



Community Engagement Survey Report

Community Involvement Committee (CIC)
June 2026

Introduction and Background on the Community Involvement Committee (CIC)

The Community Involvement Committee (CIC) serves as the Office of Community Involvement (OCI) volunteer advisory body on community engagement. We research community involvement topics at Multnomah County and share findings and recommendations with the OCI, the Board of County Commissioners, the public, and others.

Members of the Community Involvement Committee (CIC) formed the Infrastructure Subcommittee in FY 2025-26 as a continuation of last year's infrastructure subcommittee. (Previous CIC recommendations for community engagement infrastructure can be found [on the CIC recommendations webpage](#).) This year, the CIC continued to explore and study ways Multnomah County departments and staff are resourced and supported to conduct broad and diverse community outreach and engagement on matters critical to our community. Our goal was to learn more about when and how staff currently engage community members.

About the Community Engagement Survey

Our subcommittee decided to create and conduct an online survey of county employees who do engagement work. Through this survey, we sought to better understand perceptions of engagement by county staff that do engagement in their roles. This included wanting to learn more about what resources are critical to the work and suggestions for how staff can be better resourced and supported in their roles. Full survey questions are included in Appendix B.

The survey was distributed by OCI to the Community Engagement Community of Practice, the Advisory Groups Community of Practice, the Volunteer Managers meetup, and the CBAC coordinators group. In addition, CIC members presented the survey to county staff participating in a Community Engagement Community of Practice retreat on February 25, 2026.

The survey opened on February 4th, 2026 and closed on March 6th, 2026. In total, we received thirty-one responses from county staff. In the subsequent weeks and months, members of the subcommittee reviewed the survey data together and identified initial observations and themes that formed the foundation for insights and recommendations presented in this letter. We report these observations, themes, and recommendations with the hope that they provide insight into the critical work of community outreach and

engagement in Multnomah County. While we recognize the limitations of a small sample size we hope these initial insights will support managers and decision makers to understand better the needs, resources, and trainings necessary to carry out the work.

Key Observations and Insights On Community Engagement Successes

We learned that community engagement across the County involves many different types of activities, with both successes and areas for improvement reported. Many dedicated individuals from diverse backgrounds are actively engaged in this work, and their unique identities, relationships, and commitments play a vital role in its success. At the same time, we also heard from county staff a desire to “...acknowledge the emotional toll that it takes to coordinate, facilitate, and engage with conducting community groups.” Staff engage with a variety of stakeholders, including agency and community partners, service providers, program participants, and the public, with each category requiring different approaches to engagement.

Themes of Successful Engagement

Survey respondents reported feeling efforts were successful about as many times as they cited seeing room for improvement during recent engagements. Across responses we observed three themes that illuminated elements of **successful engagement**:

Inclusive, Relationship-Centered Engagement Builds Trust and Participation

Successful efforts prioritize accessibility, cultural responsiveness, and sustainable relationship-building, especially with underrepresented communities.

- Multi-event strategies (tabling series, listening sessions, pop-ups) and low-barrier formats (library activities) expanded the reach and diversity of participants.
- LGBTQ+ student summits, youth partnerships, and Tribal consultations demonstrated shared decision-making and inclusive design.
- Compensation and culturally grounded engagement (e.g., stipends, providing meals, Sovereignty collaboration) strengthened trust and participation.
- Targeted outreach increased representation and voice for Indigenous communities and Native elders in advisory spaces.

Collaborative Capacity Building Strengthens Long-Term Impacts

Partnerships and collaborative approaches build leadership, improve programs, and sustain engagement over time.

- Cross-team collaboration within departments enabled large-scale engagement efforts and alignment across projects.
- Partnerships with community-based organizations led to recurring, evolving engagement opportunities and new collaborations (e.g., annual events, preparedness campaigns).
- Advisory councils contributed to major planning efforts (e.g., Area Plan on Aging), engaging in surveys, advocacy, and ongoing implementation work.
- The Justice Fellowship program developed community leaders who now serve on boards and help shape future cohorts.

Community Voices Drive Real Decisions and Outcomes

Best engagement efforts are perceived to move beyond input-gathering to actual influence on policies, programs, and systems.

- Community-informed initiatives like the Climate Justice Plan and mental health coalition report directly influenced strategies and convened decision-makers.
- Good Neighbor Agreements and budget engagement sessions ensured residents, providers, and stakeholders directly shaped implementation and priorities.
- The Central CBAC's deep dive into program challenges led to detailed recommendations for how to improve county processes and programs as well as suggestions for code changes, many which were enacted within months.

Themes of Needed Engagement Improvements

Along with the reported successes, survey participants also reported areas for improvements. We observed areas for **improvement** generally fell into the following three themes:

Structural and Resource Constraints Limit Effective Engagement

Staffing, funding, systems, and bureaucratic processes can create barriers to meaningful and equitable engagement.

- Limited staff capacity makes it difficult to sustain engagement efforts or expand outreach to underrepresented communities.
- Staff turnover inhibits capacity as relationships and trust are negatively impacted.
- Lack of shared tools, templates, and equipment (e.g., hybrid meeting tech, survey design support) lead to inefficiencies.
- Administrative hurdles (e.g., slow approvals for webpages, policy development starting from scratch) delay responsiveness to community needs.
- Restrictions on incentives (e.g., gift card policies, lack of budget for compensation or food) reduce participation and/or can be culturally inappropriate.

Participant Voices:

- "I think leaders/electees often underestimate the cost of engagement - both in county \$ (staff time, materials, space reservations, access etc.) and community time/relationships. Similarly, it can be seen as exclusively transactive or exploitative of the community (which it can be) and rarely as opportunities for shared governance or mutually beneficial."
- "My department doesn't have capacity for partnership building with the community, so we rely on third party vendors, and end up spending MORE than if we had partnership/population engagement county staff."
- "The challenges of recruitment are often over simplified. The underlying perception that engagement is transactional rather than relational we can just "go get" volunteers. There is a lack of understanding about the educational demands of engagement to support the orientation, onboarding, and empowerment of

community members to fully participate in meaningful ways. Limited awareness and understanding on retention issues.”

Gaps Exist in Communication, Outreach, and Clarity

Inconsistent communication and unclear processes can limit community awareness, participation, and trust.

- Outreach efforts often lack sufficient timelines, coordination, or follow-through, and some teams report doing little to no engagement.
- Additional resources are needed to outreach to historically marginalized community members.
- Social media and newsletters are underutilized due to lack of dedicated staff, resulting in low visibility and engagement.
- Information-heavy presentations can overwhelm participants or create confusion about their role and influence.
- Public-facing logistics issues (e.g., unclear meeting locations, lack of translation) can cause frustration and reduced accessibility.

Participant Voices:

- “There is still a lack of clarity around the difference between 1) community engagement coordination focusing on direct community and resident public engagement and events, and 2) best practice partnership coordination and liaising that focuses internal and external organizational relationships, alliances, and partnerships focusing on policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes.”

Need for More Authentic, Inclusive, and Actionable Engagement

Some efforts fall short in meaningfully incorporating community input or sharing power in decision-making.

- Engagement is often reactive or politically driven, instead of proactive and community centered.
- Community input is sometimes underutilized or can feel performative when decisions are pre-determined or when participants have limited influence.
- Recruitment and representation gaps persist, particularly among diverse and underrepresented communities.
- When leadership is not fully aware and engaged it can undermine efficacy, trust and ownership.

Participant Voices:

- “Engagement can look like box checking. They [leaders] don't understand that high quality and meaningful engagement requires significant planning, investment, and openness to letting go of power.”
- “A misconception is thinking of community engagement as project specific, instead of a constant process of being part of the community.”
- “That its value is understood and quantified. I feel I regularly have to advocate for community voices to have a seat at the table. After two years, I've learned who cares,

who doesn't, and that most of the time, the 'bottom lines' of program efficacy that we measure don't include if the user's been engaged and has workable feedback."

Many respondents pointed to a need for additional staff time, funding, and infrastructure that is supported and prioritized by leadership to move from ad hoc engagement to more consistent, equitable, and effective practice.

Recommendations for Continued Progress in County Community Engagement

Based on our learning and shared insights, we offer three key recommendations for improving engagement efforts (in no particular order). Items are bolded for emphasis. We specifically call out the importance of leadership support, under the heading: "what can leaders do," as those who make decisions on budgets and staff time provide the critical foundation for successful community engagement.

1. Continue to Build and Resource a Countywide Engagement Infrastructure

While respondents reported some important strides have been made in the past two years, the perception was that engagement is somewhat fragmented and under-resourced at the county. The county can continue to prioritize community engagement infrastructure by:

- Creating dedicated roles (e.g., engagement leads, volunteer manager, outreach and communication specialist) and protecting staff time to fulfill these roles
- Developing and implementing a **countywide engagement framework/plan** with clear standards and expectations
- Centralizing support (admin, tools, systems, contact lists, outreach and communication) to reduce duplication and inconsistency
- **What can leaders do:** Set clear expectations, align departments, and allocate sustained funding and staffing

2. Continue to Reduce Barriers to Participation to Advance Equitable Engagement Backed by Policy and Funding

Equitable engagement requires removing structural barriers that can continue to be addressed through policy and resource decisions.

- Simplify and expand **stipends, food, transportation, and childcare support**
- Ensure funding for **translation, interpretation, and accessibility** is the standard
- Support culturally responsive and flexible engagement approaches across departments
- **What can leaders do:** Remove bureaucratic barriers (e.g., compensation restrictions), approve flexible funding, and reinforce equity as a priority

3. Continue to Champion and Strengthen Transparency, Accountability, and Shared Decision-Making

Trust depends on demonstrating that community input leads to real outcomes—and leadership sets the tone.

- Clearly communicate decision-making processes and what community members can influence

- Create a common practice of “**you said, we did**” **feedback loops** across engagement efforts
- Expand co-design and shared decision-making opportunities as appropriate
- **What can leaders do:** Champion and model transparency, meaningful participation in engagement spaces, and accountability for how community input is incorporated into decision making

When leadership **actively champions, funds, and models** community engagement, our communities experience more effective and durable outcomes. Without that commitment, even dedicated staff efforts and well-designed strategies can struggle to create meaningful outcomes.

Recommendations for the Office of Community Involvement in Support of County Community Engagement

Results of the survey help clarify priorities for the Office of Community Involvement (OCI), tasked with supporting strong community engagement across the County. Based on our observations and insights we outline specific goals for OCI within the broader recommendations for improvements.

Co-structure a Countywide Engagement Infrastructure

- Continue the work with the Community Engagement Community of Practice to develop, adapt, and implement a countywide engagement framework/plan with clear standards and expectations
- Serve as a bridge between county engagers and the Board of County Commissioners - help amplify pressing issues, offer programmatic updates, and ensure shared awareness and understanding of county engagement work
- Play a role in centralizing engagement support (particularly tools, resources, management systems) to support efficiency and better practices
- Design and collect a repository of resources for community members and county engagers

Identify Barriers to Participation and Clarify how the County Mitigates those Challenges - including tangible policies and practices

- Provide guidance on policies and practices when available
- Advocate for clarity regarding stipends, food, transportation, and childcare support, and other tactics to reduce barriers to participation
- Collaborate with other programs and offices to support culturally responsive and flexible engagement approaches

Continue to Champion Transparency, Accountability, and Shared Decision-Making through Resources and Feedback Loops

- Develop an accessible and user-friendly resource for communicating decision-making processes and illuminating ways community members can engage and influence

- Create a common practice of “you said, we did” feedback loops for CIC and CBAC and model templates / approaches for practicing “reply letters”

Next Steps / Ongoing Analysis

We plan to recommend that the CIC continue the analysis of community engagement infrastructure and follow up on this survey. Some county engagement staff who completed the survey expressed willingness to meet with us to do short interviews or focus groups about their experiences. If CIC capacity allows, we may continue this research with a deeper dive into survey findings as well as additional interviews, focus groups, and conversations with OCI and the Community Engagement Community of Practice.

Report Produced in June 2026

Community Involvement Committee members: Chase Landrey (District 1), Diego Martinez (District 1), Frank Stevens (District 4), Jen Mair (District 2), Nina Gallo (District 3).

*For additional questions, contact the Office of Community Involvement:
community.involvement@multco.us*

Appendix A: Additional Information on Survey Participants

In total, we collected 31 responses from the Community Engagement Survey. More than half (66.7%) of respondents were frontline or admin staff, 13.3% were managers and 6.7% were in director roles. We received the most responses from non-departmental offices (27.6%), followed by the health department (24.1%), homeless services (20.7%), and the department of human services (17.2%). Twenty-eight (28) of the respondents are full time staff, one is in a limited duration position, and two declined to comment. It is also worthy to note that 35.5% of respondents had at least 6 years of community engagement work at Multnomah County or in other roles.

Additionally, we collected information about gender and race. A majority of survey respondents identified as female (53.3%), followed by male (33.3%), and nonbinary (3.3%). More than half of all respondents identified as white (51.7%) followed by Latino or Hispanic (13.8%). The remaining 10 respondents identified as Slavic, Middle Eastern, Native American or Alaskan Native, Black or African American, and Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, reflecting the diverse backgrounds and experiences of those at the County doing community engagement work.

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Part 1: Tell us how you engage the community in your role with Multnomah County.

Using the IAP2 Spectrum for Engagement,

- How often have you been involved in **"Inform" activities in the past 2 years?**
- How often have you been involved in **"Consult" activities in the past 2 years?**
- How often have you been involved in **"Involve" activities in the past 2 years?**
- How often have you been involved in **"Collaborate" activities in the past 2 years?**
- How often have you been involved in **"Empower" activities in the past 2 years?**
- Do you think the engagement activities that you do reflect the mission and goals of your department or program?
- What is a brief example of an engagement activity that you coordinated in the past 2 years that you thought was **successful**? Why do you think it was successful?
- What is a brief example of an engagement activity that you coordinated in the past 2 years that you thought **needed improvement**? Why do you think improvement was needed?
- To your knowledge, does your department (or non-departmental office) have an annual, or regularly updated, community engagement plan that addresses engagement across all department programs and activities?

Part 2: Tell us about the impact of your engagement activities.

- Who are you engaging in your program or work?
- Who still needs to be engaged or is missing from your current engagement work?
- Do you get feedback from the community you engage about the impact of your work?
- If yes, what do you hear from the community about how *they* perceive the impact of their involvement?
- How would *you* rate the impact of your engagement work?
- Share an example or examples about the impact of your engagement work.

Part 3: Tell us what you need to support your engagement efforts.

- What do you think is the biggest misconception about community engagement at Multnomah County from county leadership and/or elected officials?
- Who do you feel your engagement work is supported by?
- What resources do you currently **receive and rely on**?
- What are the top two resources that you currently have access to that **most benefit** your engagement work?
- Which of these resources do you **need more of**?
- What are the **two top priority resources that you need** for your engagement work?
- What else would you like us to know about the community engagement work happening in your department?

Part 4: Tell us about you.

- Approximately how much of your time is dedicated to community engagement work (%)?

- What is your job classification?
- Is your engagement work accurately reflected in your job description?
- What department do you work in?
- How long have you been doing community engagement at Multnomah County (in this or another role)?
- What languages do you use in your community engagement, or could you use in your engagement role?
- Race/Ethnicity? Gender?

Part 5: Tell us if you're open to sharing more.

- Are you open to meeting with a small group of CIC members to share more about your experience in an interview or focus group?
- Would you like to follow up with OCI about resources to share, or do you have other ideas that you would like to share with OCI?