

COMMUNITY COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

ANCHORAGE, AK



BETTER PUBLIC MEETINGS



PURPOSE

Based on research generated through the Better Public Meetings project in Anchorage, specifically drawing on recommendations developed in conversations with local partners, the following Community Council Engagement Framework establishes a coordinated approach to how community councils strengthen participation, leadership, communication, and community connection across neighbourhoods.

The framework is intended to support engagement practices beyond a meeting-centered model toward a relationship-centered approach that supports sustainable leadership, conversational participation, and visible follow-through. It aligns leadership development, meeting practices, communication routines, and community outreach into a consistent direction that builds inclusion, trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility.

Participation is strongest when councils provide clear opportunities to engage, create welcoming meeting environments, communicate outcomes consistently, and maintain a visible presence in the community. By working toward implementing this framework over time, through practical tools and pilot activities, community councils can reinforce predictable expectations while maintaining flexibility for different neighborhoods.

IMPLEMENTATION

We recommend that community councils adopt a practical, relationship-based approach to engagement that strengthens leadership capacity, improves communication practices, and expands and innovates participation both inside and beyond formal meetings.

As part of this approach, councils should establish shared tools and routines that support consistent engagement and sustainable operations. These tools are drawn directly from council-generated actions and pilot designs developed through the Better Public Meetings process.

CORE OBJECTIVES

The framework is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- Community councils develop shared leadership structures, onboarding processes, and succession planning practices that distribute responsibilities and strengthen continuity.
- Community councils improve meeting design to encourage dialogue, participation, and efficient decision-making.
- Community councils provide consistent follow-up communication and clear summaries of decisions and activities to build trust and accountability.
- Community councils increase visibility and engagement through outreach and participation in community events.
- Community councils implement pilot initiatives to evaluate new approaches and identify effective practices for long-term use.

THE ROLE OF THE NCL AND PERFECT CITY

Throughout the implementation phase of the Better Public Meetings project, the National Civic League can advise the Community Councils and the FCC on how best to implement any of the components of this framework.

In terms of direct assistance, the League and Perfect City will help organize a Facilitator Training and support the design of a Special Community Council Meeting **(See Fall 2026 Pilot Programs)**

FRAMEWORK COMPONENTS

The following components bring together several complementary practices into a coordinated capability set. Each component supports sustained engagement, leadership stability, and stronger relationships between councils and their communities.

1 - Leadership Development and Sustainability

This component supports community councils in building leadership capacity and maintaining continuity through training, role development, and succession planning. New and existing leaders benefit from facilitation training, opportunities to learn meeting responsibilities, and clear transitions when leadership roles change. Leadership sustainability requires intentional onboarding, mentorship, and offboarding processes.

Implementation should include:

- Hosting facilitation training for civil and constructive dialogue
- Providing orientation and supporting leadership development through rotating meeting roles
- Encouraging new participation in small leadership responsibilities
- Creating job descriptions and clarifying role expectations
- Establishing orientation processes for new leaders
- Planning transitions when leadership responsibilities change, and possibly having an alumni group that helps new leaders

These practices support distributed leadership and help prevent volunteer burnout.

2 - Meeting Innovation and Dialogue-Based Participation

This component focuses on improving meeting design to balance efficient decision-making with meaningful participation. Business meetings must support both governance responsibilities and community engagement. Meeting formats can create opportunities for conversation, idea-sharing, and problem-solving while maintaining structure and efficiency.

Implementation should include:

- Adjusting meeting agendas to improve efficiency (consider using presentations)
- Evaluating meeting experiences using participation scorecards
- Structuring meetings for prioritization, not only voting
- Introducing structured dialogue formats during meetings

- Hosting special meetings focused on specific topics or priorities
- Using roundtable discussions to gather community input
- Rotating meeting locations to encourage participation

These practices support more conversational and inclusive meetings.

3 - Communication and Feedback Loop System

This component ensures that council activities, decisions, and community input are communicated clearly and consistently. Residents are more likely to participate when they receive follow-up communication and understand how their input is acknowledged. Communication practices should create predictable routines that keep residents informed and connected to council work.

Implementation should include:

- Recording meetings and then publishing post-vote summaries and decision rationales, leveraging AI
- Following up with residents who provide input
- Creating newsletters or regular communication updates curated through AI

These practices help demonstrate responsiveness and strengthen trust in community councils.

4 - Community Presence and Outreach

This component supports community councils in building relationships and awareness through engagement beyond formal meetings. Community involvement strengthens trust, encourages participation, and increases awareness of council activities. Informal interactions help build relationships and create opportunities for new participants to engage.

Implementation should include:

- Attending existing community events
- Hosting community service or volunteer activities
- Developing outreach strategies to recruit participants
- Mapping community organizations and partnerships
- Using communication tools to promote engagement
- Collaborating with community organizations on shared activities

These practices help councils maintain a visible and welcoming presence in their neighborhoods.

A COORDINATED APPROACH

This framework recognizes that community councils rely on volunteer leadership and community relationships, and that this work should be built for long-term sustainability through relationship-building and institutional memory, involving learning-by-doing as well as passing on knowledge to new leaders. Working outside of silos, across boundaries, and with other local groups can ensure the work is less onerous, making a local organizing component relevant to creating the foundations for more and more diverse people to get involved and support community action.

To support successful implementation, while community councils are a driver of this work, the Federation of Community Councils and other partners can further support resident-led boards by providing enabling conditions for training, technological support, and opportunities for community relationship-building. Anchorage's Assembly should also continue to support community councils in a way that aligns with their hopes to see them grow, and this can be done through various resources and personal touchpoints that build more accountability, transparency, and inclusion in the unique community council system that has been around for over 50 years. This is a vitally important institutional infrastructure that many cities do not have formalized. Local democracy is a work in progress that can always leverage innovation to advance the core goals of helping the community collaborate on important issues.

Through these practices, the FCC can monitor early signals of framework success as the components are applied:

- **Leadership Sustainability:** Consistent orientation and role description, a growing number of leaders prepared through different trainings, a more sustainable distribution of roles, volunteer retention/increases.
- **Dialogue-Based Meeting Formats:** Improved meeting participation and environment as measured by the Scorecard, clear participant input from discussions, reduced adversarial dynamics, productive forward-looking prioritization.
- **Feedback Loops:** Consistent meetings and post-decision summaries, improved resident trust and satisfaction in councils through surveys, repeat participation.
- **Community-Based Engagement:** Increased civic awareness and participation, greater council visibility through tabling, growth in the number of partnerships with community organizations, diversification of participation locations

Civic Scan Recommendation

Build Leadership Sustainability and Prevent Burnout

Replace Testimony-Heavy Formats with Facilitated Dialogue

Redesign Meeting Power Dynamics

Address Accessibility Barriers

Broaden Participation Beyond the "Same People"

Implement Clear Feedback Loops and Visible Follow-Through

Create Youth-Specific Civic Pathways

Strengthen the Connection Between Councils and Everyday Community Life

Move Beyond Translation to Cultural Navigation

Leadership Development and Sustainability

Meeting Innovation and Dialogue-Based Participation

Communication and Feedback Loop System

Community Presence and Outreach

Framework Components

This framework builds on the civic infrastructure scan holistically. Not all linkages between recommendations and components are explicitly shown.

- *Hosting facilitation training for civil and constructive dialogue*
- *Providing orientation, and supporting leadership development through rotating meeting roles*
- *Encouraging new participation in small leadership responsibilities*
- *Creating job descriptions and role expectations*
- *Establishing orientation processes for new leaders*
- *Planning transitions when leadership responsibilities change, and possibly having an alumni group that helps new leaders*

- *Adjusting meeting agendas to improve efficiency (think about presentations)*
- *Evaluating meeting experiences using participation scorecards*
- *Structuring meetings for prioritization, not only voting*
- *Introducing structured dialogue formats during meetings*
- *Hosting special meetings focused on specific topics or priorities*
- *Using roundtable discussions to gather community input*
- *Rotating meeting locations to encourage participation*

- *Recording meetings and then publishing post-vote summaries and decision rationales, leveraging AI*
- *Following up with residents who provide input*
- *Creating newsletters or regular communication updates curated through AI*

- *Attending existing community events*
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- *Mapping community organizations and partnerships*
- *Using communication tools to promote engagement*
- *Collaborating with community organizations on shared activities*

Fall 2026 Pilot Programs

Facilitator Training for Civic Leaders and Community Participants

Purpose: Build the internal capacity to run productive, inclusive, solution-oriented conversations.

Components:

- Ideation tools including dot voting, issue mapping, and prioritization exercises
- Conflict resolution and de-escalation, techniques for managing difficult conversations
- Shared leadership development, including ways for youth to facilitate
- Role guides and prompts for running meetings or sections of meetings

Signs of Success: Training for balanced participation in meetings should limit adversarial tone and increase willingness to lead. More people will step into leadership roles.

Special Community Council Session

Purpose: Demonstrate a new model of civic engagement that reaches beyond traditional meetings and boundaries.

Components:

- Location shift in a nontraditional setting (library, cafe, shop, school, park, etc)
- Cross-neighborhood participation
- Youth-focused outreach
- Food
- Facilitated dialogue session with structured conversation rather than testimony
- Relationship-building activities
- Issue-based conversations on a clear community problem or priority

Signs of Success: New meeting formats will increase and diversify attendance, promote participation satisfaction during discussion and follow-up, and yield possible lessons or actions for cross-community collaboration.