

Civic Agencies Training: Module No. 1

Overview of Civic Agencies



- Civic agencies are one form of civic engagement among many in use across the City of Vancouver. They are volunteer bodies established and appointed by Council to convey community concerns to Council and staff while advising on City priorities, projects, and initiatives, or to serve statutory functions as outlined in relevant by-laws or terms of reference.
- Civic agencies are often asked to provide ongoing feedback on specific projects, and make recommendations to Council and staff on matters related to their mandates. They also help residents develop their civic knowledge and give back to their communities.
- Civic agencies are generally advisory in nature and have no decision-making authority. While their advice is important and they are uniquely positioned to influence City priorities, projects, and initiatives, Council and staff are not required to follow their recommendations (unless specific legislation states otherwise).

- The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) outlines five levels of public engagement methods, with each level increasing public impact on official decisions.
 1. Inform (“We will keep you informed.”)
 2. Consult (“We will acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.”)
 3. Involve (“We will ensure that your concerns are directly reflected in alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.”)
 4. Collaborate (“We will look to you for advice in forming solutions, and incorporate your advice into decisions to the maximum extent possible.”)
 5. Empower (“We will implement what you decide.”)
- Civic agencies usually operate between the second and fourth levels.

- Equitable engagement brings people together to address common issues and bring about positive social change.
- Equitable engagement embeds safety, fairness, respect, and inclusion in the engagement process, and reduces both tangible and intangible barriers to public participation.

- **Tangible Barriers**

- Accessibility (location, venue, technology)
- Access to information
- Financial limitations
- Time limitations

- **Intangible Barriers**

- Apathy
- Civic knowledge
- Emotional labour
- Privacy concerns
- Public trust
- Unclear process

- Most civic agencies are made up of volunteer members of the public, and sometimes representatives of other bodies like professional associations or non-profit organizations who are all appointed by Council for specific term lengths.
- Civic agencies may also be assigned a City Council liaison, a staff liaison, and/or external liaisons from the Vancouver Park Board, the Vancouver Police Department, the Vancouver Public Library, and the Vancouver School Board.

- Here are two examples of civic agency structures:
 - **Arts and Culture Advisory Committee**
 - Up to ten members of the general public
 - One representative of the Vancouver Civic Theatres Board
 - One representative of the Public Art Committee
 - One Council liaison; one Park Board liaison; one Staff liaison (all non-voting)
 - **Development Permit Board Advisory Panel:**
 - Chair of the Urban Design Panel
 - Chair of the Vancouver Heritage Commission
 - Two representatives of the development industry
 - One representative of the design professions
 - Four members of the general public

- **Type A** civic agencies make recommendations to Council related to equity-denied communities such as Indigenous and Racialized Peoples, Persons with Disabilities, and 2SLGBTQ+ People, as well as local issues such as transportation, arts and culture, and housing.
- **Type B** civic agencies make recommendations to staff on matters related to planning in specific geographic areas, such as Chinatown or Gastown, or other planning matters like street naming.

- **Type C** civic agencies mainly make recommendations to Council and staff on matters related to development, operations, planning, and/or zoning, and are governed by their own distinct by-laws.
- **Type D** civic agencies are task forces that advise the Mayor (and through the Mayor, Council) on specific local issues, such as Indigenous Reconciliation or accessibility measures.
- **External** civic agencies are appointed by Council, but advisory to and/or administered by affiliated organizations.

Advisory to Council

- 2SLGBTQ+ Advisory Committee
- Arts and Culture Advisory Committee
- Children, Youth, and Families Advisory Committee
- Older Persons and Elders Advisory Committee
- Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee
- Racial and Ethno-Cultural Equity Advisory Committee
- Renters Advisory Committee
- Transportation Advisory Committee
- Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee
- Vancouver Food Policy Council
- Women's Advisory Committee

Advisory to staff

- Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee
- First Shaughnessy Advisory Design Panel
- Gastown Historic Area Planning Committee
- Street Naming Committee

Development, operations, planning, zoning

- Board of Variance
- Building Board of Appeal
- Development Permit Board Advisory Panel
- Public Art Committee
- Urban Design Panel
- Vancouver City Planning Commission
- Vancouver Civic Theatres Board
- Vancouver Heritage Commission

Mayoral task forces

- Accessibility Task Force
- UNDRIP (*United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*) Task Force

Affiliated organizations

- Pacific National Exhibition Board of Directors
- Vancouver Economic Commission
- Vancouver Heritage Foundation Board of Directors
- Vancouver Police Board
- Vancouver Public Library Board
- YVR Aeronautical Noise Management Committee
- YVR Environmental Advisory Committee

- Civic agency appointments happen at the beginning of each new Council term, and regularly as members' terms end or vacancies arise.
- Vacancies are posted on the City website, and may be advertised through social media, digital and print advertising, and community outreach. Outreach is meant to be as broad as possible, to ensure that diverse communities and lived experiences are represented on civic agencies.
- Applications are reviewed by staff for eligibility and relevance to the civic agency mandate. Comments are then forwarded to the Nomination Subcommittee of Council, which also reviews all applications and makes appointment recommendations to Council in alignment with the *Diversity on Civic Agencies Policy*.

- Establishes demographic targets for civic agencies, reflecting Vancouver's diversity.
- Every civic agency is to be comprised of 50% or more of people from equity-denied groups (see policy for definitions), and 50% or more of people who identify as women.
- Individual civic agencies may also have specific demographic targets detailed in terms of reference.
- If composition objectives can not be met, a temporary appointment of one year or less may be used to fill a vacancy.

- Many civic agencies report accomplishments and progress to Council according to set deadlines. For example:
 - Type A civic agencies submit a work plan to Council within six months of their first regular meeting, detailing committee objectives and action plans, and also an annual Report of Activities.
 - The Vancouver City Planning Commission is required to submit an annual budget to Council.
- Civic agency chairs and members work together to develop required reports, drawing on liaison and staff assistance as needed.

- Time commitments for civic agencies can vary, but generally members can expect to spend at least 5 to 10 hours per month on meetings, document review, research, and correspondence.
- Some civic agencies have a higher time commitment. For example, the Vancouver Heritage Commission holds meetings every three weeks for approximately three hours, while Urban Design Panel meetings can last up to six hours.

- 1. What is the main purpose of City of Vancouver civic agencies?**
 - A. To make decisions and give directions that Council and staff are legally required to follow
 - B. To convey community concerns to Council and staff while advising on City priorities, projects, and initiatives, or to serve statutory functions as outlined in relevant by-laws or terms of reference
 - C. To allocate resources and approve the annual City budget
 - D. To appoint members of Council once every four years

- 2. Which of the following is *not* a method on the IAP2 spectrum of public engagement?**
- A. Consult
 - B. Inform
 - C. Ignore
 - D. Empower

- 3. Which of the following *do not* sit on Civic Agencies?**
- A. Members of the community
 - B. Council liaisons
 - C. External liaisons from the Park Board, VPD, VPL, and VSB
 - D. Members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

Module No. 1 Quiz Answers

1. B

2. C

3. D

- What do you hope to achieve by joining a civic agency? List a few objectives you may have, and keep these in mind as you progress through the following modules. They can be as specific as “advise on street lighting needs in my neighbourhood,” or as broad as “influence Council’s decision-making on accessible and affordable housing.”
- You may also want to think of expectations for your civic agency itself, like “I expect that everyone will be treated equitably and with respect.”

- Have you participated in public engagement processes before? Where do you think these processes may have fallen on the IAP2 Spectrum (refer back to slide no. 3)? How do you think these processes could have reduced tangible and intangible barriers?

Module Complete