



Inclusive Engagement for  
the Dane County Board of Supervisors







## Office of the County Board Dane County Board of Supervisors

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Dear Colleagues,

Community engagement is a cornerstone of our work. I am confident our efforts to be intentional as we interact with Dane County residents will lift public discourse and have a positive impact on the decision-making process.

The Engage Dane initiative allows us to formalize the Board's engagement efforts, particularly to reach communities who may not currently participate in the county government debate, thereby improving representation and transparency. As Dane County grows and becomes ever more diverse, it is our responsibility to make inclusive engagement a hallmark of our efforts. It is not enough to hold a meeting and hope interested parties will be able to attend. We must commit ourselves to seeking out input on issues of the day, and do so early and often.

I want to thank the community groups who worked with us on this project. We needed to hear from different voices in the community about how to best engage around issues facing the county. Clearly there is no one best engagement technique; one size does not fit all. Those organizations that welcomed the Engage Dane team members to their meetings and provided their perspectives on how they wanted to interact with County government made this plan possible.

The Engage Dane plan and toolkit of engagement practices is designed to support members of the Board in this critical aspect of service as a local elected official. I fully expect our approach to evolve and grow over time, both in terms of issues and techniques. I am proud of the framework we have put in place and look forward to continuing to improve our community outreach.

Sincerely,

Supervisor Sharon Corrigan, Chair  
Dane County Board of Supervisors

# Executive Summary



*We need to recognize that Dane County is made up of many communities.*

*- Feedback from Engage Dane outreach*

The Dane County Board of Supervisors has embarked on an initiative - “Engage Dane” - to make inclusive engagement foundational to Dane County government. Over the past five years, the Dane County Board has prioritized equity as key to informed and responsible decision making. The Engage Dane initiative builds on this work and paves a clear path forward between the community and county government, providing for robust and meaningful discussion and partnership on the important issues facing the county.

The intent of Engage Dane is to formalize and expand the Board’s past engagement efforts, which include listening sessions, community workgroups, online surveying, public meetings, and focused discussions. Most importantly, the initiative prioritizes hearing the voices of those who have not had a place at the table in the past. This linkage between equity efforts and engagement implements a recommendation from [Dane County’s 2015 Racial Equity Analysis](#) to “implement strategies to ensure Dane County is an effective and inclusive government that engages community and is responsive to its needs”.



In addition, the County Board looked to other places and organizations, including Dubuque, Seattle, the federal government and the International Association for Public Participation (IAPP) for best practices on engagement and specifically inclusive engagement. These entities have developed a wealth of processes and resources to foster effective government interaction with the public.

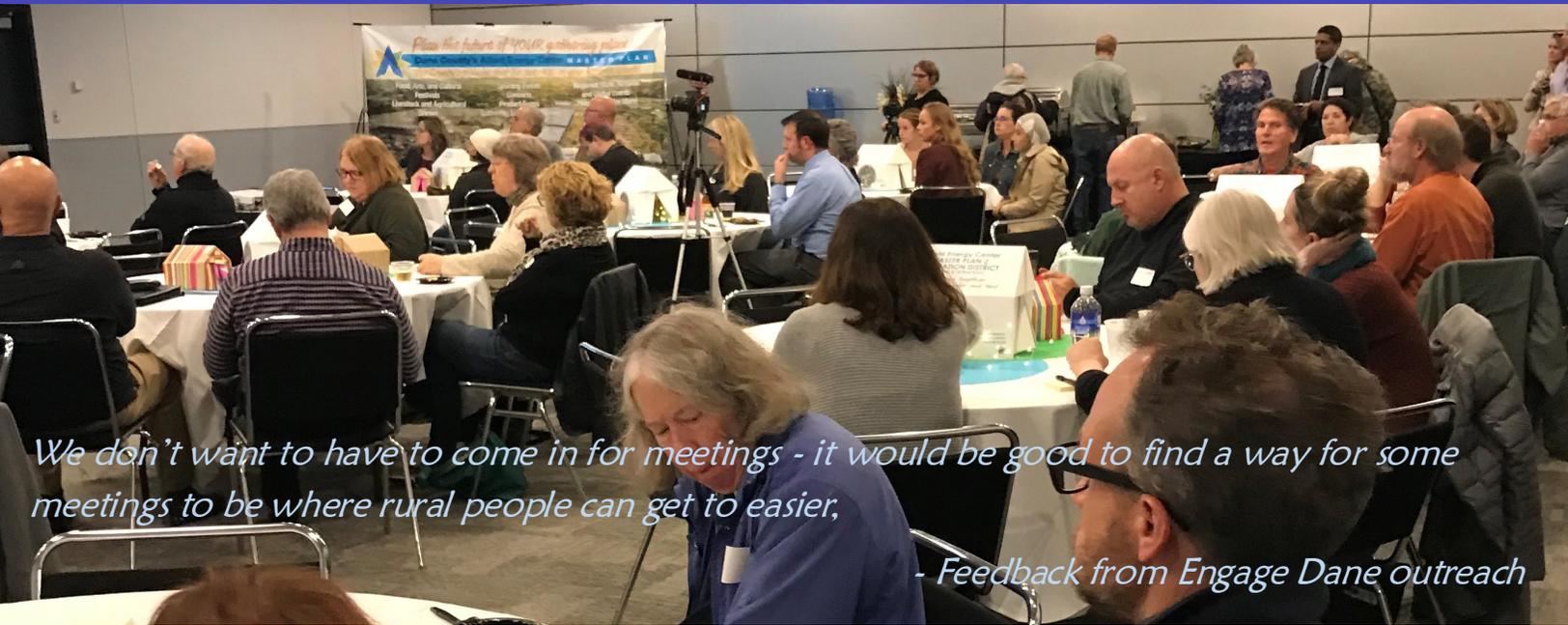
Finally and, most importantly, a team of County Board Supervisors and Board Office staff completed outreach with community groups and representatives to determine how they wanted to interact with their county government.

Based on experience, best practices, data from outreach, and other feedback, the resulting Engage Dane initiative is a broad and multi-faceted approach to inclusive engagement. It is comprised of the following:

- This **Engage Dane Report** for members of the County Board and interested parties, which includes background on inclusive engagement and resources for County Board Supervisors.
- An outward facing, updated County Board **website** will make resident engagement easier. The website will include information on how to attend meetings and reach members of the County Board. Residents will be able to sign up to receive a monthly newsletter that includes information on key issues being addressed by the County Board.
- An Engage Dane **Toolkit of Engagement Practices** for members of the Board (to be tested and improved in 2019), available via an internet portal, with inclusive engagement planning worksheets, topic-specific Power-Points, and resources for Supervisors to use in the community at venues such as town meetings or neighborhood association meetings.
- A **work plan** for 2019, setting forth specific goals and objectives for the year and including priority topic areas and activities, audiences, geographic areas, and anticipated outcomes.

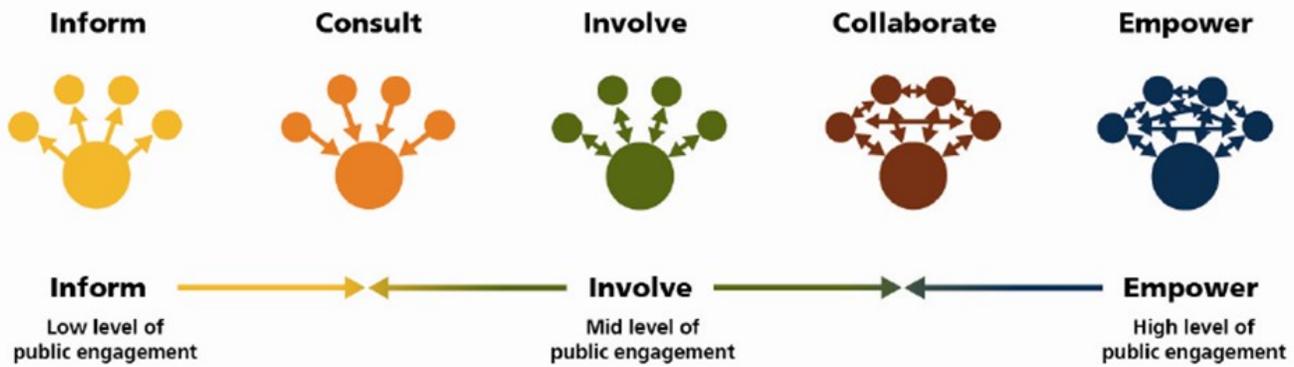
Continuous evaluation of what works and what does not work is critical to the ultimate success of Engage Dane. The County Board will continue to rely on the expertise of UW-Extension to guide the evaluation of both specific inclusive engagement activities and the initiative as a whole.

# Background on Engage Dane



In the Spring of 2018, County Board Chair Sharon Corrigan, desiring better County Board inclusive engagement efforts, assembled a team of supervisors and staff to review current inclusive engagement efforts, engage resident groups on their engagement interests, and determine next steps. This team was comprised of four supervisors (Paul Nelson, Kelly Danner, Yogesh Chawla, and Tanya Buckingham) as well as County Board and Extension staff (Karin Thurlow, Lauren Kuhl, Colleen Clark-Bernhardt, Mindy Habecker, and Sharon Lezberg). The initiative is called “Engage Dane”.

Why ‘inclusive engagement’? Public participation has been embraced by municipalities across the country as essential to good governance. The goal of Engage Dane is to put in place a variety of approaches for regular and inclusive engagement across the continuum of public participation, from informing to consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering. By specifying ‘inclusive engagement,’ the Board is prioritizing efforts to hear the voices of those who are most impacted by issues, and might be excluded from formal decision making processes.



To date, the Board has used a variety of approaches to inform and engage the residents of the county. Individual members of the County Board participate in neighborhood associations, town and village boards, and constituent groups within their own districts.

Commonly used tools to **inform** include weekly press releases and community newsletter columns to raise awareness of Board activities with the public. Tools to **consult** have included online surveys, listening sessions, and community conversations. Approaches to **involve** and **collaborate** include formation of community-driven committees that provide direct feedback and advice to decision makers. Residents who serve as members of boards or commissions are empowered to make decisions in collaboration with elected officials (example: criminal justice committees formed by 2015 RES 556, “Investigating Solutions to Racial Disparities and Mental Health Challenges in the Dane County Jail and Throughout Dane County’s Criminal Justice System”).

Engage Dane will expand these engagement efforts while focusing on inclusion of diverse audiences. The initiative will start with efforts to expand engagement on:

1. Issues that impact Dane County as a whole. County government is responsible for many and diverse services, including public safety, human services, lake management, planning, and transportation.
2. County Board Supervisor engagement with their constituents.

The Engage Dane team is developing a toolkit to guide inclusive engagement effort. This toolkit will be an on-line resource that includes information on current issues (fact sheets will be added over time to provide supervisors with background information to share with constituents at meetings or via newsletters or social media) and tools and methods of inclusive engagement.

<sup>1</sup>This image, from the Burlington Gazette, 1/15/2013, provides a graphic illustration of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, which is referenced often in this report. The IAP2 Spectrum is included in Appendix C of this report.

<http://www.burlingtongazette.ca/burlingtons-community-engagement-charter-passed-by-council-in-2013/>

## How the Community Would Like to Engage

Having used a variety of techniques to inform and to listen to Dane County residents in the past, a key goal of Engage Dane is to understand how inclusive engagement is currently used and how to improve efforts moving forward. To that end, it was important to seek community input on how community members want to interact with the County Board. The first phase of Engage Dane included seeking community input on strategies to engage (See Appendix A for presentations, survey instrument, and summary documents used in the outreach process).

### Key Recommendations from Outreach with Community Groups:

- Go out to the community to increase participation
- Provide a variety of opportunities for engagement
- Improve language access
- Prioritize inclusion of people of color, immigrants, elderly, and others who might not be comfortable with formal input processes
- Improve use of technology
- Hold conversations, not one way discourse

In an effort to document how diverse groups prefer to be involved with County Government, the Engage Dane team reached out to several community groups, including: Area Agency on Aging Committee, LaSup, City-County Homeless Issues Committee, Youth Governance Program, Dane County Towns Association, South Metropolitan Planning Council, Wednesday breakfasts at First United Methodist Church, and a Senior Advocacy Training. Participants discussed various engagement techniques, and were asked to fill in a short survey on how effective they view specific techniques. While the numbers of respondents aren't large, the message from these discussions is consistent, that people want to engage in decision making on issues of importance in the County.

The results of the community outreach surveys are found in Appendix B, Figures 1&2. It should be noted that the results from this outreach are informative, but not definitive, in that those who filled in the survey were already a self-selected group of involved residents. Nevertheless, participatory meetings, such as forums, information sessions, listening sessions and community conversations were identified by many as the most effective approaches to inclusive engagement.

A key takeaway underscores the need to match the type of specific outreach to specific groups. Some groups indicated greater preference for specific techniques – for example, elderly respondents stated a preference for meetings with real time interaction, whereas respondents from the Latino Support Network showed little preference, overall, on what type of engagement strategy is utilized. In general, familiarity and use of on-line polling is low, and involvement in truly participatory decision-making (collaboration and empowerment) has been limited to a few very engaged residents. Throughout the process, we will continue to monitor resident preference regarding how to improve engagement methods and practices.



# Overview of Inclusive Engagement



*Many of these strategies could be very effective if they were well advertised and made accessible to people from all over.*

*- Feedback from Engage Dane outreach*

## **Rationale: Why the County should prioritize and support Inclusive Community Engagement**

Common practice for public engagement employs methods to involve the public throughout a spectrum of participation - informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering (details on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation can be found in Appendix C). Public engagement can be defined as “any process that directly engages the public in decision-making and gives full consideration to public input in making that decision” (EPA, Introduction to Public Participation, 2018). Community engagement, like public engagement, is “a process used to engage impacted parties prior to action being taken or decisions being made” (Madison Engaged, 2016).

Inclusive community engagement (a term we’ve adopted, first found in materials from the City of Seattle Office for Civil Rights) goes further in emphasizing diversity and inclusion as foundational to engagement. Inclusive engagement prioritizes the voices of community residents who might not otherwise be heard, and “Is about ensuring that those most impacted by social challenges have a say in designing and implementing solutions” (Schmitz, 2017, p 2). This represents a shift in power, where community members own and have more responsibility for the decisions made around issues.



Engage Dane seeks to set a new standard and practice for the County Board regarding inclusive community engagement in decision-making. Community residents can and should be involved in developing solutions to issues that affect them. To encourage informed and inclusive engagement, elected officials must identify tools and processes that are easily accessible, representative, meaningful, informative, and transparent (Design Fix, 2017).

Public entities hold responsibility to develop policies to address public issues. However, too often decision-making happens with limited knowledge or public engagement. While elected officials represent their constituents, they do not often have the breadth of understanding nor the depth of perspective that exists in our communities. To gain this breathe and depth, widespread community engagement in decision-making is essential. Inclusive community engagement assures that those community members most impacted by decisions around an issue and those who are under-represented in decision-making due to disenfranchisement or lack of access are involved in identifying issues, designing processes, and creating solutions.

Conversely, public officials have a responsibility to increase transparency of government, so that all residents are aware of both the issues addressed and the process utilized to make decisions about the issue.



Inclusive community engagement requires that public officials and committees make adequate efforts that all people have both the *invitation* to and the *ability* to participate. By embracing Inclusive community engagement, the County Board is accepting the responsibility to provide processes, venues, and accommodation to reduce barriers to participation.

Ultimately, inclusive community engagement is about making information, resources, and civic processes available to residents who may not have easy access to the halls of government – namely, people of color, immigrants and refugees, the elderly, youth. When the public is engaged, three desired outcomes are realized:

1. communities are empowered to make decisions for themselves,
2. the capacity and potential of communities is released, and
3. the relationship between government and service providers with community residents is altered to be more equitable and reciprocal.

## Planning for Inclusive Engagement



From: EPA, 2018. "Introduction to Public Participation"

See Appendix D, Table 1 "Steps in Public Participation – Planning Checklist" for details on each of these steps.

There is much available guidance for how to plan a public participation process (a simple graphic of good process is portrayed above). We've taken the advise from several sources and consolidated in "Twelve best practices for an Inclusive Community Engagement Process (Appendix D, Table 2)." Additional resources for background on community engagement and for 'how-to' information are found in the resources section of this report. The toolkit of Engagement Practices will provide step by step worksheets to guide Supervisors and committees in planning for inclusive engagement.

# Engage Dane Implementation



## Implementation Phases

The Engage Dane Inclusive Engagement Initiative has four phases as described below:

**1** **Phase I** (completed 12/2018) was the pre-planning process and included community outreach discovery on engagement approaches. During this phase, the team researched approaches utilized by other communities (Seattle, Dubuque, San Rafael) and consulted planning materials for best practices and resources to facilitate community engagement.

This initial phase of Engage Dane also included the establishment of an email address ([engagedane@countyofdane.com](mailto:engagedane@countyofdane.com)) for additional public comment and a [project website](#).

**2** **Phase II** (completed 2/2019) involved development of this report, which is based on both community input and national best practice research. The report is complemented by the associated toolkit and web-based materials (these will be tested and improved during the 2019 pilot year) to provide guidance to County Board Supervisors regarding their community engagement practices.

3

**Phase III** (completed 2/2019) was the development of an implementation plan for the pilot project (2019). Members of the County Board, community members, and University of Wisconsin -Extension Dane County are involved in developing the plan.

4

**Phase IV** will be the implementation of the 2019 Inclusive Engagement Action Plan (including launching several pilot engagement efforts to test a variety of inclusive engagement approaches), and evaluation of these efforts. The 2019 budget includes resources necessary to operationalize the ideas and approaches included in the plan.

## Communications

Clear communications prior to any engagement meeting, during the meeting, and post meeting are essential for establishing relationships and maintaining trust and continued engagement.

Engage Dane commits to:

**Two Way Communications:** Consistent two-way communication (dialogue) will help to reinforce participation and encourage stakeholders to continue to be active as the engagement evolves.

**Clarity of Roles:** The public will be informed as to where decision-making authority resides – for any particular issue – when participating in an engagement process. The public will be informed as to how public comment will be considered.

**Reporting:** Residents care deeply about issues in the community, and their concerns and ideas will be incorporated into reporting on the issue area. Participants at public events will be provided with information on how their input is being considered by decision-makers, including:

- How and when feedback will be provided,
- How and when decisions will be made,
- Further opportunities for engagement,
- How participants can shape the overall engagement process, and
- Ways in which community groups can be involved at the implementation stage.

**Meetings:** A meeting/gathering report/summary will be provided to participants at any Engage Dane meeting that summarizes the discussion and provides a record of participant comments. Meeting reports will include how stakeholder input has influenced, contributed to or improved the overall engagement outcomes.

**Surveys:** When appropriate participants to surveys administered through POLCO will receive a communication about the poll outcomes, how polling data will be used, opportunities for further engagement, and when/how decisions will be made.

## Evaluation of Engage Dane

The Engage Dane pilot initiative will include evaluation of efforts to broaden public engagement. The following goals guide the evaluation protocol:

**GOAL: County Board Supervisors increase their use of inclusive engagement strategies in their outreach efforts.**

**Evaluation questions include:**

- Do County Board Supervisors understand the inclusion tools available?
- To what extent have County Board Supervisors increased efforts to engage the public?
- Have County Board Supervisors been successful at increasing levels of engagement along the spectrum of public participation?

**GOAL: Constituents gain an increased understanding about County Board work and connect to the County Board through participation along the spectrum. Evaluation questions include:**

- To what extent have constituents increased their understanding of County Board work?
- To what extent have constituents increased their involvement in issues addressed by the County Board?
- Has there been an increase in public engagement along the spectrum of public participation?
- Do constituents view their involvement as meaningful and effective?

**GOAL: County Board Supervisors able to reach and engage a more diverse audience through inclusive engagement practices. Evaluation questions include:**

- Have outreach/marketing efforts been successful at reaching diverse audiences?
- Have the engagement practices created conditions for all to participate/increased accessibility?
- Has diversity at events put on by the County Board increased?
- Are committees and citizen decision-making bodies community reflective and of the specific issue communities?

**GOAL: County Board Supervisors embrace intentional inclusive engagement practices to guide decision making.**

**Evaluation questions include:**

- Are those most affected invited to co-design the engagement strategy?
- Are those most affected part of decision-making bodies that address this issue?
- Are community members impacted invited to participate in the issue educational sessions, discussions and deliberations?
- Are an array of Inclusive engagement practices utilized in such a way as to be effective, desired, efficient, and implementable?
- Did the specific method allow all participants to share their thoughts?
- Did participants learn about the County Board through the event?
- Did participants feel listened to?
- Did participants feel that they had an ability to be involved to the extent that they influenced decision-making?

# Summary

The Dane County Board of Supervisors embraces transparency and equity as core values and foundations to good government. Four years ago, the Board implemented a legislative management system, Legistar, to increase awareness of and ease access to county meetings and agenda items. The Engage Dane initiative likewise seeks to provide information and to engage on a regular basis with community members on issues facing the county. The companion toolkit provides worksheets that guide planning and implementation of inclusive engagement efforts.

Engage Dane will provide Board Supervisors with methods to address differences in the formality of approaches, in purposes of engagement and in appropriateness of techniques based on how individuals are interested in engaging. The initiative considers a range of engagement methods - spans the continuum from large group, formal engagement events sponsored by the Board to interactions between individual supervisors and their constituents. Engage Dane recognizes the varying levels of engagement, from building awareness to collaboration and empowerment. The Engage Dane approach appreciates that not all people are alike and communities of interest may want to interact with county government in different ways.

The Engage Dane toolkit is a living document, particularly in terms of the content-specific issue briefs. Two-page summary pieces will be developed on priority and timely issue areas, and serve as a point of departure for supervisor interaction with neighborhood associations, community groups, and local government officials.

Previous engagement efforts, as well as best practice research and the input of several community groups informed the development of the Engage Dane plan. Continuous feedback on approaches that work and those that present challenges will be included in the pilot phase of this initiative. The County Board's intentional and inclusive engagement work will grow and change over time, improving public discourse on critical issues.

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