KAYA
strategik

City of Renton

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

2022-2025 INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Renton is the fourth largest city in King County and eighth largest in the state of Washington. The City has seen changing demographics in recent decades that necessitate a thoughtful, strategic and equitable approach to improve community engagement outcomes and services for all Renton residents. In the Spring of 2022, a needs assessment process was initiated among staff and leadership to understand gaps and take specific action to fully encompass community engagement practices at the organizational level.

The City values authentic community engagement through relationship building and connection. The 2022-2025 (3-year) community engagement infrastructure plan and framework recommendations were created to act upon Renton's commitment to engage with residents and community members inclusively and equitably - regardless of culture, income, gender, ability, immigration status, home ownership status, native language, and more. The purpose of this community engagement infrastructure plan is to operationalize and develop the systems, policies and practices to enact effective and streamlined community engagement throughout all departments.

In alignment with the City's Business Plan, five (5) strategic goals were identified to implement and advance equitable community engagement at the City of Renton over a 3-year period from 2022-2025.

Community Engagement Infrastructure Plan & Framework
- Internal Community Engagement Infrastructure and Coordination
- Community Partnerships and Customer Service
- Accessible and Inclusive Participation
- Data, Research, and Information Hub
- Digital Engagement Capacity
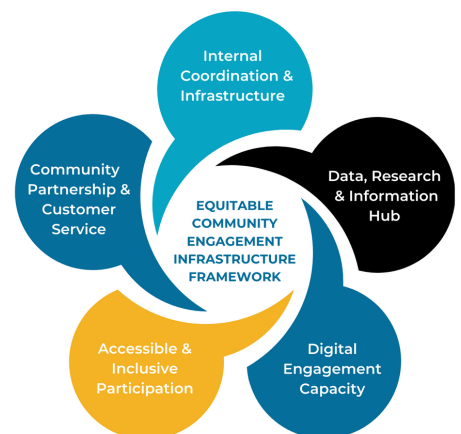
GUIDING GOALS & PRINCIPLES

The following goals and principles guided the process and approach to developing this community engagement infrastructure plan and framework.

ACTION-ORIENTED, EVOLVING OPERATIONAL PLAN FOR CHANGE

A community engagement operational plan and intentional coordination that informs and improves how staff apply community engagement in their role is a strong need. Staff and leadership are ready for change that will benefit both their work and the community. This includes tools, training, and resources invested to build operational capacity. While the plan guides direction, it also serves as an evolving tool with opportunity for expansion and modification to adjust to emerging or unanticipated needs.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

Staff and leadership across departments are responsible for incorporating community engagement as a core value and practice in their positions, above and beyond federal Title VI compliance. Community engagement is not the responsibility of one person or one department. It is a shared responsibility where staff and leadership are collectively accountable to equity, access, and inclusion through community engagement.

BUSINESS PLAN ALIGNMENT

The City's current 2023-2028 business plan guides the governing priorities of City leadership and staff. The community engagement framework and action plan supports the implementation of the business plan in outlining strategies to engage community in its goals of environmental sustainability, social, economic, and racial equity; and excellent customer service, public safety, and economic vitality.

RECOGNIZE AND INTEGRATE EXISTING AND PAST WORK

Utilize, acknowledge and affirm past and current community engagement feedback, strategies developed, and action steps taken. Community members and residents have already provided much feedback to the City around community engagement, diversity, and programming needs. City staff and leadership have also acted to address concerns. This framework and plan integrates past feedback and work done by current and former staff.

PROCESS & APPROACH

KAYA strategik, LLC worked with Renton staff to plan and solicit input; and conducted in-depth one-to-one staff informational interviews. The intent of the internal information gathering and assessment process was to speak with staff and leadership on opportunities for improved coordination and alignment to conduct community engagement effectively.

Community feedback on outreach and inclusive engagement gaps and needs; and efforts administered by previous Neighborhood Program staff were utilized to take action upon. KAYA and Renton's communications team also reviewed and discussed outreach and engagement needs and recommendations for creating inclusive relationships with residents and communities.

Over the Spring and Summer of 2022, KAYA's team conducted one-to-one interviews with all elected officials and twelve recommended Renton employees from nine departments. All interviews were conducted via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each informational interview consisted of five (5) open ended questions that were meant to gather feedback around Renton's approach and values in regards to communications and engagement, culturally responsive programming, and staff development best practices. Community and resident survey feedback collected through the Neighborhood Program were also integrated. as well as previous staff and community needs assessments and recommendations. Interviewees were asked for experiences and thoughts on the following:

- Community engagement values
- Challenges and barriers
- Opportunities for growth
- Policies, tools, resources, and best practices to continue and/or invest
- Suggestions to measure community engagement quantitatively and qualitatively

INSIDE THE INTERVIEWS
PROCESS & APPROACH

Departments

Parks and Recreation

Police

City Attorney

Municipal Court

Executive Services

Public Works

Community and Economic Development

Equity, Housing, and Human Services

Human Resources and Risk Management

9 Departments

Electeds **8**

12 Staff Members

CITY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT VALUES

EQUITY, ACCESS, AND INCLUSION - MINIMIZING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

There was resounding consensus and value in meeting the community where it is, rather than solely expecting the community to come to the City. Equitable and inclusive engagement entails minimizing as many barriers to participation as possible and making it easy to participate. "Going to or meeting the community where they're at" entails strategies such as identifying accessible spaces and alternatives to host and/or virtually host engagement meetings. Offering translation and interpretation, food and refreshments, and childcare are among many strategies to address barriers.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING, CONNECTION, AND COLLABORATION

The City values building and sustaining strong relationships of trust and collaboration with community members. Listening and establishing rapport and connection are critical elements. Exploring ways to convene that are accessible, cater to those who prefer meeting virtually or in-person, and promote new connections are important efforts. Renton has been described as having a "small town mentality." Fostering a welcoming, inclusive space for community members to engage in dialogue, feel heard and collaborate builds trusted relationships.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-DETERMINATION

Communities and residents are leaders in creating solutions, rather than solely being told or given options after decisions are made. Encouraging leadership opportunities and participation in City committees, such as the recently created Equity Commission, promotes community empowerment through genuine listening, dialogue and developing plans and solutions together.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Excellent and responsive customer service has been identified as a highly valued form of engagement. City staff must interact with community members in ways that are respectful, accommodating, and kind. Customer service is a critical skill for staff who regularly interact with the public.

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

LACK OF CAPACITY AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Across departments, staff expressed lack of capacity in terms of tools, staffing, technology, and resources to conduct effective community engagement. Heavy staff workloads or lack of staff members are barriers to supporting community engagement communications and coordination - decreasing the ability to take on more work.

DEPARTMENTS OPERATE IN SILOS OR COMPETITION, NOT COHESIVELY OR COLLABORATIVELY

Concern regarding the lack of communication and collaboration across departments was expressed. Additionally, departments compete for focus on their projects and budgets. Departments may work in silo, particularly based on their own unique programmatic timeline, and there can be a lack of shared understanding in the meanings of terms such as community engagement and racial equity. These silos are felt and observed among staff citywide. Duplicative efforts have also occurred and therefore resources are not maximized. Staff find that opportunities are being missed as they do not maximize or share relationships and connections. Staff shared concern about overlapping events and activities, and unshared tools and resources. There is also a need to develop cohesion among employees working remotely and those working in the office. The COVID-19 pandemic has been identified as a barrier to this, as many staff and electeds prefer and see the value of in-person engagement.

CHALLENGE REACHING ALL DIVERSITY OF RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES

Reaching the full breadth and diversity of community members, given the ongoing demographic population growth and shifts in the City - specifically language, abilities, culture, lifestyle, and age - have been a challenge to catch up to. Because of this, the City tends to approach the same stakeholders. Both staff and leadership recognize that the City needs to engage with new people, particularly those with whom the City is not yet connected or familiar. The City also has found it challenging to go outside of the box in terms of community engagement. There is an uncertain balance of what may feel overbearing or too much outreach versus accessible presence to the public. Misunderstandings or differing interpretations of community engagement and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) frameworks among staff are also present.

THEMES & FINDINGS - OPPORTUNITIES
INTERNAL CAPACITY & INFRASTRUCTURE

COORDINATED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INTERDEPARTMENTAL TEAM

Staff want to operate as one city. For community engagement to be incorporated into everyone's work, efforts must ultimately be streamlined. A community engagement IDT (interdepartmental team) with representatives from each department that regularly convenes to coordinate and streamline engagement has been an effort under way. A regularly convening IDT that includes a shared calendar increases coordination and communications across departments - supporting standardization, infrastructure, and cohesion.

TASK FORCES AND DEPARTMENTS AS RESOURCES

Staff view specific groups within Renton such as the Inclusion Task Force, Neighborhood Program, and/or Equity, Housing and Human Services (EHHS) as helpful resources to turn to regarding inclusion and community engagement. Partnering and finding staff leadership and expertise with these internal groups are beneficial to build capacity for equitable community engagement.

STAFF AND LEADERSHIP TRAININGS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Guides, tools and technology resources enable more successful collaboration both virtually and in person. DEI trainings are considered important, but need to evolve and incorporate different trainers for a more well rounded approach. Facilitation, customer service, social media, community building, and crisis communications are useful training resources. Staff want the education and classes that will enable them to use the community engagement tools available to them. A centralized internal site that hosts all trainings and education materials staff have received should be maintained. In addition new and existing employees may also use this internal site to receive onboarding training on customer service, community engagement, and other relevant tools and resources.

INCREASE STAFF ACCESS TO COORDINATE WITH LEADERSHIP

A desire was expressed by City staff to work with and have more face time with leadership, such as the directors of their respective departments, Council, and the Mayor. There is a disconnect between staff and those who make major decisions for their departments and work, particularly decision-making on community engagement budgets.

TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS & PARTNERSHIP

BUILD UPON AND EXPAND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Renton interviewees expressed pride around their intentional and thoughtful partnerships with community based organizations, residents, businesses, and groups. Such considerable partnering should be maintained and continued. There is also a desire to increase and expand upon the level of community partnerships. Utilizing these trusted relationships to share about City and community resources available mutually benefit both Renton and partners.

INCREASE NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAM CAPACITY AND ROLES OF THE COMMUNITY LIAISONS

The Neighborhood Program is a widely appreciated program internally and with community residents. Community liaisons are viewed as community members and leaders who are the bridges between the community and City that are trusted, bicultural, bilingual, and actively engaged with their respective communities. There is a desire to resurrect previous models of this program and modify to meet the current needs of both Renton and the community to provide culturally responsive support and assistance.

IN-PERSON HOSTING OR CO-HOSTING NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

A high volume of interviewees mentioned their appreciation of neighborhood picnics. Food was identified as a common ground from which residents and the City could interact and connect. Staff enjoy speaking with residents, inquiring about their needs and thoughts around inclusion and equity, and simply getting to know each other. However, this event format may not be the most appealing or effective approach for all residents. Depending on one's age, culture, or lifestyle, the City can consider other types of activities such as "pop-up's" to appeal to the diverse population of Renton.

SUPPORTING AND RESOURCING COMMUNITY-LED EFFORTS

There is opportunity to support and listen to community by creating opportunities for leadership inside the City through community advisory groups, committee involvement and partnership through community grant-making. There are a variety of commissions, committees and other volunteer advisory groups that currently exist where the City can encourage community members to participate in such leadership opportunities.

ACCESSIBLE & INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

CREATE A CULTURALLY RELEVANT OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT APPROACH CENTERED IN EQUITY AND ENSURES TITLE VI COMPLIANCE

Develop an inclusive outreach and engagement toolkit reflective of the City's values above and beyond Title VI compliance. Staff should also be aware and understand that the City is federally obligated to comply with Title VI policies around access and inclusion to address potential discrimination in services.

LANGUAGE ACCESS - TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION

There was a strong emphasis on the need to streamline and centralize translation and interpretation processes and resources. The City needs to ensure relevant translation of top languages and access on printed and digital materials such as social media, brochures, event promotions, and particularly vital City documents and alerts. There is a need to provide alternative interpretation services, including but not limited to a consistent language line resource.

EXPLORE DIVERSE, CREATIVE, AND ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF PRESENTING ACCURATE INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC

Explore alternative ways of promoting City events and activities to ensure information is communicated to the public. It is evident that not all residents receive information in the same ways. Some people are more technologically inclined while others prefer traditional methods of communication. Therefore, there have been challenges promoting accurate information across the City and receiving feedback and responses following outreach attempts. Exploring different means of communicating with residents and stakeholders is a priority for staff and leadership.

BALANCE OF BOTH VIRTUAL AND IN-PERSON OFFERINGS

Both in-person and virtual options are necessary. While virtual options may not have the same interpersonal connection as face-to-face interactions, they are necessary to meet the needs of those who do not feel comfortable or are unable to attend in-person activities. Most staff found the importance of maintaining working hybrid options for both the City employees and community. Furthermore, rather than holding hybrid events and balancing in-person and digital components simultaneously, separate virtual and in-person events may be more manageable.

THEMES & FINDINGS - OPPORTUNITIES
DATA, RESEARCH, & INFORMATION HUB

DATA-DRIVEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There is a strong desire for consistently updated and accurate data on all aspects of the City to inform planning, implementation and services. Given the new 2020 Census results and release of the 2020 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), an update to the City of Renton demographic profiles should be created.

DATA AND RESEARCH RESOURCE HUB ON RENTON'S CHANGING NEIGHBORHOODS

There is opportunity to build capacity to serve as a data resource hub on Renton's changing neighborhoods, including languages and demographics to tailor outreach. Effective research is critical to inform and apply data driven public policy and decision-making. There is also opportunity to assess, track, and evaluate community engagement efforts to measure results and participation to understand program impact and effectiveness for improvement.

ENGAGE AND ADVISE IN SOLICITATION AND ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Employees find that a high volume of comments and input on social media platforms indicate engagement. Additionally, response to required engagement qualifies as positive engagement, such as attendance to court dates, fine and bill payments, picked up or returned phone calls, et cetera. There is opportunity to compare quantitative engagement from 1) pre-Covid-19 pandemic, 2) during the height, and 3) at present to understand how many community members have participated in Renton's engagement efforts.

Qualitatively, it is important for residents to feel they have been heard through action and response, rather than treated as another statistic. Rather than a sole focus on how many comments and questions the City received from residents, the quality, substance, and follow-up of comments must be equally considered and valued. In addition, engagements where community members feel valued and respected regardless of background, rather than as a diversity data point are essential. Collecting stories and experiences anecdotally is also a form of data collection and validation.

THEMES & FINDINGS - OPPORTUNITIES
DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT CAPACITY

INVEST IN CAPACITY FOR STAFFING AND TECHNOLOGY SOFTWARE FOR ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

There was resounding agreement on the need for the City to utilize up-to-date methods and tools to engage with residents and community members online and via social media through digital engagement. To meet these needs, staff and technology software capacity is needed to be effective in hybrid operations and engagement. There is also a need to understand gaps in resident technology access and literacy.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Develop a social media policy handbook that includes policies and procedural steps to guide staff on online engagement. This includes procedures and systems for streamlining referrals received through the Renton Responds app service. The Police Department has a manual that may be reviewed and adapted citywide.

VIRTUAL OPTIONS INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY

Virtual options allow residents who may not have been able to participate to join critical events, such as public hearings at city hall and council meetings. Live streaming, recording meetings, and court hearings have been helpful and allowed community members to choose which setting is more comfortable and accessible for themselves. The exploration of alternative virtual options for both staff and residents have been done, such as electronic permitting, video meeting platforms, and virtual counter appointments.

SOCIAL MEDIA, CITY WEBSITE, AND BRAND

Some leadership and staff disclosed their discomfort with social media, while others expressed a need for a social media policy. The use of online platforms such as Nextdoor and Facebook should be clarified to expand upon its usefulness in connecting with the public. There is also a need for posts to be more timely to take advantage of opportunities. Staff recommended that Renton's website be more standardized and user friendly as messaging throughout the website is not always consistent, cohesive or represented as "one voice." Finally, feedback has been given around the need to update the City logo and brand to reflect more of the City's diverse populations and growth.

RENTON 2022-2025 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

We are a city committed to being "the center of opportunity in the Puget Sound Region where families and businesses thrive"

INTERNAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COORDINATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

- Coordinated community engagement workplace integrated with business plan.
- Formalize citywide CE IDT regularly convening.
- Create and maintain a shared calendar for all departments and staff to access.
- Coordination of elected official support/attendance in relevant community engagement efforts.
- Centralized site for new & current staff to access training on community engagement tools & resources.
- Build technology infrastructure to streamline community engagement for all departments.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP & CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Increase capacity of Neighborhood Program for resident & community engagement.
- Re-engage community liaison programming.
- Convene and build community through continued co-host of community & neighborhood picnics or pop-ups.
- Expand and partner with community based organizations, schools/districts, local college(s) & other institutions & stakeholders.
- Promote and highlight community leadership opportunities in government such as commissions and advisory committees.
- Equitable community grant-making.

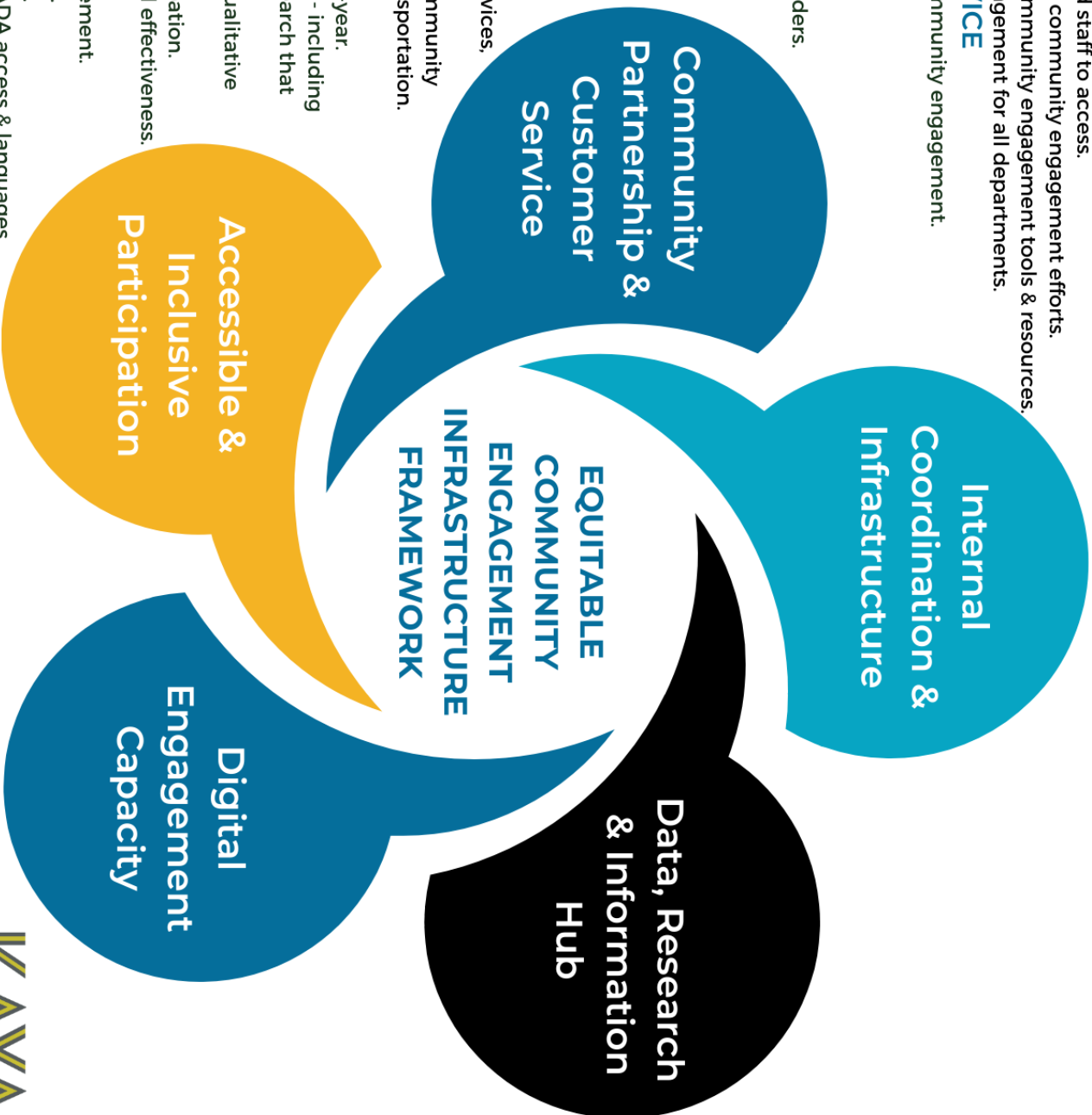## ACCESSIBLE & INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

- Develop an inclusive outreach & engagement toolkit reflecting City values above & beyond Title VI compliance.
- Continue & expand in-person, hybrid & virtual options for public hearings, interviews & office hours.
- Ensure language translation and ADA access on social media, brochures, event promotions & particularly vital alerts.
- Provide comprehensive interpretation and ADA access and services, including but not limited to consistent language line resource.
- Budget to address barriers and promote culturally relevant community engagement particapation such as for food, childcare and transportation.

DATA, RESEARCH, & INFORMATION HUB

- Update Renton demographic profiles with Census 2020 ACS 5-year.
- Serve as a data resource on Renton's changing neighborhoods - including languages, demographics to tailor outreach, and effective research that informs public policy and decision-making.
- Engages & advise in solicitation & followup on quantitative & qualitative community & resident experiences.
- Collect diversity data to track and measure results and participation.
- Build capacity to assess, monitor, & evaluate equity impact and effectiveness.

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT CAPACITY

- Invest in capacity for staffing & technology to for online engagement.
- Policies and procedures for using technology and social media.
- Create and maintain elected leadership social media accounts.
- Streamline virtual & hybrid participation options that include ADA access & languages.
- Review and streamline Renton Responds service.
- Implement 2022 Communications Plan including an ethnic media strategy.

Community Partnership & Customer Service

Accessible & Inclusive Participation

EQUITABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INFRASTRUCTURE FRAMEWORK

Internal Coordination & Infrastructure

Data, Research & Information Hub

Digital Engagement Capacity

KAYA strategik

RENTON 2022-2025 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INFRASTUCTURE PLAN

We are a city committed to being "the center of opportunity in the Puget Sound Region where families and businesses thrive"

'Completion' goal, then ongoing

2022 2023 2024 2025

GOAL 1:
Internal Community Engagement Coordination and Infrastructure

- Coordinated community engagement integrated with business plan.
- Formalize community engagement IDT to hold consistent, regular IDT meetings
- Create and maintain a shared calendar for all departments and staff to access.
- Centralized site for onboarding new and current staff and to access training on community engagement tools and resources.
- Coordinate with elected officials to support in relevant community engagement efforts.
- Invest in technology infrastructure to streamline community engagement.

GOAL 2:
Community Relationships, Partnership, and Customer Service

- Increase capacity of Neighborhood Program for community engagement.
- Re-engage community liaison programming.
- Co-host community and neighborhood picnics and/or pop-ups to convene and promote commnity building.
- Build upon and expand and partner with community based organizations (CBOs), local school district, hospital district, community college, chamber, ethnic media and other organizations.
- Promote and highlight community leadership opportunities in government such as commissions and advisory committees.
- Equitable grant-making and community capacity building.

RENTON 2022-2025 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ENGAGEMENT INFRASTUCTURE PLAN

We are a city committed to being "the center of opportunity in the Puget Sound Region where families and businesses thrive"

GOAL 3:
Accessible and Inclusive Community Engagement and Participation

'Completion' goal, then ongoing

	2022	2023	2024	2025

- Develop an inclusive outreach and engagement toolkit reflective of City values above and beyond Title VI compliance.

- Citywide and staff awareness and education of federal Title VI Compliance

- Continue and expand in-person, hybrid and virtual options for public hearings, interviews, and office or community engagement hours.

- Streamline and centralize translation and interpretation process and resources.

- Ensure language translation and ADA access on social media, brochures, event promotions, and particularly City vital documents and alerts.

- Provide comprehensive interpretation and ADA access and services, including but not limited to a consistent language line resource.

- Budget to address barriers to community engagement participation such as food, childcare, transportation and other factors.

RENTON 2022-2025 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INFRASTUCTURE PLAN

We are a city committed to being "the center of opportunity in the Puget Sound Region where families and businesses thrive"

'Completion' goal, then ongoing

2022 2023 2024 2025

GOAL 4:
Data, Research, and Information Hub

- Update Renton demographic profiles with Census 2020 ACS 5-year.
- Serve as a data resource on Renton's changing neighborhoods including languages, demographics to tailor outreach, and effective research that informs public policy and decision-making.
- Engage and advise in solicitation and follow up on quantitative and qualitative community and resident experiences.
- Collect diversity data to track and measure results and participation.
- Build capacity to assess, monitor and evaluate equity impact and effectiveness for improvement.

GOAL 5:
Digital Engagement Capacity

- Invest in capacity for staffing digital, social media, and online engagement.
- Engage in understanding gaps in resident technology access and literacy.
- Policies and procedures for using technology and social media.
- Create and maintain elected leadership social media accounts.
- Streamline virtual & hybrid participation options including ADA & languages.
- City newsletter (electronic and mailer) to residents and businesses monthly or quarterly and accessible in multiple social media platforms.
- Review and streamline Renton Responds service.
- Implement 2022 Communications Plan including an ethnic media strategy.

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16