A SIX-STEP
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT GUIDE
FOR CAPITAL PROJECTS

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ARLINGTON
VIRGINIA

ENGAGE ARLINGTON

About this Guide

This guide was developed to advance public engagement practice across Arlington County government.

Building on both the Participation, Leadership and Civic Engagement (PLACE) initiative and the Community Facilities Study, this guide integrates more recent feedback received from both internal and external stakeholders regarding opportunities to improve public engagement for Arlington County Government capital projects.

The levels of engagement framework was influenced by engagement concepts produced by the International Association of Public Participation, available at www.iap2.org.

The guide was prepared by Arlington County's Office of Communications and Public Engagement, with input from both both internal and external stakeholders.

topics.arlingtonva.us/engage

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About this Guide

why does Arlington County have a public engagement guide?

Arlington County is a dynamic environment – a place where people are passionate about their community and committed to enhancing its policies and programs. With a community of more than 222,000 residents and an equal number of people who work here every day, our government is constantly planning for our future and advancing hundreds of projects.

Whether we're letting our residents know about plans to create a new park, looking for feedback on a transportation project or new facility, or seeking input on a policy update… **we want to hear from our community.** This guide is our commitment to meaningful engagement and provides the framework for successful engagement. It provides a range of techniques to engage the community in the activities and decision-making processes of the County.

where to find more

Visit arlingtonva.us and search "engage"

The *Engage Arlington* page on the County's website hosts an abundance of resources, including engagement opportunities, public meeting schedules, contacts and more.

Arlington Public Schools also organizes engagement initiatives. Learn more at *apsva.us/engage*.

County staff can access ready-to-use templates and resources from the County's intranet, *AC Commons*. Click on the Communications & Public Engagement tab.

how to use this guide

This is a guide **to help Arlington County staff** or contractors in developing or completing County projects. With more than 60 formal commissions and advisory boards, residents and business representatives also work with the County Board and County staff as projects and policies are developed and implemented.

This guide will help project teams determine the appropriate level of engagement and communication, map appropriate strategies, and share information with stakeholders along the way.

when to use this guide

Arlington completes hundreds of projects -- small and large -- in any given year. Recognizing that **there is no one-size-fits-all approach**, this guide is intended to help align the level of public engagement based on characteristics, benefits and potential impacts of each project.

Not every project will have a 6-step engagement process. While all County projects are important, there will always be some routine tasks that the County will complete at its discretion while practicing an efficient use of time and resources.

Public Engagement Values

These seven guiding values are the foundation for the County's engagement initiatives and strategies. These are followed by guiding principles, which are the most effective way to build trust and to demonstrate Arlington County Government's commitment to the community.

Inclusion and mutual respect

Ensure public notice and engagement is based on building trust and seeking to involve all stakeholders and range of perspectives, without predetermined outcomes.

Early involvement and timely communication

Communicate as early as possible in the engagement process, provide regular updates, and ensure timely information that supports stakeholder participation.

Transparent and accountable

Share information and provide feedback about how community input was considered and/or integrated.

Clear and accessible communication

Use plain language and a wide range of tools and techniques for communicating and engaging with stakeholders.

Open, two-way communication

Work with stakeholders in a cooperative and collaborative way to share information and provide opportunities for constructive dialogue.

Fiscally sustainable

Ensure methods and resources for public notice and engagement reflect the magnitude, complexity, and costs to the extent possible for each initiative.

Continuous improvement

Review process and seek better ways of engaging the community and provide efficient and effective public notice and engagement processes.

Six-Step Approach for Public Engagement

The six-step approach for public engagement is an easy-to-use framework designed to help project teams articulate the project scope, identify impacted stakeholders, and communicate areas of opportunity for public input.

** These steps are a guide. As processes vary, not every engagement step may be possible.*

1 Clearly Define the Project

The first step includes foundational information for the project, including:

- *Project basics*
  Name, location
- *Origin*
  How project was initiated and any relationship to other County plans or policies (include dates)
- *Project team*
  Name, role, department, email
- *Engagement & Communication Plan Sign-off*
  Identify who needs to review and sign-off on the completed plan. Include your communications team and, in some cases, senior leadership.
- *Description*
  Purpose, objectives, major components
- *Project partners*
  Other departments, Arlington Public Schools, outside agencies, utilities
- *Parameters*
  Schedule, budgets, regulatory constraints
- *Project Lifecycle (see page 7)*
- *Project Context (see page 8)*

STEP 1 Clearly Define the Project

Project Name: Central Park Plan

Location: 100 Arlington Avenue (cross street: Virginia Road)

Origin *(include dates)*: Identified in County Sector Plan; prioritized in 2018 CIP

Project Team

Name	Role	Department	Email
Jane Smith	project lead/planner	DPR	
John Williams	planning supervisor	DPR	
Jennifer Johnson	communications + outreach	DPR	
James Jones	transportation planner	DES	

Engagement Plan Sign-off Required By

Description *(purpose, objectives, major components, relationship to other plans)*: Arlington Central Park will be a new, public green space with recreational amenities, passive uses, enhanced pedestrian connections and diverse landscaping.

The purpose of the planning process will be to develop a park design based on broad community input.

Related Plans: Public Spaces Master Plan; County Sector Plan; General Land Use Plan; Stormwater Management Plan; Public Art Master Plan

Project Partners *(e.g., other departments, Arlington Public Schools, other agencies or organizations)*:
Dept. Parks and Recreation (lead)
Dept. Environmental Services
Dept. Community Planning, Housing, & Development
Arlington Public Art

Parameters *(schedule, budget, constraints)*:
- $1.1 million in design and Phase I construction.
- Design Development: 16 months

Departmental communications lead should sign-off on engagement and communication plans. In some cases, senior leadership may also need to review and approve these plans.

Connect with your communications staff early for engagement support

1 Clearly Define the Project *(continued)*

Project Lifecycle

Determine what stages your project will have. Engagement and communication opportunities may occur at different points or stages in a project's lifecycle.

Common project stages involve:

- Planning & visioning
- Approval
- Scoping
- Funding
- Design
- Construction

Large, complex projects often have different stages - with different engagement levels at those varying stages.

There is no one-size-fits-all project cycle for the multitude of County projects and processes. Each will have their own stages, opportunities and levels of engagement.

You will determine levels of engagement in Step 3.

STEP 1 Clearly Define the Project

Project Lifecycle Stages

Stage of Project Lifecycle	Engagement Level *(complete at Step 3)*	Engagement Opportunity? Y/N	Communication Opportunity? Y/N
Visioning	Collaborate	Y	Y
Concept alternatives	Collaborate	Y	Y
design refinement	involve	Y	Y
Approve funding		N	Y
construction		N	Y

1 Clearly Define the Project *(continued)*

Project Context
Consider the context of the project using these starter questions.

Understanding the context of your project will help more thoroughly identify stakeholders, level of potential sign-off required and levels of engagement in the next steps.

STEP 1 Clearly Define the Project

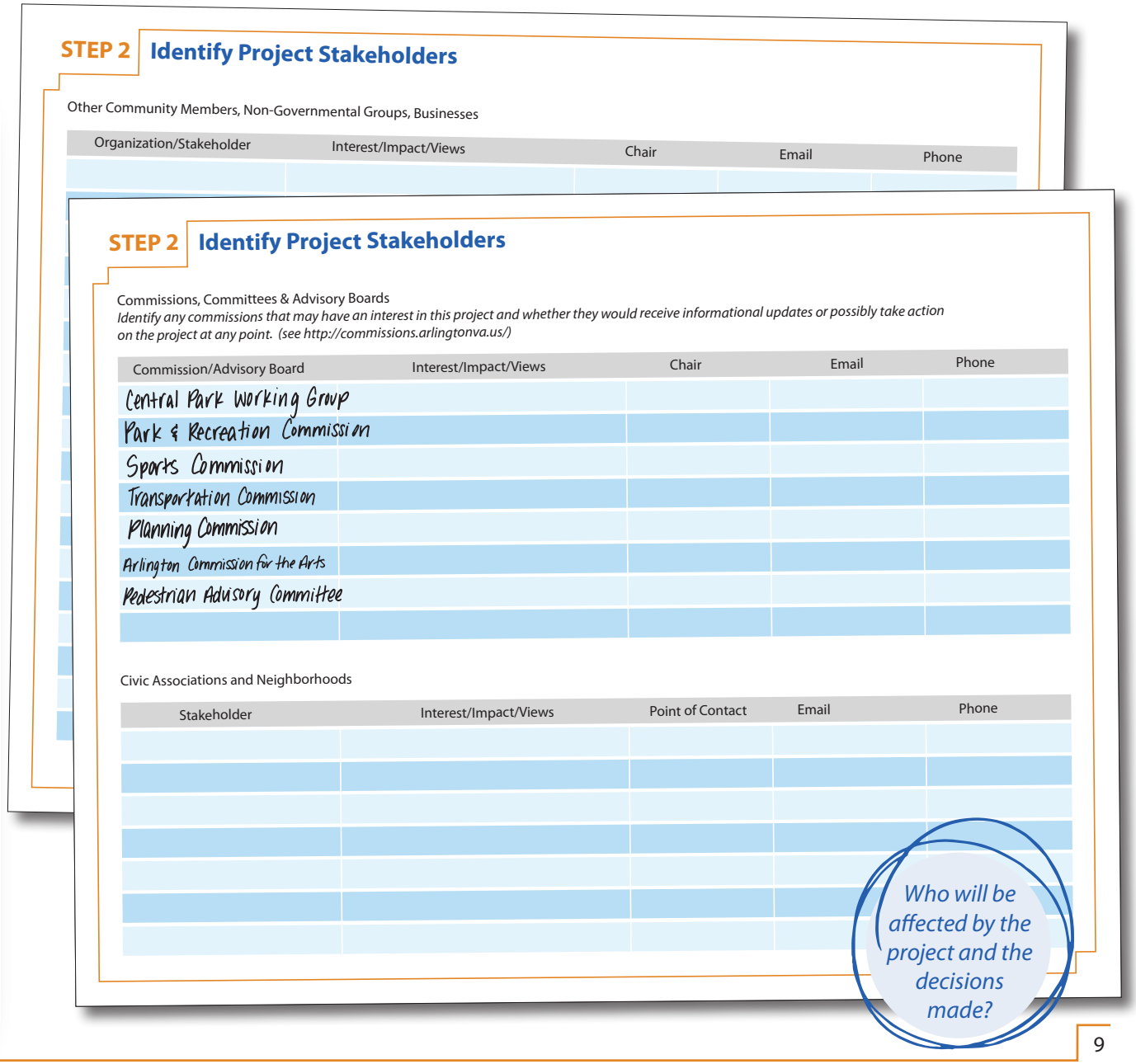
Project Context	Yes	To Some Extent	No	Notes
Does this project relate to master, sector, corridor, Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and/or other plans?	✓			
Have members of the public had an opportunity to provide input into the project prior to this point in time?		✓		
Are there are other projects in the immediate geographic area that are important to be aware of? This includes county, regional, state, federal and utility projects.	✓			
Are there any potential benefits and/ or concerns for nearby residents and/or businesses (e.g., health/safety, traffic, parking)?	✓			
Are there any greater needs that this project fulfills?	✓			
Is there community support for this project?	✓			
Are there community concerns and/or opposition for this project?		✓		

2 Identify Project Stakeholders

Identify all community members, groups and organizations that will be impacted by or have an interest in your project. Consider what their differing views and perspectives may be.

Be sure to consider the following:

- Commissions, Committees, Advisory Groups
- Civic Associations and Neighborhoods
- Condo/rental units and associations
- Adjacent neighbors
- Under-represented communities
- Other Community Members, Non-Governmental Groups, Businesses
  - Impacted or interested community members who may not be in the immediate impact area
  - Non-governmental groups or NGOs
  - Businesses, employers, employees, business improvement districts (BIDs)
  - School and parent groups, local churches, religious group facilities



3 Determine Level of Engagement

There are four levels of engagement for County projects: Communicate, Consult, Involve and Collaborate*. The following indicators will help decide the appropriate engagement level for a project. More checks in a particular category, generally indicates that is the appropriate engagement level. If there's a tie, use the higher engagement level. It will be important to use both these indicators and the framework on page 11 to deteremine levels of engagement.

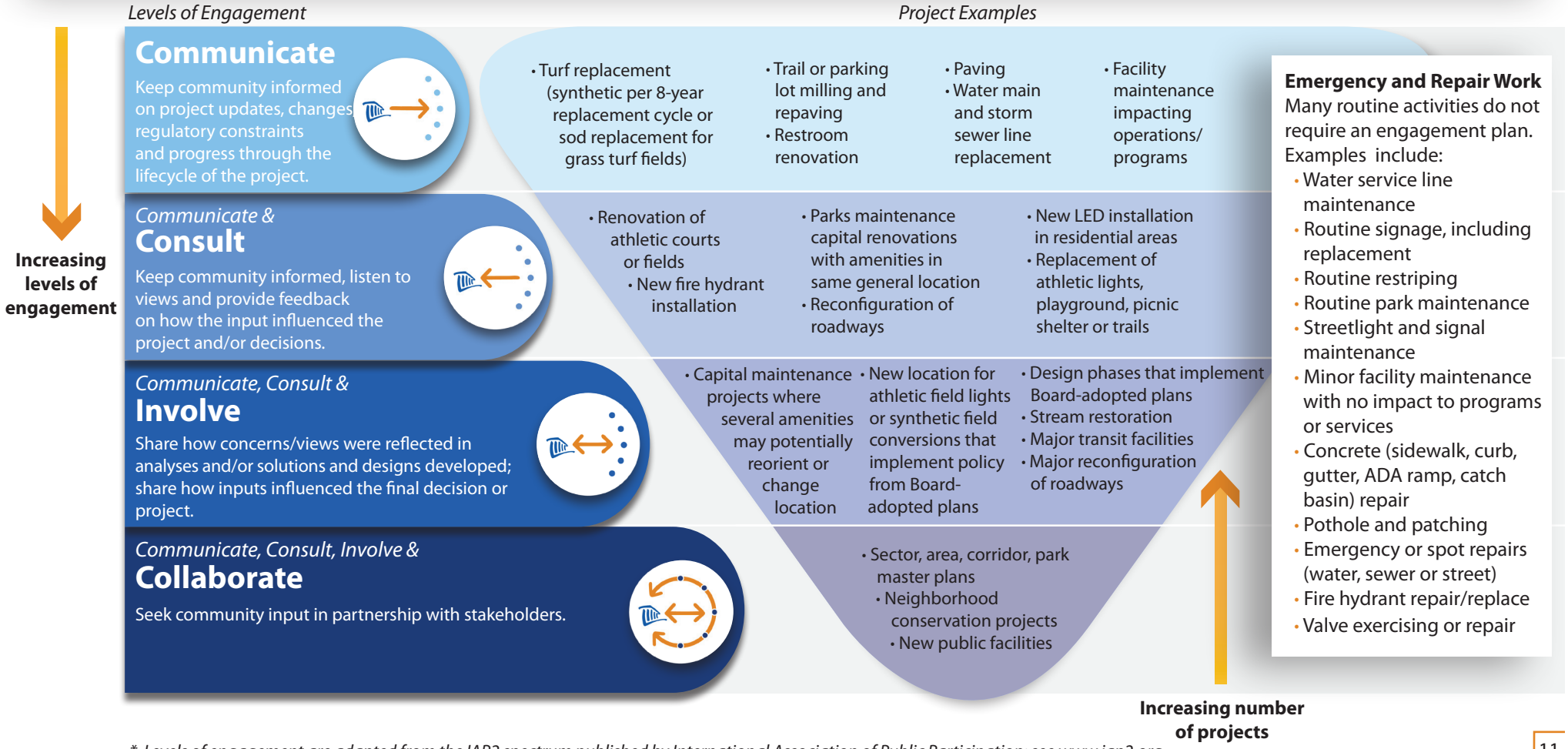
	✓	Indicators for Engagement Level
Communicate		Project **would not** interrupt service and/or traffic for an extended period of time (typically < one month)
		Residents and/or businesses **would not** be disrupted for an extended period (typically < 6 months)
		Project is a direct replacement of infrastructure, materials or other in the same location
	✓	**Indicators for Engagement Level**
Communicate & **Consult**		Project addresses a public health and/or safety concern
		Project **would not** cause loss of or significant** change to facility, program or service to community
		Project changes may be triggered by legislative, regulatory or policy requirements.
	✓	**Indicators for Engagement Level**
Communicate, Consult & **Involve**		Project included in approved County Plan (e.g., Master, Sector, Corridor, CIP)
		Project **would** fundamentally change the size, capacity, and/or intensity of use of space, roadway, etc.
		Project **would** cause loss of or significant** change to a facility/program/service for broader Arlington
		Project could have significant** impacts on nearby residents and/or businesses (e.g., health/safety, traffic, parking, loss of mature trees, adverse construction impacts)
		Strong community interest (support, concern, differing views, opposition) anticipated for project
	✓	**Indicators for Engagement Level**
Communicate, Consult, Involve & **Collaborate**		Project **not** a capital maintenance or operations project
		Multiple commissions and/or advisory boards would typically provide input on this type of project
		Project did **not** originate from a previously approved County Plan (e.g., Master, Sector, Corridor, CIP)
		County Board/County Manager has provided high-level direction (e.g., construction of public buildings, studies)

* *Levels of engagement are adapted from the IAP2 spectrum published by International Association of Public Participation; see www.iap2.org.*

** *Significance can be assessed, in part, by answering context questions in Step 1.*

3 Determine Level of Engagement *(continued)*

While the extent of engagement increases each step from Communicate to Collaborate, the number of projects inversely decreases, with the highest number of County projects falling into the Communicate category and the least number of projects in the Collaborate category. Large, complex projects may have an overall engagement level, with different levels of engagement within stages.



* *Levels of engagement are adapted from the IAP2 spectrum published by International Association of Public Participation; see www.iap2.org.*

	Strategy	Examples of Potential Tools
Communicate Keep community informed on project updates, changes, regulatory constraints and progress through the lifecycle of the project.	• *Early, often and ongoing communication*	• Email updates and e-newsletters • County news channels – *Citizen*; Insider, ATV, etc. • Neighborhood and civic association newsletters • Webpages – project-specific, topical • Social media – Facebook, Twitter, Next Door, etc. • Signage – sandwich boards, posters, flyers, door hangers, displays • Printed media - fact sheets, brochures • Mailings, mail inserts, letters
Communicate & **Consult** Keep community informed, listen to views and provide feedback on how the input influenced the project and/or decisions.	• *1-2+ engagement opportunities* • *Typically after concepts or options are developed*	• Listening sessions • Public hearings • Walking tours & field visits • Listening sessions, civic association meetings, small meetings with stakeholders • Online feedback – comment forms, email boxes, surveys/polls, CiviComment ** plus the strategies listed above in previous levels.*
Communicate, Consult & **Involve** Share how concerns/views were reflected in analyses and/or solutions and designs developed; share how inputs influenced the final decision or project.	• *3-5+ engagement opportunities* • *Over a defined period of time* • *Typically prior to design development*	• Open houses • Roundtables, focus groups, workshops • Online dialogues • Input from Commissions/Advisory Groups • Interactive forums (in person and/or online) • World cafes ** plus the strategies listed above in previous levels.*
Communicate, Consult, Involve & **Collaborate** Seek community input in partnership with stakeholders.	• *Use multiple engagement opportunities that build on each other*	• Charrettes • Working groups • Citizen-led engagement and partnerships ** plus the strategies listed above in previous levels.*

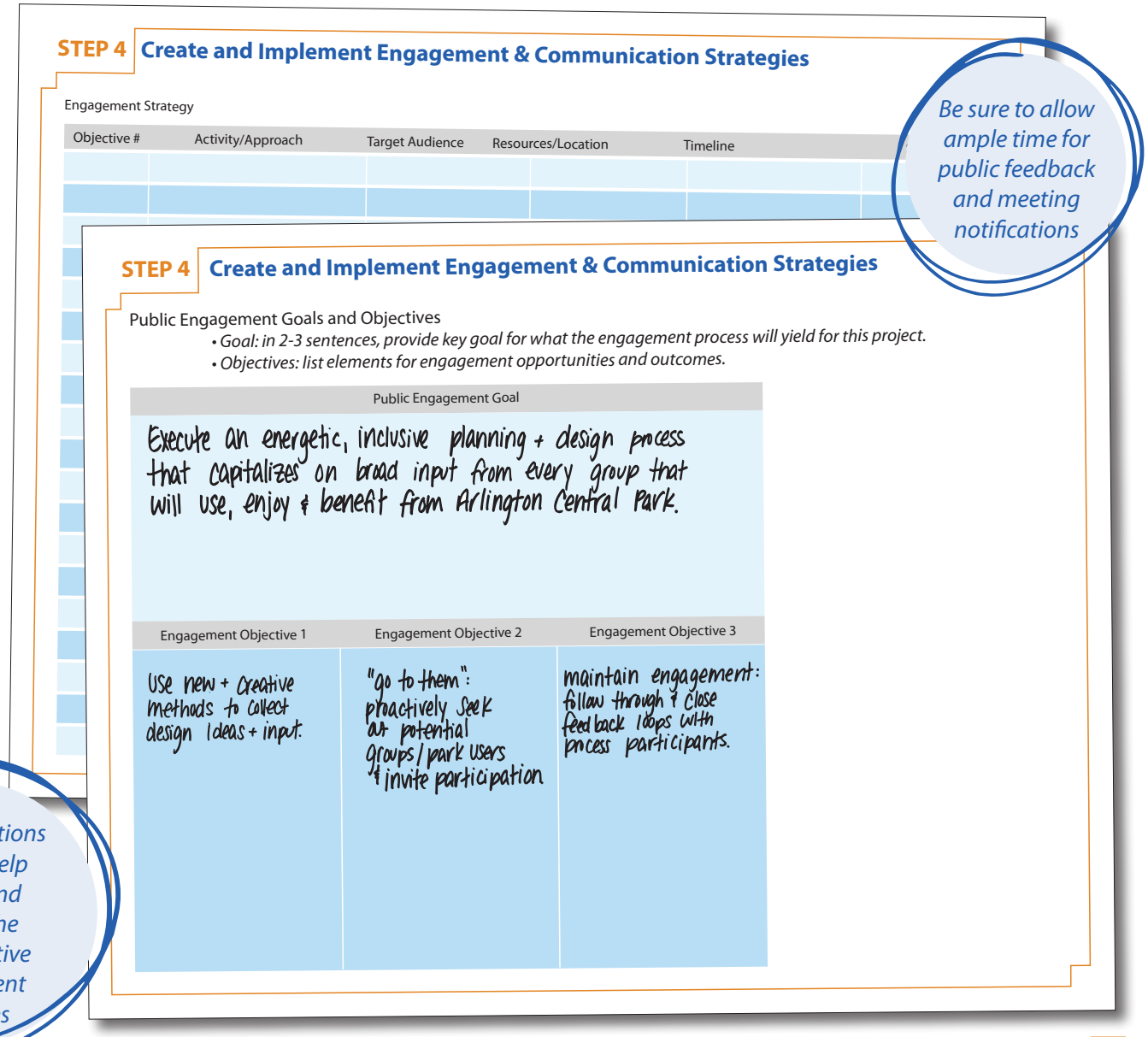
* *Levels of engagement are adapted from the IAP2 spectrum published by International Association of Public Participation; see www.iap2.org.*

4 Create and Implement Engagement & Communication Strategies

As you **create** your strategy:

- Outline your public engagement goals and the objectives for each one. Think about the higher vision and purpose of the engagement strategy.
- Align the appropriate tools with your engagement objectives.
- List your target audience, necessary resources, location and timeline details -- and identify the lead contact for each item.
- Ensure information about the project and related engagement opportunities are available to stakeholders.
- Develop and use outreach messages, or your "elevator speech", that summarizes the project in a few brief sentences.
- Feedback from commission, advisory or working group chairs may be helpful in this process.

Your communications lead can help identify and execute the most effective engagement strategies



STEP 4 Create and Implement Engagement & Communication Strategies

Engagement Strategy

Objective #	Activity/Approach	Target Audience	Resources/Location	Timeline

Be sure to allow ample time for public feedback and meeting notifications

STEP 4 Create and Implement Engagement & Communication Strategies

Public Engagement Goals and Objectives

- *Goal: in 2-3 sentences, provide key goal for what the engagement process will yield for this project.*
- *Objectives: list elements for engagement opportunities and outcomes.*

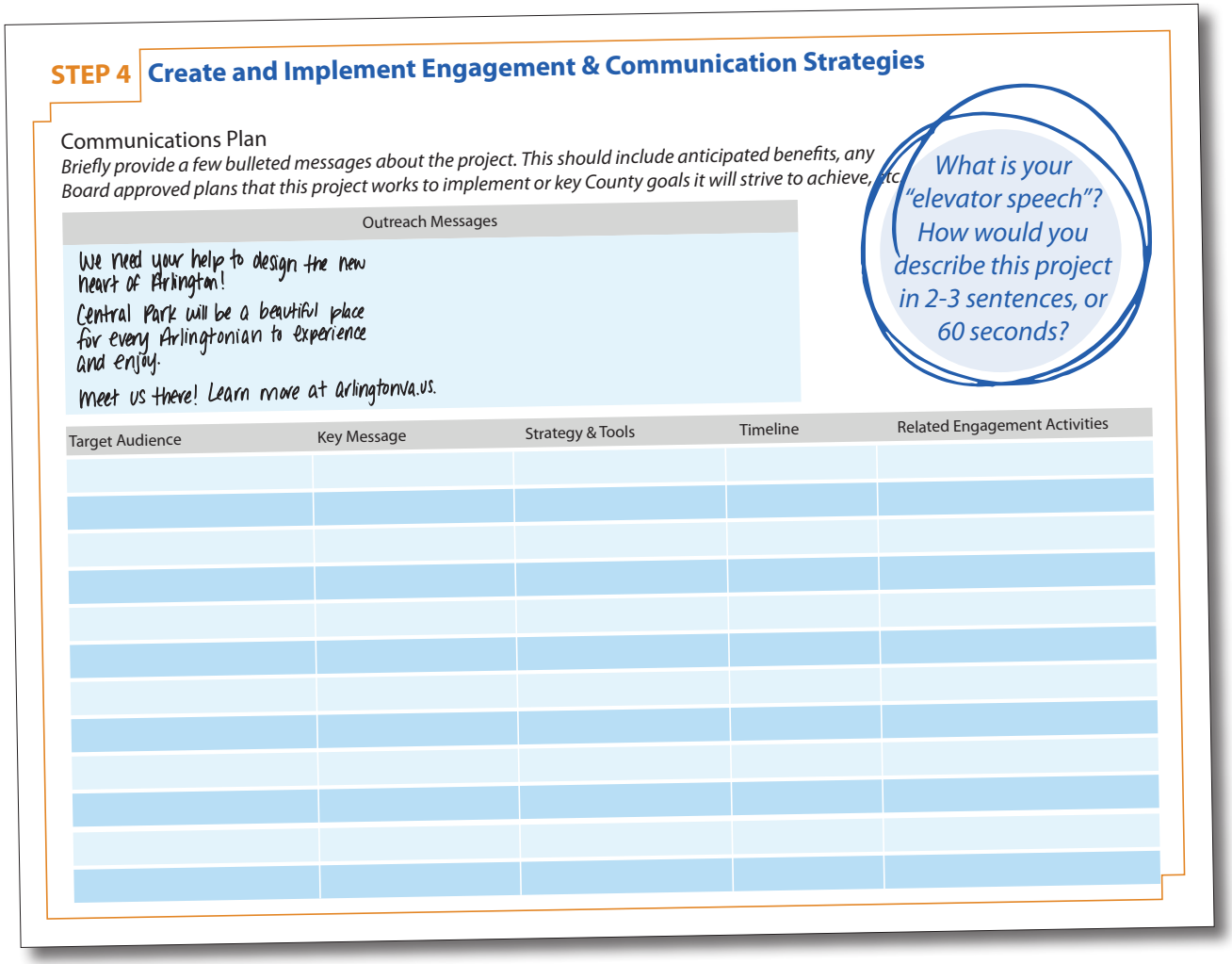
Public Engagement Goal
Execute an energetic, inclusive planning + design process that capitalizes on broad input from every group that will use, enjoy & benefit from Arlington Central Park.

Engagement Objective 1	Engagement Objective 2	Engagement Objective 3
Use new + creative methods to collect design ideas + input.	"go to them": proactively seek out potential groups / park users & invite participation	maintain engagement: follow through & close feedback loops with process participants.

4 Create and Implement Engagement & Communication Strategies *(continued)*

As you **implement** your strategy:

- Convene staff involved to review roles, responsibilities and run of show for each engagement opportunity.
- Periodically assess your communication strategy and make modifications as you go to ensure that you are reaching all interested stakeholders.
- Establish a system to document all of the input you receive to help you in the next step.
- As appropriate, include contractors and/or consultants identified for this project in your strategy.



STEP 4 Create and Implement Engagement & Communication Strategies

Communications Plan

Briefly provide a few bulleted messages about the project. This should include anticipated benefits, any Board approved plans that this project works to implement or key County goals it will strive to achieve, etc.

Outreach Messages
We need your help to design the new heart of Arlington! Central Park will be a beautiful place for every Arlingtonian to experience and enjoy. Meet us there! Learn more at arlingtonva.us.

What is your "elevator speech"? How would you describe this project in 2-3 sentences, or 60 seconds?

Target Audience	Key Message	Strategy & Tools	Timeline	Related Engagement Activities

5 Conduct Analysis for Decision Makers

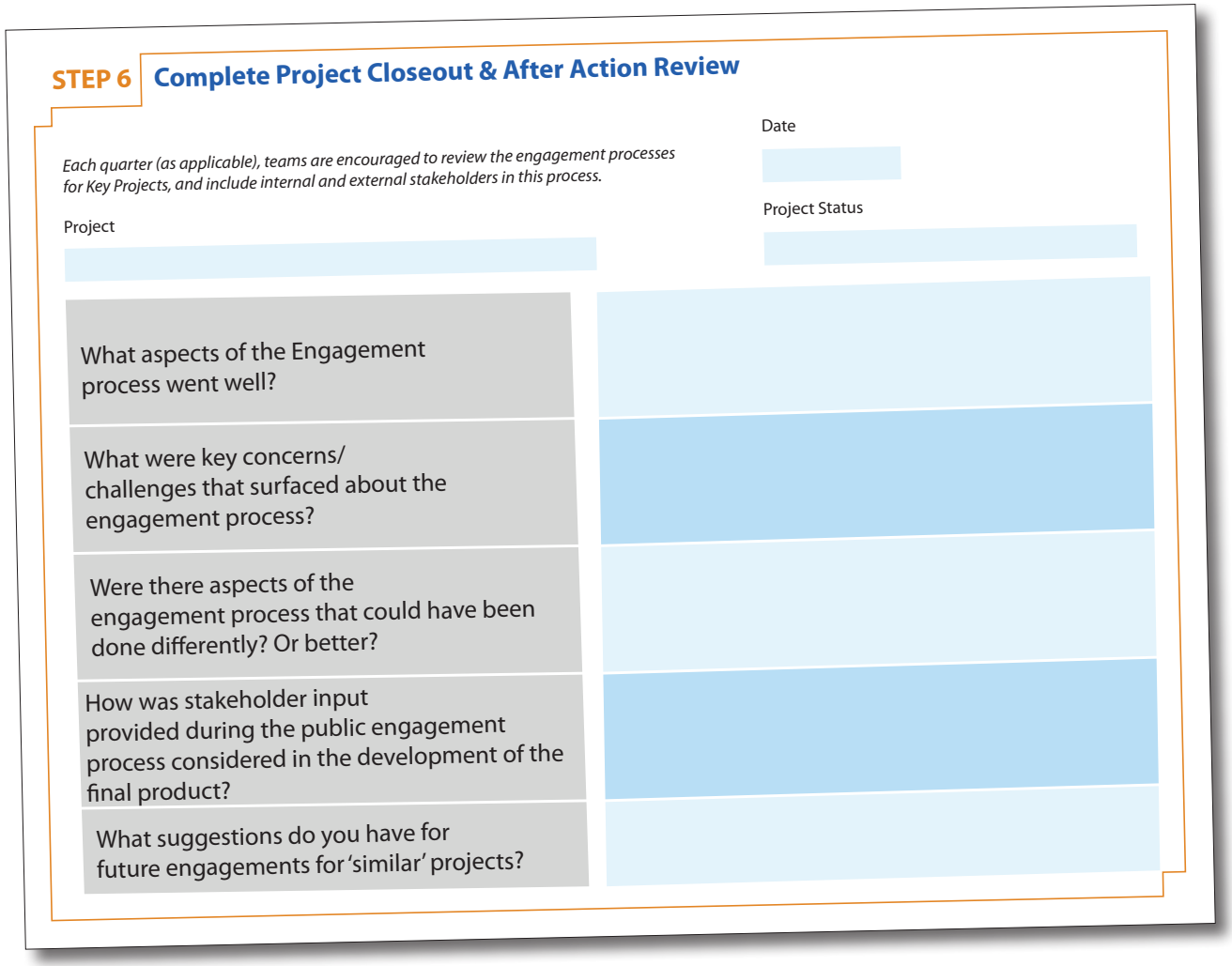
Review and **analyze** all of the input you've received and summarize your findings.

It will be more important that the decision makers receive an analysis of the input received through public engagement. It is especially important for them to see all the perspectives and views that have surfaced throughout the process.

6 Complete Project Closeout & After Action Review

At the conclusion of a project, include notifying stakeholders of the status or outcome in your project closeout tasks. Ensure all public information locations (websites, signage, etc.) are updated to reflect the final information.

Take time to conduct an after action review. This type of review offers an opportunity to reflect on what went well and explore areas for improvement. Lessons learned can be used to adjust engagement strategies for future projects.



STEP 6 Complete Project Closeout & After Action Review

Date

Each quarter (as applicable), teams are encouraged to review the engagement processes for Key Projects, and include internal and external stakeholders in this process.

Project

Project Status

What aspects of the Engagement process went well?	
What were key concerns/ challenges that surfaced about the engagement process?	
Were there aspects of the engagement process that could have been done differently? Or better?	
How was stakeholder input provided during the public engagement process considered in the development of the final product?	
What suggestions do you have for future engagements for 'similar' projects?	