective Communication**
- Science Visualization and Graphics:
  - Dr. Khatora Opperman’s **A Road Map to Scientific Illustrations**
  - Mind the Graph **Graphics for Science: How to Use Visual Communication in Science?**

