

Talking Together: A stronger dialogue between you and your government

What we heard





Background

On January 10, 2018, the Government of Yukon and City of Whitehorse launched **Talking Together: A stronger dialogue between you and your government**. The project was a joint effort to learn what Yukoners see as meaningful engagement, and emerged from a commitment the Government of Yukon made in November, 2017, to take a new approach to public engagement.

That commitment coincided with the launch of engageyukon.ca, a website that serves as a place for Yukoners to access all Government of Yukon engagement opportunities – both underway and completed so that they can both participate and, later, see how their participation played a role in the development of policy, regulation or process.

Talking Together closed on February 26, 2018.





Engagement process

The information that we gathered through this process will be used to create measures of success for effective public engagement and so that we can evaluate whether the efforts are meeting our commitments. It will also help us to build a culture of public engagement within both the Government of Yukon and the entire territory.

“I look forward to seeing some creative and innovative engagement in the future. All too often a decision is made with input from key stakeholders, but without the perspective of other less affected people and groups.”

Participation by the numbers

- We received **93** completed surveys.
- There were **2078** total votes on our crowdsourcing tool.
- We held in-person meetings with **14** organizations and received **five** email submissions – **two** with completed surveys and **three** with comments and feedback.
- We did not count the number of participants at public meetings, the Ideas Fair, or at outreach in common spaces. Rather than passively count individuals in the room, our intent was to focus on the interactions that were taking place.
- The Ideas Fair gave participants an opportunity to give their feedback on 12 different topics from the City of Whitehorse and the Government of Yukon.

How we reached out to the public

- In addition to a news release sent out on January 10, we posted regularly to the Government of Yukon and City of Whitehorse social media channels (Facebook and Twitter) during the engagement period.
- We sent emails to a list of over 100 organizations with whom the Government of Yukon and the City of Whitehorse regularly engage in which we offered to meet with them directly and encouraged them to participate. Multiple emails were sent out prior to and throughout the course of the engagement period to this list.
- We were present at other public engagement meetings across the territory about cannabis, legalization, the Liquor Act and recycling surcharges for tires and electronics. We attended these meetings to encourage people to participate in Talking Together, and to take note of any feedback on existing engagement processes.
- We advertised the Ideas Fair in the Whitehorse Star and the Yukon News, created a Facebook event, reminded key stakeholders of the event via email, and set out a sandwich board outside of the venue on the day.





What we heard

Several themes emerged throughout our conversations and the survey responses we received. These themes form our top ten recommendations for things both the Government of Yukon and the City of Whitehorse can do to improve the way we approach engagement.

Prior to engagement

1. Communicate early about the engagement process through multiple channels and ensure citizens have time and a variety of opportunities to participate. Avoid the use of jargon and be clear and concise.
2. The scope and intention of the engagement process needs to be clear. Any limitations, prior commitments or decisions that have already been made should be relayed to the public so there is an understanding of what is being asked of them.

During the engagement process

3. Be willing to be flexible based on the feedback you're receiving.
4. Allow for engagement opportunities over the lifetime of the project and not just as a one-time event.
5. Use multiple approaches and techniques to gather input and provide more opportunities for dialogue and discussion.
6. Build time into engagement processes so participants are able to tell their stories. The process should foster safety and encourage sharing of differing perspectives.
7. Listen to participants and seek clarification and understanding.

Following the engagement

8. Be willing to take action based on the feedback you've received. If a decision has already been made, do not engage with the public.
9. Reports back to the public should reflect participant contributions to the conversation. This should be ongoing during the process as well as at the conclusion of the engagement.
10. Communicate results of engagement process so that participants understand how their input influenced the decision. Close the loop. If there are any next steps, outline those clear and point participants to a place where they can watch for more information.

“... the biggest change I'd like to see is more strategy about what is being asked, when.”

“Increase awareness that engagement is occurring.”

We also heard that we should not be engaging as much or at all, and that governments have been elected to make decisions. Others said they wanted to better understand how the government decides what to engage the public on and when.

Finally, we received ideas for how to solve specific problems or government projects. While we can't address those concerns in this particular process, we will consider how they can be used.





What we asked

“Government was authentic in their desire for feedback. It wasn’t just for show. Input resulted in action.”

Through our crowdsourcing tool

We asked Yukoners, “what should we do to make future conversations between you and your local governments meaningful for you?” Participants could vote for their favourite ideas or add their own. The most popular ideas emerged on top.

Here are the results, in order of most to least voted upon:

1. Show a connection between the input people give and the decisions government makes
2. Make sure the process is fair and open
3. Encourage and support Yukoners from all walks of life to participate
4. Consider everyone affected by an issue, and make sure to include them in the process
5. Provide enough time for people to learn about the issue before they respond
6. Really listen to what citizens say
7. Allow the public to guide or make decisions.
8. Create both face-to-face and online opportunities to engage
9. Use language everyone can understand
10. Make all possible efforts to engage a wide range of citizens, though multiple means of communication
11. Make all possible efforts to engage a wide and representative range of citizens, though multiple means of communication
12. Break down barriers that make it difficult for some people to be able to give their view, such as education, language levels and access to computers
13. Ask the community for the right time to engage
14. Give more notice about when engagement process or conversations will happen
15. Make efforts to engage with Yukon’ most vulnerable and keep social inclusion at the top of mind for all involved.
16. Let Yukoners work on real challenges and come up with solutions
17. Make the background information easy to understand
18. Tell the public when and why we can’t use their input
19. Be more clear about how we use public feedback
20. Try new and different ways to engage to make it easier for people to give their input
21. Spend more time in rural communities
22. Build capacity within our communities to have difficult conversations.





What we asked

“It was respectful of both the public members and the public servants. People had both a chance to explain, ask questions and understand. The public was involved before too many things were already determined – early engagement is great so it is more of a collaboration instead of being told what is rolling out.”

Through our survey

We also asked Yukoners to tell us their thoughts in more detail through a survey.

1. Think of the best public engagement or important conversation you've been a part of. What made it meaningful?

Because this question was open-ended, responses were varied. Some common themes were:

- No or less public engagement
- Time
- Consider input, action
- Decision-making
- Wide variety of people and perspectives
- Listening
- Felt valued and heard
- Information shared
- Communication
- Transparency
- Inclusive
- Ideas presented
- Strong facilitators
- Commitment from leadership
- Examples of engagement
- All voices matter
- Openness
- Opportunity to be heard, ask questions
- Key stakeholders consulted
- Solutions together
- Ongoing, not just one opportunity
- Trust
- Multiple ways to participate
- Food
- Get answers
- Good survey questions
- Early involvement
- Process and techniques
- Clear expectations
- Authentic and genuine
- Agenda
- Best practice
- Respect
- Honesty
- Feedback loop
- Questions to promote dialogue
- Empathy
- Using outside organizations





2. Think about how the Government of Yukon and the City of Whitehorse currently interact and engage with Yukoners. What is the biggest change or improvement needed to support more meaningful ways of talking and making decisions together?

The themes that emerged were:

- Communication
- Hire professionals
- Less engagement
- Who to engage
- Transparency
- Engagement examples
- Clear expectation and scope
- Opportunities for “hard to reach” people
- More dialogue and discussions
- Planning
- Give enough time
- Process and techniques
- Listening

“Make it clear what the parameters are and what the decision making process is, and be clear about what scope the public input has in the ultimate decision.”

3. Learning how to talk, work and make decisions together is a journey. This journey needs signposts to help us stay on the right path. Here is where you come in – we’ve drafted five guiding principles for engagement that we will hold at the forefront of our thinking when we engage with the public.

- We will be inclusive.
- We will be transparent and clear.
- We will recognize and value the unique contribution of participants
- We will be accountable and act with integrity.
- We will build skills.

Pick one or two of the principles that are the most important to you and tell us: What does this engagement principle mean to you? What would it look like in action?

Responses to what this would look like in action varied. We are using these stories and ideas to create a scorecard so that Yukoners can evaluate us on how well we are following the guiding principles.

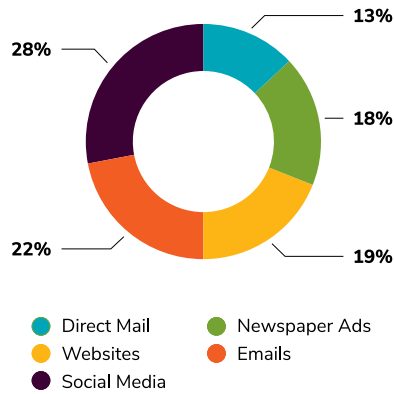
- **50** people chose “We will be transparent and clear”
- **46** people chose “We will be accountable and act with integrity”
- **27** people chose “We will be inclusive”
- **16** people chose “We will recognize and value the unique contribution of participants”
- **9** people chose “We will build skills”



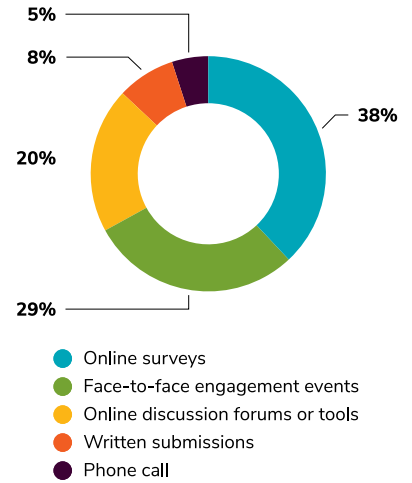


“Do not discount minority opinion. Sometimes, unpopular ideas can be dismissed too quickly without understanding. Anyone who has taken the time to participate in a process believes that they have something to offer of value. Just because an idea might seem to come out of left field, or to be in conflict with the majority opinion does not make it worthless. It is possible that such opinions are often simply, the most creative.”

4. How would you like to learn about opportunities to engage? Select all that apply.

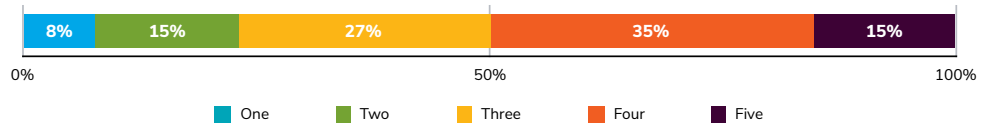


5. How do you prefer to provide your input or feedback? Select all that apply.



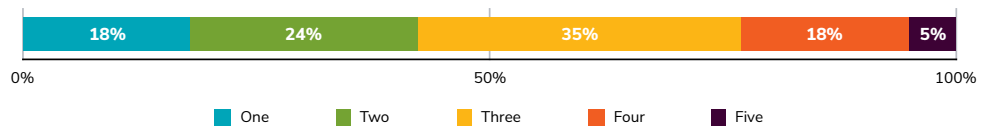
6. How knowledgeable are you on how decisions are made within the Government of Yukon?

Scale of 1-5 (1 meaning least to 5 meaning very knowledgeable).



7. How knowledgeable are you on how decisions are made within the City of Whitehorse?

Scale of 1-5 (1 meaning least to 5 meaning very knowledgeable).





8. What else might we need to know so that we listen to your input and govern together in more meaningful ways?

Themes that emerged as a result of this question were:

- Less engagement
- Don't listen to the loudest voice
- All voices count
- Listen
- Dialogue
- Clarity about what the public can influence
- Kudos for this process
- Clarity about constraints
- Use feedback
- Education
- Who to engage
- New ideas
- Process and techniques
- Don't waste time if decision is already made
- Honesty
- Use best practices
- Share engagement plans
- City of Whitehorse engagement
- Report back – why or why not
- Project examples
- Critical of process
- Lack of understanding of government processes
- Trust
- Communication
- Transparency
- Political issues

“A ton of work goes into shaping the messaging of the results and the delay and lack of transparency is very transparent to the public.”





What's next?

The top 10 recommendations will be presented throughout the Government of Yukon. These recommendations will guide us as we plan, implement and report back on public engagement activities.

The five guiding principles we discussed about during Talking Together will change slightly as a result of the public's feedback. We feel that it's important to add additional elements to two of our guiding principles. The altered parts of our guiding principles are highlighted below:

“Giving more notice of meetings. I work for an umbrella organization and often I receive the invitations just a couple of weeks (or sometimes less) before the meeting/engagement session and that does not give me enough time to meaningfully engage with our members so that I can confidently represent them.”

- 1.** We will be inclusive - we will be accessible to a broad range of voices and when we don't hear a voice, we will seek it out.
- 2.** We will be transparent and clear - we will create easily accessible processes for engagement and we will tell people our intentions when we engage the public.
- 3.** We will recognize and value the unique contribution of participants - we will demonstrate care and respect for participants, recognizing that they have valuable, relevant knowledge and experience to contribute.
- 4.** We will be accountable and act with integrity - we will be clear about the goal of the public engagement and how public input will be considered in our decision-making. *We will demonstrate what emerged from the conversations and connect input to action and activities.*
- 5.** We will build skills - we will help Yukoners to have conversations about complex topics in a productive way, and we will help government staff build their public engagement skills. *We will build processes that provide an opportunity for listening, learning and working together.*

We are also using this input to create a scorecard and evaluation form for public engagement activities. When we do a public engagement; we'll ask participants to fill it out. This will help us know whether we're achieving our guiding principles and living up to the recommendations that came out of this process.

The government has committed to more meaningful public engagement and to seek your views when we make decisions that will affect you. Part of this commitment means we're making efforts to think carefully about when we engage and when we do not engage. We know we haven't always got this right in the past, and we're trying to get better at it. We won't be engaging on every issue, particularly when decisions have already been made, but we will try to explain why we choose to engage and why we choose not to.



