

Community Engagement Framework

Share your voice. Shape Brant's future.



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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we meet on the lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, and the traditional territory of the Attiwanderonk.

We remind ourselves that the County of Brant is situated on lands that are full of rich Indigenous history and home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people today; we recognize the significance of their contributions to the past, present, and future of this land.

As a County, we have a shared responsibility for the stewardship of the land on which we live and work and a commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action. We commit to continue learning, reflecting on our past, and working in allyship.

Introduction

Imagine a vibrant community where every voice has a place, every idea has value, and every conversation strengthens the ties that bind us. The County of Brant is a community built on connection—among neighbours, between generations, and with the beautiful community we share. These connections are the heartbeat of our County, and they thrive when everyone has the opportunity to participate meaningfully in shaping our collective future.

This Community Engagement Framework is our commitment to fostering those connections. It is a guide for how we, as a County, listen to you, include diverse perspectives, and collaborate transparently to make decisions that impact everyday life in our community. The framework incorporates more than just guidelines and process; it's a reflection of our shared belief that the best outcomes emerge when the community, Council, and staff work together.

The benefits of this approach ripple far beyond individual projects. When we engage openly and thoughtfully, we create a stronger, more united community.

Together, we can embrace challenges, celebrate successes, and chart a course toward a future that reflects the values and aspirations of all who call the County of Brant home.

"At the County of Brant, we believe that effective community engagement is the cornerstone of good governance. This framework is our promise to listen with intention, respond with transparency, and work collaboratively to shape a vibrant and inclusive future for all residents. Together, we can ensure that the decisions we make are guided by the voices of the community we serve."



Alison Newton
County of Brant CAO

"The strength of the County of Brant lies in its people. This Community Engagement Framework demonstrates our commitment to fostering open dialogue and meaningful connections between our residents and their local government. It's about creating opportunities for everyone to have a say in the decisions that shape our community and ensuring that Brant continues to be a place where everyone feels heard and valued."



David Bailey
County of Brant Mayor

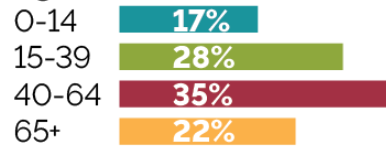
A closer look at the County of Brant

The County of Brant is a diverse and growing community, and to create inclusive engagement opportunities, it is essential to understand the unique characteristics of residents and neighborhoods. Home to over 40,000 residents, the County is made up of several distinct communities, each contributing its own personality and charm. From the serene rural landscapes of Mount Pleasant and Scotland to the vibrant arts and culture of Paris, the County offers a tapestry of perspectives and experiences.

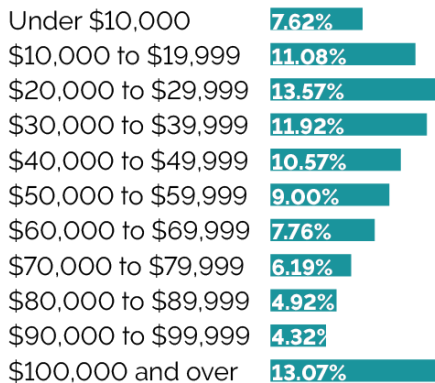


Population in 2021:
39,474
Increase of **7.5%**
from 2016

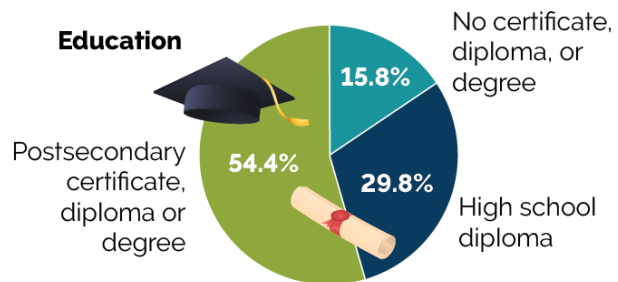
Age



Income



Education



30%

Approximately 30% of residents in Brant are living with a disability.

Source: Weighted 2020 provincial average.

The disability rate increases with age. Growth of the County's senior population will contribute to the overall increase in the disability rate.



10.6% of County residents are immigrants:

- 13.9% Americas
- 58.4% Europe
- 4.4% Africa
- 22.9% Asia
- Oceania and other 0.4%

Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a process that creates opportunities for you to become involved in decision making by County of Brant Council and staff with regards to County policies, programs, projects, and services.

The County's goal, through community engagement, is to share information, gather diverse public input, and build relationships to create better-informed, inclusive decisions.

Opportunities to engage are published on our Engage Brant online platform, EngageBrant.ca. Each project page includes project information, including clear goals, describes the level of engagement, and outlines how you can get involved to share your input.



Community Engagement Policy

The County's Community Engagement Policy is the foundation for the Framework. It describes our guiding principles, roles and responsibilities, the importance of respectful and safe discussion, and the steps involved in community engagement.

What is a community engagement framework?

A community engagement framework is a structured approach that guides how the County of Brant involves the public in decision-making processes. It provides a clear set of principles, processes, and tools to ensure that community input is gathered effectively, transparently, and meaningfully.

The framework helps to create consistent, equitable, and inclusive engagement between the community and County of Brant Council and staff.

Key benefits

- **Creates stronger community connections:** Engagement encourages open conversations, helping you feel heard and fostering a sense of belonging.
- **Builds transparency and trust:** Clear processes show how your input shapes decisions, building trust between the County and the community.
- **Ensures better decision making:** Collecting a wide and diverse range of ideas and opinions leads to better-informed policies, programs, and services that meet community needs.

- **Invites participation and inclusivity:** The framework ensures that everyone, including underrepresented groups, have a chance to participate.
- **Encourages proactive problem solving:** Early engagement helps identify potential challenges, reducing risks and finding solutions before issues arise

The County of Brant's Community Engagement Framework

The County of Brant's Community Engagement Framework is championed by the Communications and Marketing Division within the Strategic Initiatives Department; however, its implementation and accountability are the responsibility of all County departments and division's that undertake community engagement. The Public Consultation Specialist supports this work through leadership, advice, planning, training and evaluation.

Your involvement is important and valued








Community engagement thrives when residents, businesses, and community partners actively participate. Your involvement ensures that decisions reflect the real needs, concerns, and values of the County of Brant. By sharing your perspectives, experiences, and ideas, you help shape projects, policies, and services that impact everyday life in the County.

Community engagement also promotes transparency and trust, ensuring that you understand how your feedback is used and feel empowered to take an active role in the community. By caring about engagement, you contribute to a thriving County of Brant where everyone's voice matters and meaningful change is possible.

Guiding principles

We believe that every County of Brant resident—whether you’ve lived here for generations or are new to the community—deserves a voice in shaping our shared future.

Our approach is guided by the following core principles:

Core principle	Description
<p>Inclusive</p> 	<p>Engagement is based on building trust and relationships that involve all members of the community. We will reflect the diversity of our community by using a range of tools and techniques to engage with you and gather a variety of perspectives.</p>
<p>Respectful</p> 	<p>Our engagement efforts will foster mutual respect, valuing all opinions, experiences, and interests. All members of Council, County staff, and members of the community are expected to communicate in a respectful and civil manner.</p>
<p>Accessible</p> 	<p>We will communicate using plain language and offer multiple ways to participate, recognizing that people engage and learn in different ways. We will coordinate engagement activities for efficiency and accessibility.</p>
<p>Transparent and accountable</p> 	<p>We will clearly communicate the level of participation you can expect and provide concise summaries of what we heard from communities as well as how your input has been used to shape decisions. By prioritizing transparency and accountability, we aim to create an engagement process that is meaningful and reflective of community voices.</p>
<p>Committed to continuous improvement</p> 	<p>We are committed to evaluating and improving our community engagement practices through public feedback to better serve the community.</p>

When we will engage

The County of Brant is committed to engaging with the community when your input can genuinely shape, inform, or influence the outcome of decisions or projects that impact you. We will engage with you to:

- Gather insights about priorities and concerns related to community initiatives
- Inform the creation of new projects, policies, or programs
- Get feedback about existing projects, policies, or programs
- Fulfill a Council resolution or legislated requirement

Certain legislation, such as the Municipal Act and Environmental Assessment Act, outlines the minimum requirements for when municipalities must seek input from the community. In the County of Brant, we strive to go beyond these legal requirements by creating additional opportunities for meaningful community engagement.

When we will not engage

While we value your input, there are times when engagement may not be appropriate. Here are some instances when we will not engage:

- **During emergencies:** If there is an immediate need to protect public safety or respond to a crisis, engagement will not be possible.
- **When the impact is minimal:** If a project or decision has little to no effect on the community, engagement may not be necessary.






Instances also occur from time to time where a decision has already been made due to factors such as Provincial or Federal mandates, approved budgets, safety regulations, etc., and cannot be changed. In these cases, while engagement will not take place, we will focus on communication to ensure you understand the reasoning, implications, and next steps.

When we are not able to engage with you, decision-making will be guided by our commitments to the community, and the priorities established in the County's Strategic Plan.

Level of engagement

Engagement within the County of Brant will vary depending on the needs and goals of a project. The County is committed to following the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) guidelines as a recognized standard for community engagement.

We will use these guidelines to make sure our engagement efforts are clear, consistent, and respectful. With every project, we'll let you know how your feedback will be used—whether it's simply to provide information, gather opinions, or involve you in deeper collaboration. We'll ensure that the level of engagement goal is clear, and the County's promise is adhered to.

Level	Community Participation Goal	Our Promise to the Community	Example tools
 <p>Inform</p>	To provide the community with balanced and objective information to assist you in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	We will keep you informed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public information meeting/centre • Open Houses • Websites
 <p>Consult</p>	To obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Open House • Pop-up events • Surveys • Focus groups
 <p>Involve</p>	To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Polling
 <p>Collaborate</p>	To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into decisions to the maximum extent possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad hoc committees • Task forces
 <p>Empower</p>	To place final decision making in the hands of the community.*	We will implement what you decide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Polling

**Please note: While we aim to uphold your decisions through the 'Empower' level of engagement, Council retains the authority to review and confirm outcomes to ensure they align with legal, financial, and community-wide considerations. We will clearly communicate any instances where Council's input is required.*



Decision-making in the County

Decision-making in the County of Brant is complex and may involve a unique mix of considerations.

While all feedback is carefully considered, it's important to remember that we must balance your input with factors like different levels of government, resource constraints, long-term impacts, environmental needs, legal guidelines, financial considerations, and the needs of the entire community. The County's goal is to always make the most informed decisions by considering ALL these aspects together.

Our decisions will aim to create the greatest benefits, minimize negative impacts, and promote equity, while working to address the needs of our growing and diverse community.

Steps we take to engage with community

Creating meaningful engagement for the County of Brant requires time, people, and resources to design and deliver effective community engagement. Our phased approach ensures engagement is meaningful, thorough, and impactful.

What we will do	What you can expect
<p>Step 1: Define</p> <p>We will define the scope and goals of the project then assess if community engagement is appropriate.</p>	<p>We will assess how the project might impact the community and determine if engagement is needed.</p> <p>If engagement is the right approach, we will set clear objectives and define the level of engagement.</p> <p>We will identify who and how we need to engage to ensure the process is focused and effective.</p> <p>We will consider what meaningful engagement opportunities exist, based on the available time, resources, and budget.</p>
<p>Step 2: Plan</p> <p>We will create community engagement plans that align with the goals established in Step 1.</p>	<p>Where possible, we will use a variety of effective methods to reach and engage residents.</p> <p>We will consider geographic locations throughout the County for events, given the project topic, scope, timeline, and budget.</p> <p>We will set appropriate timelines that align with both community needs and project goals.</p>
<p>Step 3: Implement</p> <p>We will implement the community engagement plans created in Step 2.</p>	<p>We will promote community engagement using a variety of free and paid channels depending on the project budget.</p> <p>We will use a variety of tools to ensure inclusive and informed engagement.</p> <p>We will host engagement activities online, in print, over the phone, or in the community, depending on what is outlined within the plan.</p> <p>We will collect and analyze all engagement data.</p>

Step 4: Share

We will share data and insights from community engagement.

We will share updates, data and insights with the community in ways that are easy to understand.

We will share how community engagement informed a recommendation or decision.

Step 5: Evaluate

We will evaluate the plan and process to understand what went well and what could be improved in future.

We will research and utilize new approaches and invite public feedback to make community engagement practices better.

We will use the following evaluation techniques:

Informal discussions

Interviews with staff or community partners

Participant evaluation form

Roles and responsibilities

Your responsibilities

- Read and abide by the community engagement framework, including the [engagement guidelines](#) and [code of conduct](#).
- Focus on the topic of the project when providing your input.
- Participate by sharing your thoughts, ideas, suggestions and alternative solutions on available projects through the available means.
- Work collaboratively with fellow participants, the facilitator, Council and County staff
- You are part of a larger community, encourage others to offer input too
- Request alternative ways of participating if required.
- Recognize the County must balance your input with factors like resource constraints, long-term impacts, legal guidelines, budget limits, and the needs of the entire community.
- Sometimes project outcomes may not be what you had hoped for. If that happens, please be respectful of final project decisions.

Elected official's responsibilities

- Endorse the Community Engagement Policy, [guiding principles](#), [levels of engagement](#) and the engagement framework as a whole. Aim to ensure it is embedded in the culture.
- Ensure that staff reports, individual concerns and overall public benefit, are all considered with each project.
- Work collaboratively with community members and County staff.
- Attend or be involved in community engagement activities when feasible.

Staff responsibilities

- Use the Community Engagement Framework and Policy to determine if community engagement is appropriate for the project.
- If engagement is needed, work with the Public Consultation Specialist to develop an appropriate Community Engagement Plan for the project.
- Actively implement the Community Engagement Policy [guiding principles](#), [levels of engagement](#) and the engagement framework as a whole.
- Ensure residents are provided access to opportunities to engage.

- Work collaboratively with the community and Council.
- Ensure the final reporting includes and identifies community feedback and project outcomes.
- Ensure that consultants and facilitators undertaking community engagement activities on behalf of the County comply with the Community Engagement Framework and Policy.

Tools for inclusive and informed engagement

Digital Platforms

Accessible online platforms like Engage Brant (EngageBrant.ca) and the County website (brant.ca) are used to reach a broad audience.

Engage Brant is a website platform that provides a space to connect, share ideas, and provide feedback on projects and initiatives happening in the County of Brant. Whether it's shaping future parks, improving services, inspiring new programs, or helping to build inclusive communities, you can share your feedback about the topics that are most important to you.

Some online tools include but are not limited to:

- Engage Brant project pages
- Surveys
- Idea and Story boards
- Polls
- Mapping tools
- Questions and comments
- Forums

To ensure accessible and equitable opportunities, we offer surveys in print through our Customer Service Offices in Paris and Burford, as well as phone-in options by calling 519.44BRANT (519.442.7268) or 1.855.44BRANT (1.855.442.7268). Where possible, surveys may also be offered in multiple languages depending on the project budget, scope, and community need.

Engagement Activities

We host engagement activities such as workshops tailored to different community groups, like "Coffee and Community Conversations" for seniors.

Some [engagement activities](#) include but are not limited to:

- Pop-up events
- Public Information Meetings
- Statutory Public Meetings
- Virtual Meetings
- Open Houses
- Workshops
- Focus Groups
- Roundtables
- Ad Hoc Committees

Townhalls have traditionally been seen as a way to facilitate dialogue with the community. However, recent analyses and studies show that, in today's evolving public space, they can be less effective at reaching diverse audiences, fostering thoughtful and productive discussions, and achieving meaningful engagement. With these challenges in mind, the County of Brant is focusing on other engagement methods, like those listed above, to better collect your feedback.

Communication Loops

A communication loop is a two-way process that connects the County with the community throughout the engagement process. It shows you how your input is used and keeps you informed every step of the way. Transparent communication loops help address concerns, celebrate successes, and demonstrate accountability.

Some communication loop examples include but are not limited to:

- Project news feeds provided on Engage Brant
- Emails to subscribers regarding project announcements, reminders, and updates
- Visual timelines or next steps
- "What We Heard" reports to summarize key themes, concerns, and/or ideas shared
- Communicate how public feedback influenced decisions
- Infographics to make complex information more digestible

Accessible Information

Accessible information ensures that everyone in the community can participate in engagement by accessing, understanding, and using the information shared by the County. When information is accessible, it breaks down barriers and invites more people to participate in meaningful ways. This includes residents with disabilities, those who speak different languages, and individuals with varying levels of literacy or access to technology.

We aim to provide Information in the following formats:

- Screen-reader-friendly text, images (alternative, or alt, text), and documents
- Closed caption videos to support those with hearing impairments
- Infographics and iconography
- Clear, concise, and straightforward language
- Colour contrast combinations to support those with visual impairments
- Live assistance through Customer Service for questions or requests for accommodations
- Multiple languages (where possible)

Guidelines for engagement

The County of Brant's Public guidelines for engagement help create a welcoming environment where all residents feel respected and comfortable sharing their thoughts and participating meaningfully. The County values diverse perspectives and strives to ensure that all voices are heard, regardless of background or opinion.

We encourage everyone involved in County of Brant community engagement opportunities to familiarize themselves with these guidelines and uphold them in their interactions and contributions.

1. **Respectful Communication:** All participants are expected to communicate in a respectful and civil manner. Personal attacks, derogatory or hateful language, insults, and disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated.
2. **Constructive Participation:** Contributions should be on topic and aim to be constructive and focused on finding solutions to or improving the matter under discussion. Criticism should be respectful and constructive, and aimed at improving the discussion and finding solutions.
3. **Diversity and Inclusivity:** Consultations encourage and welcome diverse perspectives. Engagement is based on building trust and relationships that involve all members of the community. Discriminatory language or behavior based on race, gender, religion, age, ability, or any other characteristics will not be tolerated.

4. **Reporting Violations:** Any participant who witnesses or experiences a violation of these guidelines should promptly report the incident to the project lead or consultation facilitator.

Code of conduct

To ensure a safe, respectful, and productive environment for everyone at all engagement activities, please ensure you read and follow this Code of Conduct.

1. **Respect each other:**
 - Listen actively and respectfully to others.
 - Allow everyone a chance to speak without interruption.
 - Avoid personal attacks, insults and rude comments, and offensive language.
2. **Stay on topic:**
 - Keep comments relevant to the discussion at hand.
 - Address the issue, not individuals.
3. **Value Diverse opinions:**
 - Appreciate different perspectives.
 - Recognize that respectful disagreement is natural and can lead to better solutions.
 - Strive to understand other viewpoints. This doesn't mean agreeing but respecting a different point of view.
4. **Follow the rules of the session:**
 - Adhere to this code of conduct and follow any specific instructions outlined at the beginning of the session.
 - Enjoy sharing with and learning from your neighbours.
5. **Support a safe environment:**
 - Avoid disruptive behavior.
 - Report any concerns about safety or misconduct to the facilitator.

The code of conduct will be clearly displayed at all engagement activities.

Creating a safe engagement space for all

When appropriate the meeting facilitator will review the Code of Conduct at the onset of the activity. To maintain a respectful environment, a participant may be asked to remove themselves from a community engagement activity if they have:

- Refused to follow the Code of Conduct.
- Displayed disrespectful behaviour or made disrespectful comments or attacks on other participants, including County of Brant Council or staff.

Appendix A

Engagement activity definitions

Pop-up event: a temporary, interactive activity or event held in an accessible and high-traffic area within the County to engage with residents in a casual, informal setting. These events are designed to meet people where they are—such as parks, markets, libraries, community events, or community centers—to gather feedback, share information, or foster dialogue on County projects, policies, or initiatives.

Public information meeting: a formal or semi-formal meeting organized by the County to provide residents and community partners with detailed information about specific projects, policies, plans, or initiatives. These meetings aim to educate attendees, address questions, and sometimes collect feedback or gauge public sentiment.

Public information meetings are structured and adhere to an agenda to inform and educate attendees about a particular topic, ensuring consistent messaging and comprehensive understanding. This information-focused approach encourages participation through avenues, such as one-on-one conversations, small group discussions or written feedback.

Statutory public meeting: a formal meeting held to satisfy the requirements of the Ontario Planning Act that is open to the public for the purpose of soliciting public feedback on a development application. The rules for these meetings often include specific requirements for project timelines, notices, and information sharing, and depend on the type of application submitted for Council approval.

Virtual meeting: a formal or informal online meeting conducted by the County that enables elected officials, staff, and members of the community to participate from different physical locations through their mobile or internet connected devices.

Open house: an informal community engagement event organized by the County to provide residents and community partners with an opportunity to learn about specific projects, initiatives, or policies in a flexible and accessible format. These events are designed to facilitate direct interaction with County staff and project representatives, fostering dialogue and encouraging feedback in a casual, come-and-go setting.

Workshop: an interactive, hands-on engagement session organized by the County to involve residents and community partners in collaboratively exploring ideas, identifying issues, or providing input on specific County projects, policies, or plans. Workshops are designed to encourage active participation, creative problem-solving, and meaningful dialogue in a structured format.

Roundtable: members of the public gather to participate in a group discussion which also facilitates networking and relationship building. Roundtables encourage cooperative discussion and promotes the free flow of ideas to ensure that everyone has an equal chance to contribute to the topic.

Focus group: a small, facilitated discussion organized by the County to gather in-depth insights and feedback from a selected group of participants on specific issues, projects, or policies. These groups are typically composed of individuals who represent a cross-section of the community or a primary demographic relevant to the topic under discussion.

Ad Hoc Committee: a formal group established by the County to provide advice, recommendations, or support on specific issues, policies, or projects. Ad Hoc Committees are typically composed of a mix of community members, elected officials, and County staff, and operate within a defined scope and timeline, to assist Council and staff in decision-making processes.

Appendix B

The code of conduct will be clearly displayed at all engagement activities.

Code of conduct

To ensure a safe, respectful, and productive environment for everyone at all engagement activities, please ensure you read and follow this Code of Conduct.

Respect each other

- Listen actively and respectfully to others.
- Allow everyone a chance to speak without interruption.
- Avoid personal attacks, insults and rude comments, and offensive language.

Stay on topic

- Keep comments relevant to the discussion at hand.
- Address the issue, not individuals.

Value diverse opinions

- Appreciate different perspectives.
- Recognize that respectful disagreement is natural and can lead to better solutions.
- Strive to understand other viewpoints. This doesn't mean agreeing but respecting a different point of view.

Follow the rules of the session

- Adhere to this code of conduct and follow any specific instructions outlined at the beginning of the session.
- Enjoy sharing with and learning from your neighbours.

Support a safe environment

- Avoid disruptive behavior.
- Report any concerns about safety or misconduct to the facilitator.

Thank you for your participation and cooperation.

