

In January 2014, the City convened a diverse group of Santa Rosa residents to create the Mayor's Open Government Task Force, the goal of which was to obtain recommendations about how to improve openness and transparency in Santa Rosa municipal government. Of the recommendations set forth by this Task Force, the following focused on community engagement:

## Develop a Culture That Values Public Engagement

This overall recommendation was broken down into a subset of additional recommendations on how to accomplish this:

- 2.1: Genuinely engage and partner with neighborhoods, volunteers, businesses, institutions, and other organizations which support our community
- 2.2: Establish Santa Rosa as a leader in civic engagement with the goal of increasing Openness, Transparency and Accountability
- 2.3: Close the communication loop - Acknowledge the value of community input, wisdom, and participation
- 2.4: Increase opportunities for diverse community engagement and effective participation
- 2.5: Build a strong civic infrastructure – educate people about how best to engage.

Before we can start to build a culture that values public engagement or community engagement, we must understand the principles of community engagement and make them part of the work we do every day. The following principles were developed by the City of Alexandria, Virginia. Like Santa Rosa, Alexandria was tasked in 2012 to work with residents to improve and expand civic engagement throughout their city and increase openness and transparency of their local government. Through a series of community conversations and online participation, residents of Alexandria collaborated with city staff, and appointed and elected officials to talk about how Alexandrians could best participate in public decision-making processes that shape the city.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> City of Alexandria, Virginia. (January 2014). *What's Next Alexandria: Handbook for Civic Engagement*. <https://www.alexandriava.gov/WhatsNext>

These principles serve as the foundation for civic engagement in Alexandria, VA, and can also help shape the foundation for community engagement in Santa Rosa. City leaders and decision-makers may want to consider convening a similar process with the community to develop Santa Rosa specific principles in the future.

**1. Respect**

All participants, including staff, residents, and appointed and elected officials, demonstrate respect in words and actions and approach decisions with open-mindedness so that everyone feels comfortable expressing their opinion regardless of differences.

**2. Inclusiveness and Equity**

Santa Rosa reaches out and encourages the participation of all members of the community in dialogue and decision-making processes, including those who will be affected by the issue as well as those who have not historically been engaged. All members of the community are informed and empowered to participate; all views are equally heard and inform the outcome; and all impacts and benefits are fairly distributed.

Additionally, Santa Rosa makes every effort to be culturally and linguistically inclusive; Spanish-language translation and interpretation are made available at all community meetings and in decision-making processes. Santa Rosa also agrees to look at culturally appropriate ways to engage those who may not have historically been engaged, particularly community members from our Latino and other ethnically diverse communities.

**3. Early Involvement**

Identify and involve stakeholders (e.g. residents, community leaders, businesses, etc.) early in decision-making processes. Community members are involved in framing issues before any conclusions have been drawn, requiring early and ongoing communication with participants through each phase in the process.

**4. Easy Participation**

Promote an open and readily accessible government (Open Government Task Force Recommendation 2.2). Communications and information are timely, easy to understand, and offered in a variety of formats, appropriate to a given process. Information will also be available in Spanish throughout each project and decision-making process. The City will provide clarity about the public decision-making process, including milestones and a defined endpoint. Participants have the flexibility to participate in a variety of ways, including online and in-person.

**5. Meaningful Engagement**

Santa Rosa provides opportunities for all community members to participate in an **open and unbiased** process, free of predetermined outcomes, to consider and deliberate feasible options. The City authentically solicits, acknowledges, incorporates, and responds to community input.

**6. Mutual Accountability**

The City and community are mutually accountable for a fair process, honest and respectful participation, informed and fact-based discussion, outcomes that reflect input, and acceptance of the result. City processes will include meaningful assessments to measure progress, implementation of improvements as needed, and effective communication of both.

**7. Transparency**

The City of Santa Rosa will act with integrity in an open process, and will provide timely access to clear, trustworthy information, presented and employed by all parties from the beginning to the end of the process, including the reasoning that leads to and supports policy conclusions.

**8. Sustained Collaboration**

Promote a culture of community engagement that enhances public decision-making processes and invests in long-term working relationships, learning opportunities and ongoing, open collaboration among community members, community groups, City leaders, and staff.

**9. Evaluation**

Santa Rosa will work in partnership with the community to assess community engagement efforts in decision-making processes. The evaluation will quantify participant feedback, document lessons learned, and identify strategies for improvement.