

Sonoma County Fire Memorial Community Engagement Framework

DRAFT

Prepared by: Community Engagement Ad Hoc Committee of the Fire Memorial Task Force
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Purpose

Community engagement is the foundation of the Fire Memorial project and the heart of how this memorial will authentically reflect our community's experiences with the 2017 wildfire complex. The artist's role is to absorb and reflect the full spectrum of our community's stories, emotions, and hopes into a memorial that serves as a place for acknowledgment, remembrance, gathering, and reflection.

The Fire Memorial Task Force has developed this engagement framework because we believe the memorial's power will come from the artist's deep understanding of how these fires impacted our community—the individual and collective grief, the resilience that emerged, and the ongoing process of healing.

Guiding Principles

Inclusivity

The engagement process will reach across geography, language, identity, and experience to ensure all voices can contribute to informing the artistic vision.

Healing

Every engagement opportunity will be designed as a healing-centered space that supports emotional expression and builds resilience rather than re-traumatizing participants.

Transparency

The process will clarify how community input is collected, how it informs the artistic process, and what role the community plays in the design development.

Shared Ownership

While respecting the artist's interpretation and creative authority, the community should feel genuinely heard and reflected in the final memorial design.

Engagement Goals

A successful community engagement process will achieve these outcomes:

- The artist will gain **insight into the range of experiences, emotions, and community impacts** from the fires.
- The artist will **develop trust and meaningful connections** with directly impacted families, survivors, and the broader community.
- The engagement process will **present to the artist stories, imagery, emotions, and community values** that can inspire and inform the memorial design, without prescribing specific artistic solutions.
- People across our diverse **community will have multiple meaningful opportunities to contribute**, including specialized approaches for families of victims, survivors, and different cultural communities.
- Through the engagement process, the **community will develop an understanding of public art processes**, trust in the artist, and shared investment in the final memorial.
- Participants will have opportunities to reflect not only on past loss but also to envision and **contribute to a hopeful future** for our community.

Core Engagement Strategies

The following strategies represent options for community engagement, recognizing that the artist and project team will select the approaches that best align with the artistic process, timeline, and community needs.

❖ Differentiated Engagement Approaches

The engagement process will be designed to recognize that different audiences require varying approaches to engagement.

Families of Victims & Direct Survivors:

- Personal invitations and individual meetings with the artist
- Small, intimate storytelling circles with trauma-informed facilitation
- Private artist meet-and-greets before larger community events

General Community:

- Public forums and community presentations
- Online surveys and offering story submission portals
- Pop-up engagement stations at farmers markets, libraries, and community events
- Newsletter updates and social media engagement

Specific Cultural Communities:

- Affinity-based circles hosted by trusted community organizations
- Spanish-language events with interpretation provided
- Partnerships with groups like North Bay Organizing Project, Jobs with Justice, California Indian Cultural Museum

❖ Multiple Engagement Formats

We offer several different methods for engaging with the community

In-Person Gatherings:

- Community forums at accessible, comfortable locations
- Site visits and walking discussions
- Meet-the-Artist events for relationship building

Virtual and Asynchronous Options:

- Online story collection portal (potentially through Sonoma County Library, Sonoma County Museum, Sonoma Valley Museum)
- Digital surveys with carefully crafted reflection prompts
- Virtual community presentations for those unable to attend in person
- Social media engagement through Creative Sonoma channels (Instagram, Facebook)

Creative and Expressive Activities:

- Community art-making sessions (eg. tiles, memory objects, collaborative pieces)
- Storytelling workshops and sharing circles
- Photography or visual memory collection
- Writing and poetry sessions

Safe and Healing-Centered Spaces

Every engagement activity will prioritize emotional safety and healing. This commitment manifests through trauma-informed facilitation, with gatherings assisted by facilitators with experience in trauma and community healing. Sessions will begin with shared agreements that establish community norms emphasizing respect, confidentiality, and care.

Mental health professionals will be available at larger gatherings to provide emotional support, while quiet options ensure that opt-out spaces and alternative participation methods are available for those who need them. Throughout the process, cultural sensitivity will guide our approach, recognizing that people process grief and trauma in different ways across cultures.

Outreach Framework

Target Communities

Primary Outreach (Personal Contact):

- Families who lost loved ones in the fires
- Fire survivors
- First responders and emergency personnel

Community Organizations & Networks:

- Faith communities and congregations
- Fire Safe councils and COPE groups
- Senior living communities and centers
- Immigrant community organizations (Bayer Farm, NBOP)
- School districts and youth organizations
- Artist communities (Creative Bridges participants, emerging artists)
- Nonprofit networks through Sonoma County COAD
- Medical and hospital personnel
- Public employees (city and county staff)

Geographic Communities:

- Residents near the memorial site location
- Fountaingrove, Coffey Park, Mark West and other affected neighborhood associations
- Block captains and neighborhood leaders

Outreach Methods & Messengers

Method	Best For	Trusted Messengers
Personal Calls/Emails	Families, survivors, first responders	Task Force members, county staff, community leaders
Partner Organization Networks	Cultural communities, seniors, youth	Faith leaders, nonprofit directors, community organizers
Creative Sonoma Channels	General public, artists, county-wide reach	Social media, Fire Memorial webpage, newsletters
Local Media	Broad awareness, displaced community members	Press releases, op-eds, radio interviews
Community Event Pop-ups	Meeting people where they are	Existing gatherings such as farmers markets, etc.
Supervisor/City Council Updates	Civic engagement, neighborhood reach	Board of Supervisors District newsletters, council meeting announcements
Multilingual Materials	Spanish-speaking communities	Library staff, cultural organizations, translated materials

Potential Implementation Framework

Phase 1: Introduction & Awareness

Activities:

- Public announcement of artist selection
- Meet-the-Artist community events either virtually and/or in different locations
- Update the Fire Memorial webpage with engagement opportunities

- Initial outreach to families and directly impacted individuals

Goals: Build awareness, introduce the artist to the community, establish trust

Phase 2: Deep Listening & Story Collection

Activities:

- Storytelling circles and listening sessions
- Art-making workshops and creative expression sessions
- Individual meetings between the artist and families/survivors
- Pop-up engagement stations throughout the county
- Online story and memory collection

Goals: Gather rich community input to inform the artistic vision

Phase 3: Concept Development & Community Feedback

Activities:

- Presentation of initial design concepts to Task Force
- Community forums to share artistic direction and gather reactions
- Focused feedback sessions with families and directly impacted individuals
- Refinement of design based on community input

Goals: Ensure community voice is reflected, build support for design direction

Phase 4: Final Design & Community Preparation

Activities:

- Final design presentation to the Task Force
- Planning for installation and dedication events
- Documentation and celebration of engagement process

Goals: Prepare for memorial completion

Resource Support & Coordination

Task Force Role:

- Provide contact lists and facilitate introductions
- Participation in events when possible
- Assist with outreach through existing networks
- Offer feedback and guidance throughout the process

Creative Sonoma Support:

- Project management and timeline coordination
- Support event logistics and venue coordination
- Communications and media outreach
- Website maintenance and online engagement tools
- Budget management for engagement activities
- Ensure trauma-informed facilitation for sensitive gatherings
- Translation services and cultural competency guidance
- Arrange for mental health support to be present at events
- Oversee communications strategy and materials development
- Inspire engagement with county and city officials

Commitment to Community Voice

The Fire Memorial Task Force is committed to supporting this engagement framework through logistical coordination, community outreach, and facilitation support. This framework offers our ideas about the conditions for authentic community connection while respecting the artistic process and creative authority necessary for the creation of the memorial.

This document represents our shared vision for how community engagement can inform and strengthen the memorial. The framework is designed to serve both the community's need to be heard and the artistic need to create a lasting memorial that truly reflects our collective experience with the 2017 fires and their ongoing impact on Sonoma County.

Resources:

<https://noaa.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=790ba363d4e74c77a94d861a7dd533fe>