Public Engagement Strategy Rollout Action Plan

October 6, 2022

Introduction

The Township's Engagement Framework and Toolkit are informed by and rooted in best practice and research.

As a starting point, it is important to understand that effective communication and engagement go hand in hand. Each of these is achieved by managing the relationship between the municipality and its key stakeholders and community audiences.

The definition below demonstrates that **the relationship is two-way**, where voices from both sides are heard and respected, which is why effective and meaningful engagement practices are critical to helping the Township achieve its goals and be responsive and accountable to its taxpayers.

> **Definition of communications excellence from the**
> **Canadian Public Relations Society:**
>
> *...using communications to **manage relationships** with diverse stakeholders/audiences to:*
>
> - *achieve mutual understanding*
> - *realize organizational goals*
> - *serve the public interest.*

Methodology

To develop the Township's Engagement Framework, Toolkit and Action Plan, Redbrick Communications conducted comprehensive research. This included:

- Facilitated discussion with the Township's leadership team
- Interviews with three staff groups with representatives from each department
- Facilitated discussion with Township Council
- Discussions with two members of the community
- Results from two surveys: Township staff and the community
- Interviews with two comparable municipalities: Frontenac County and the City of Kawartha Lakes
- Leading best practice in public participation
- Drawing on Redbrick's 20 years' experience working in the municipal sector

Key themes from the research

- Township staff desire **improved communications between departments** to know what other areas are doing; some departments engage their staff better than others

- **Staff want to be informed and heard**, and know that their perspectives are valuable

- **Clearer expectations and roles are needed** around planning and implementing public engagement

- Need to be **more proactive** in engaging the public

- Staff would like the **public to better understand Township processes**

- **Feedback loops should be closed** – both staff and the community should be told how their input was used and informed/or if it did not inform decisions

- **More regular touchpoints** are needed with the community; a stronger presence

- **Each community may have different expectations**. The Township needs to take time to understand needs and help address them

- Community cares about where they live.

- **Improved communication** will help lead to a more informed and engaged community

- Opportunities to **give feedback online** is most preferred

Best Practices

- The **level of engagement should be adjusted** based on the level of impact.

- **Regular informal touchpoints**, mixed with formal engagement opportunities, are part of the recipe to success.

- **Effective communication goes hand in hand** with effective engagement.

- **Consistently report back** input and how it was used to build trust and confidence and increase the likelihood for staff and the community to participate again

Top 5 Engagement Priorities for the Township of Huron-Kinloss

The research identified some clear priorities for the Township to consider and focus on as they roll out the Engagement Framework and Toolkit. Addressing these priorities will help build success and ensure the investment in creating the framework and toolkit was valuable.
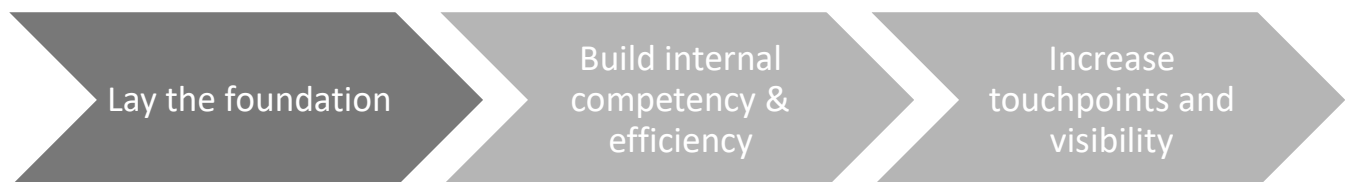
Redbrick recommends the following as top five priorities as a starting point to enhance how the Township engages both staff and the community:

1. **Obtain Council buy in** for the Engagement Framework, Toolkit and Recommendations. Council sets direction for staff. Their buy in will help set the tone for this work and demonstrate its commitment to the public.

2. **Communicate a clear vision and expectation** for both internal and community engagement.

    - importance, principles, commitments to staff and the community

3. **Ensure Council, leadership and staff across the organization are aware** of the Engagement Framework and Toolkit:

    - planning processes

    - roles and expectations

    - tools

    - how to share feedback after consultation has occurred

4. **Increase competency** in all departments

5. **Set up planning systems** to better anticipate engagement needs – both internally and with the community

Phased Action and Implementation Plan

For the Engagement Framework and Toolkit to be effective and achieve an end goal of increased and more meaningful engagement – both with staff and the community – they must be supported by action from leadership and staff across the organization.

Redbrick suggests taking a phased approach.

Lay the foundation → Build internal competency & efficiency → Increase touchpoints and visibility

Phase 1: Lay the Foundation

Action	Purpose
Present the Framework and Toolkit with the senior leadership team	Ensure buy in and understanding Discuss expectations across the organization
Roll out an "Engagement Roadshow" to all departments	Raise awareness of the new Framework and Toolkit across the organization Ensure understanding and set clear expectations with staff, including best practices for closing the feedback loop and optimal reporting back
Post the Framework and Toolkit on the Township's website	Ensure transparency with the public Demonstrate the Township's commitment to improved engagement practices
Develop a Township engagement calendar that all departments can feed	Creates an easy visual to see what's coming Assists in proactive planning and opportunities for collaboration/coordination
Include engagement in conversations with departments about their communications needs	Help instill a culture of proactive planning

Phase 2: Build internal competency and efficiency

Action	Purpose
Identify one person per department to receive IAP2 training *(start with departments with the highest engagement needs)*	Increases number of staff at the Township who understand and can champion engagement best practices Strengthens an organizational culture of improved public engagement

Action	Purpose
Create engagement leads leveraging the staff who are trained, to meet twice per year and share lessons learned and best practices.	Instills a culture of continuous improvement at the Township Increase internal collaboration and breaks down siloed approaches
Develop a stakeholder matrix with key contact information and possibly regular meeting schedules of community groups (reach out to stakeholder groups to find out when they meet)	Creates a central location for important community contacts Can help identify and plan when the Township can participate in existing group meetings
Identify hard-to-reach audiences and conduct targeted outreach to better understand opportunities and preferences for engagement. Share findings with leadership and staff	Opportunity to develop a shared understanding or key principles/processes going forward Increases likelihood they will participate in the future and have a stronger voice
Create an Engagement Kit for in-person engagement events with checklist and supplies (branded table cloths, backdrop, etc.)	Opportunity to strengthen branding and visibility of the Township by ensuring branded materials are at every event Makes it easy for staff to take what they need
Build reporting back mechanisms and processes internally to strengthen closing the feedback loop	Community trust increases when it is clear how feedback was used Increases likelihood that the community will participate in future engagement efforts
Intentionally promote where findings and results can be found – make it easy	As above

Phase 3: Increase community touchpoints and be more visible in the community

Action	Purpose
Run a promotional campaign about HaveYourSayHK	Raises more awareness of the online tool Increase number of subscribers and level of engagement
Create "Wisdom Councils" or Round Table Community Groups in each community and engage twice a year; invite them to support Township engagement efforts	Responds to feedback from the community and key stakeholders Increases the Township's visibility in the community Leverages community influencers
Implement monthly social media polls to gage community sentiment on different topics	Creates a regular touchpoint to gather quick feedback Helps the Township keep a pulse on community sentiment If regular, the community can anticipate and be prepared to respond (look out for the next poll)
Implement a once per year feedback event *(see Burlington "Food for Feedback" example)*	Integrates departments Maximizes resources and streamlines community involvement Incentivizes community involvement Increases the perception that the Township is well organized and committed to hearing from the public
Offer different ways to gather feedback: • Set up tables or booths at community events • By phone	Reduces the reliance on one way to get feedback, which risks missing important audiences Makes engagement easy for target audiences Be more visible in the community

Action	Purpose
• At stakeholder meetings or discussion forums • Online – promoted using QR codes on materials to make it easy to participate • Ask Councillors to ask and report back feedback when appropriate	

Conclusion

Residents in the Township of Huron-Kinloss care about their community. Many want to take part in making it a great place to live. The Township team has an opportunity to enhance how it hears from the public and to ensure the community has a meaningful voice in local decision making.

Drawing from research and best practice, Redbrick recommends the Township starts by laying a stronger foundation to enhance their public engagement practices. They should ensure that Council and leadership are committed to the guiding principles in the Framework and build expectations across the organization to 'live' these principles, while setting up internal processes to support planned and proactive engagement.

From there, the Township can enhance staff competency and coordination across the municipality, working with traditionally hard-to-reach audiences to learn how they want to be engaged and heard, and making it easier to roll out engagement initiatives.

Finally, the Township can focus on being more visible in the community with more regular touchpoints and leveraging different tools to hear from members of the public.

As the community's expectations to be heard increase, the Township has an opportunity before it to better meet, increase trust and strengthen its relationship with those they serve.