

DRAFT

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Community Quality of Life Assessment
Government Services and Planning in Sonoma Valley

A Collaboration of the City of Sonoma and County of Sonoma

Prepared by the [Consensus Building Institute](#)



PURPOSE

The past several years have been characterized by significant change as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and other interrelated social and cultural shifts. Emerging from this period of change, the City and County of Sonoma are embarking on significant planning initiatives including the The County General Plan, The City General Plan, the Springs Specific Plan, among others. The City of Sonoma and County of Sonoma and community based organizations are partnering on a community quality of life assessment to gain a better understanding of community needs and how municipal government service delivery could be improved in Sonoma Valley. The results of this assessment would inform effective planning for the future and responsive government services to improve the lives of Sonoma Valley residents. The initial phase of this strategy would include community discussions and a survey that would be administered using a range of communications and engagement methods consistent with the below principles and goals. The findings from the assessment would lead to recommendations that would outline a work plan for Phase 2 of the effort. The timeframe for the effort is Fall 2023- Summer 2024.

PRINCIPLES & GOALS

The underlying principles depicted in Figure 1 and the corresponding goals of the Strategy are as follows.

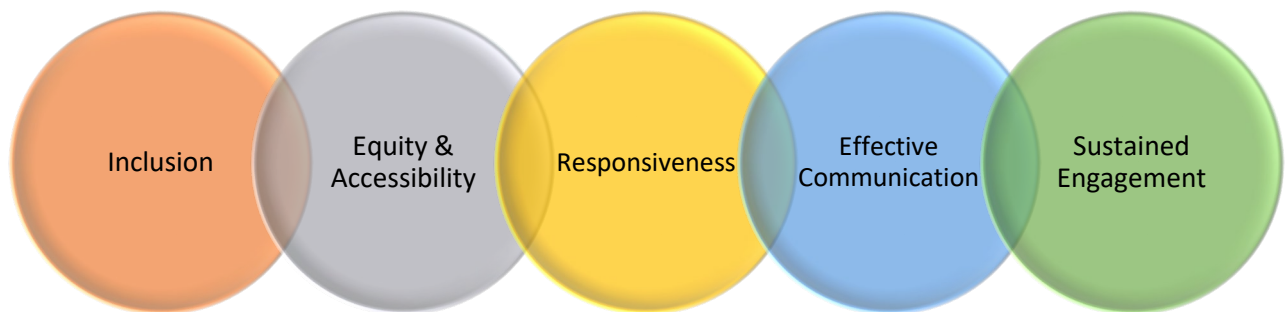





Figure 1. Principles Guiding Community Engagement Strategy

-  Reach out to and engage the full spectrum of community members, particularly those who have been historically underrepresented.
-  Identify where community members currently gather, accommodate cultural and language needs, and employ a variety of methods to meet the needs of diverse participants.
-  Gain an understanding of what is important to the community, incorporate community input and respond to concerns, and provide accurate and up-to-date information.



Manage communications in a manner that is clear, transparent, and accessible to the community. Gather and reflect input using a range of tools to ensure broad participation



Enhance understanding and inform the community about the planning and decision-making processes, and opportunities to meaningfully engage over the long term.

COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY APPROACH

This Strategy aims to be inclusive and to build the capacity of groups that have been chronically underrepresented and underserved including the Spanish-speaking community, youth, seniors and harder to reach neighborhoods in Sonoma Valley to participate in government led planning initiatives and decision-making forums that affect their lives and those of their communities now and into the future.

The initial phase of the effort is to conduct a community quality of life assessment where local officials can gain a better understanding of the community's quality of life and their experiences interacting with and accessing important government services. It also aims to assess opportunities to improve government services into the future. The City of Sonoma and County of Sonoma will work with diverse community partners to conduct the assessment through online and in-person venues that are accessible and culturally competent. Following the assessment, the results and associated recommendations would be transparently made available to the community and the input collected would inform a work plan for next steps.

BACKGROUND

Elected officials, local agency staff members, and other community leaders are thinking about the “landscape” of agencies that serve the Sonoma Valley, and whether changes would improve efficiency and equitable delivery of municipal services to Sonoma Valley residents.

The County of Sonoma, with advice from the City of Sonoma and other government agencies, is embarking on an effort to explore what opportunities exist and the community's perspectives on the options to improve government services in Sonoma Valley.

The broad ambition of the effort is to educate Valley residents about municipal service delivery options, and to determine if there is support for any changes. The underlying interest of the effort is to ensure reliable, high-quality municipal services that are delivered efficiently, equitably, and at a reasonable cost for all Sonoma Valley communities.

Improving service delivery could include modest changes. Agencies can seek efficiency gains by coordinating or contracting with other agencies. For example, the City of Sonoma does that for policing and fire services.

However, more significant options for consideration may include:

- Adding territory to an existing agency (i.e., annexation)
- Reclassifying an existing agency, like making a water district into a community services district, which can provide different services.
- Forming a new agency
- Closing an agency
- Joining together similar districts

Whatever proposals these discussions and activities may lead to, the intent is to provide ample opportunity for Valley residents to weigh in while exploring potential changes and their associated benefits and tradeoffs for all communities in Sonoma Valley.

Depending on the outcome of the effort, the County may then ask the Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), an independent regulatory commission responsible for controlling boundaries of cities and most special districts, to prepare a study that would evaluate service provision options. If agency reorganizations are ultimately proposed, LAFCO would consider them through a process that requires public engagement and approval provisions.

This effort is also informed by Sonoma County's commitment to racial and social equity. The County's Office of Equity's strategic plan outlines the meaning of equity as an outcome whereby you can't tell the difference in critical markers of health, well-being, and wealth by race or ethnicity, and a process whereby the voices of people of color, low income, and other underrepresented and underserved communities are valued.

Census data show income disparities between some communities in Sonoma Valley, particularly in the Springs and the City of Sonoma's westside. This effort intends to take a close look at any gaps in services in those areas and will engage historically underrepresented groups to ensure that their voices are directly represented when considering potential options for government services to be improved in their communities.

PROJECT ROADMAP & KEY MILESTONES

The below graphic illustrates the anticipated timeline at a glance and key milestones for the effort.

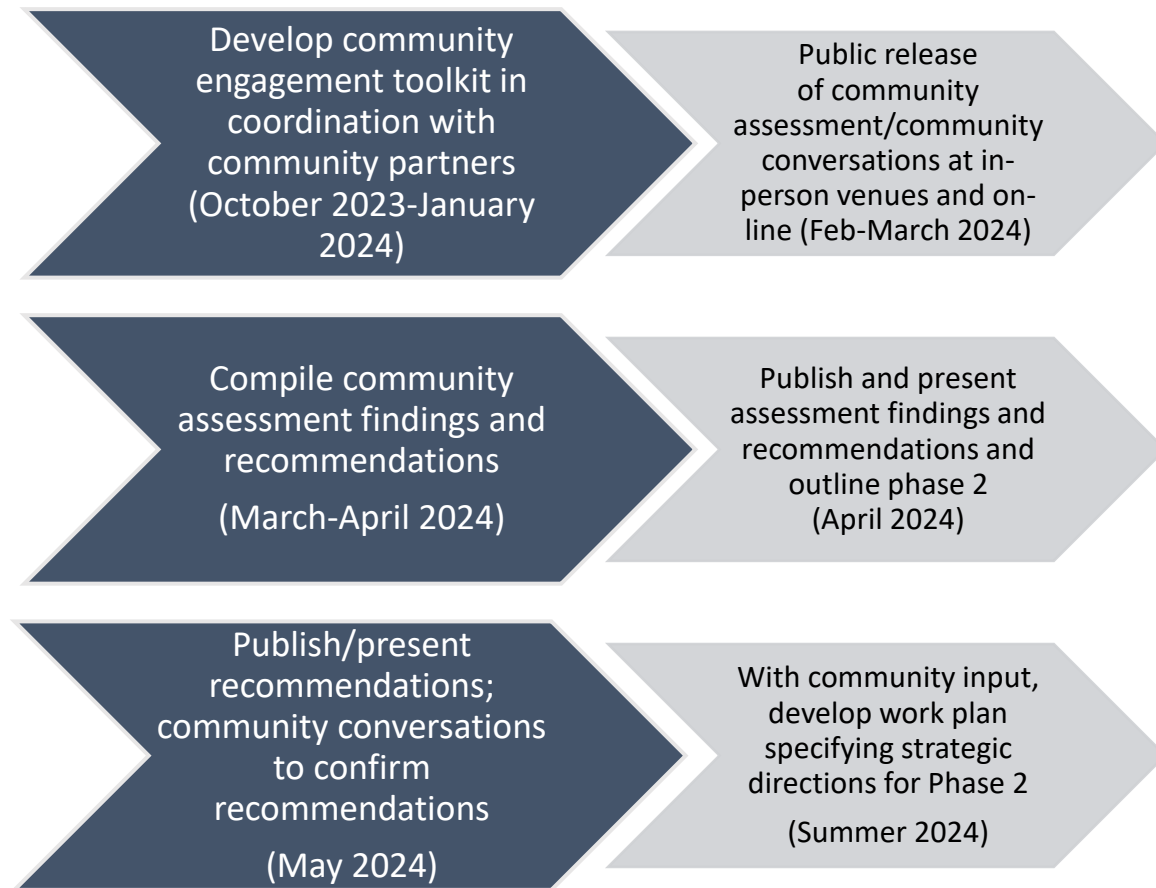


Figure 2. Process Roadmap

COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT TOOLS AND VENUES

A variety of communications and engagement tools will be employed and at a variety of venues to achieve significant community participation in the assessment and to present and receive community input on its findings and recommendations. Common communication tools such as agency websites, social media platforms and periodic newsletters as well as standing and seasonal community events and print and online news media outfits provide opportunities to inform and engage the public to participate in the community needs assessment.

KEY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FORUMS

Local Public Meetings

Public meetings are formal opportunities for community members to learn about the assessment and its findings. The below are some key venues where outreach and engagement with the community could occur.

County Meetings

Entity	Regular Meeting Schedule	Website
Board of Supervisors	Every Tuesday, 8:30 am	Access [Here]
Planning Commission	1 st and 3 rd Thursday of the month, 1:00 pm	Access [Here]
Sonoma Valley Citizen's Advisory Committee	4 th Wednesday, 6:30pm	Access [Here]
Springs Municipal Advisory Council	4 th Tuesday of the month, 6:30 pm	Access [Here]
North Valley Municipal Advisory Council	3 rd Wednesday of the month, 5:30 pm	Access [Here]
LAFCO Meetings		

City of Sonoma Meetings

Entity	Regular Meeting Schedule	Website
City Council	1 st and 3 rd Wednesday, 6:00 pm	Access [Here]
Planning Commission	3 rd Thursday, 6:00 pm	Access [Here]
Climate Action Commission	2 nd Wednesday, quarterly*	Access [Here]
Cultural & Fine Arts Commission	3 rd Tuesday, quarterly**	Access [Here]
Design Review & Historical Preservation Commission	2 nd Tuesday, 6:00 pm	Access [Here]
Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Commission	2 nd Wednesday, quarterly***	Access [Here]
Traffic Safety Committee	Quarterly (TBD)	Access [Here]
*Jan, April, July, Nov	Subject to Change	
**Jan, April, July, Nov	Subject to Change	
***March, June, Sept, Dec	Subject to Change	

Community Based Organizations

There are many NGOs in Sonoma Valley whose regularly scheduled meetings and periodic communications (ie, newsletters, social media, etc.) offer an opportunity to increase community awareness about the community quality of life assessment. The lead agencies and consultants will coordinate with community based organizations to publicize the assessment and to make presentations and announcements, as warranted.

