

# Governance & Services Committee

**TO:** Governance and Services Committee

**FROM:** Jodie Foster, Director of Communications and Information Services

**DATE:** June 1, 2021

**SUBJECT:** RDCO public engagement framework development

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**Purpose:** To provide the Governance and Services Committee with an overview of the development of the RDCO's public engagement program.

**Executive Summary:**

This report outlines the first phase of work in the development of a formal RDCO public engagement framework.

It provides an overview of:

- RDCO staff and Regional Board feedback on current RDCO engagement delivery
- A public engagement best practices review based on the International Association of Public Participation engagement model, as well as feedback from other similar-sized regional districts
- Recommended guiding principles for the RDCO engagement program
- A recommended Board policy for engagement at the RDCO

Based on feedback from the Governance and Services Committee, the next phase of work will include build out of the framework, final consideration by the Regional Board and the launch of the framework expected later this fall including an online engagement portal.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**THAT** the Governance and Services Committee receive for information the RDCO public engagement framework development report, dated June 1, 2021.

**AND THAT** the Governance and Services Committee recommend the Regional Board endorse the guiding principles for the RDCO public engagement framework.

**AND FURTHER THAT** the Regional Board approve the RDCO Public Engagement Policy (#BP11 – 2021).

Respectfully Submitted:



Jodie Foster  
Director of Communication and Information Services

Approved for Committee Consideration



Brian Reardon, CAO

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## Implications of Recommendation:

**General:** This report formalizes how public engagement is delivered by RDCO and its consultants.

**Organizational:** The report and accompanying policy outline responsibilities within the RDCO for delivery of the public engagement framework.

**Financial:** Budget for this program is allocated within the current financial plan including \$15,000 from the COVID Restart grant for the investment in an online engagement platform during 2021.

**Policy:** This report includes consideration of a new public engagement policy.

**Legal/Statutory Authority:** None

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## Background:

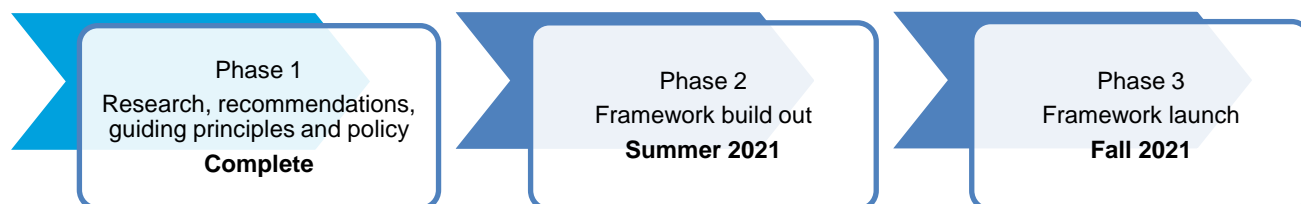
Public engagement, also referred to as public participation, creates opportunities for the public to contribute to problem-solving or decision-making about RDCO's policies, programs, projects, and services. It is premised on the belief that residents, stakeholders, municipal and indigenous partners should have meaningful opportunities to engage in the decisions that affect their communities. It moves past one-way communication and welcomes participants into the decision-making process by ensuring timely information and awareness of opportunities to provide input before decisions are made.

It is recognized that while the RDCO has delivered successful engagement initiatives, there is opportunity to improve the processes by adopting a consistent framework going forward. The information below outlines the development of a formal framework to be used by staff or consultants working on behalf of the RDCO to deliver quality public engagement.

An adopted and consistent engagement framework will:

- Support Regional Board decision making by providing information on resident, stakeholder, municipal and indigenous partners' opinions;
- Recognize that effective engagement creates greater understanding of issues, needs and potential solutions;
- Ensure consistent and clear practices for involvement and / or information sharing;
- Recognize that people want to participate in decisions that affect them and ensure an appropriate level of engagement based on assessed community impact and benefit; and
- Identify the parameters and resources available for public engagement.

Work to establish the framework and support its implementation will occur in 3 phases and includes:



## **Phase 1 – Research and Recommendations, Guiding Principles and Policy**

The Engagement Research and Recommendations Report by the Flow Communications Group (attached) summarizes research that took place during May 2021 and included interviews and surveys with the Regional Board, RDCO senior leadership team and staff, as well as interviews with communications and/or engagement leads with other regional districts. Flow also reviewed the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) methodology and best practices, and researched approaches by other local governments in B.C. and elsewhere in Canada.

### **Four key themes emerged from the research:**

- Regional districts have unique engagement and communication challenges
- Engagement approach should be consistent across the organization and engagement initiatives
- Developing an online engagement tool has become best practice, particularly during COVID
- Knowing your audience and how to reach them is critical

### **Recommendations:**

Flow provided the following recommendations for the engagement framework development based on research findings and discussions with the RDCO elected officials and staff.

#### **Role and process clarity:**

- Draft and approve a public engagement policy that formalizes the RDCO public engagement process. The policy should identify high-level expectations and procedures for public engagement processes.
- Draft and approve a public engagement framework that operationalizes the policy.

#### **Coordination and consistency:**

- Draft and approve a public engagement toolkit for use by staff, elected officials, and contractors.
- Train staff and elected officials on engagement principles and best practices.

**Improve communications:**

- Ensure information on projects and engagement is easy to find on the new RDCO website.
- Provide a visible and consistent channel for engagement activities.
- Identify existing communication channels within RDCO communities.
- Use engagement activities to educate residents on the role of the RDCO.
- Use plain language.

**Increase diversity and inclusivity:**

- Expand engagement participation beyond “the usual suspects” and identify and engage demographics not typically reached to get a more representative view of the community.

**Engagement Guiding Principles**

The RDCO will engage with the public based on the following engagement guiding principles:

- *Transparency:* Public engagement opportunities are developed so that participants clearly understand their role, the level of engagement and the decision-making process. Feedback is shared publicly.
- *Consistency:* Engagement opportunities are presented in a predictable and consistent manner to build understanding of participants’ roles and how they can be involved.
- *Inclusivity and diversity:* Public engagement processes allow all community members a reasonable opportunity to contribute and share their perspective. Effort will be made to ensure diverse voices are identified and these voices invited to participate.
- *Timeliness:* Public engagement is commenced as early as possible so the community and stakeholders have enough time to learn about the issues and actively participate.
- *Plain language/clear communication:* Information and instructions related to public engagement are provided in clear and simple language and easily understood by the community. Complex ideas will be shared in ways that are easy to grasp and the impact of different decision options will be explained.
- *Suitable process:* Design and implementation of public engagement processes that reflect the size, complexity and community impact of any initiative.
- *Regional perspective:* The RDCO recognizes the unique values and perspectives of its varied and diverse communities and stakeholder groups. Engagement activities are developed to balance the specific needs of individual communities with the region as a whole.

**Public Engagement Policy**

As part of formalizing public engagement, a new policy, RDCO Public Engagement (#BP11 – 2021 is provided for Committee consideration (attached). The policy outlines the purpose, scope, guiding principles and responsibilities for public engagement.

**Attachment(s):**

Engagement Research Findings and Recommendations Report by the Flow Group  
Communications  
RDCO Public Engagement Policy #BP11 - 2021