

10 BEST PRACTICES in Community Engagement around Water Projects

A Resource for Local Organizations and Local Governments for developing and implementing Community Engagement Plans for water projects.

Project Objective: To create a resource that outlines Best Practices in Community Engagement that may be used by Local organizations and local governments, working alongside impacted communities, to conduct water projects.

Environmental Justice Council Meeting Objective: The six named agencies in ORS 541.551, which include Water Resources Department (OWRD), Department of Environmental Quality, Business Oregon, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Oregon Health Authority, are looking for opportunities to actively involve Oregon communities in the development and refinement of the Best Practices in Community Engagement for Water Projects.

Agencies aim to share with Council members an overview of ongoing community collaborations in the creation of the draft set of Best Practices, and then engage in a group discussion around how to best continue to refine and share these practices with those who are working on water project and those who maybe impacted by water projects. Agencies will also be seeking feedback from the Council on if the current draft of the Best Practices in Community Engagement for water projects is ready for sharing widely within Oregon through a public comment period.

Project Summary: [ORS 541.551 \(Oregon House Bill 3293, 2021 Oregon Laws\)](#) requires that the six named agencies as providers of water project support develop and adopt into rule best practices for community engagement with disproportionately impacted communities. HB3293 does not direct providers of water project support to require local organizations and governments to develop community engagement plans for every supported water project. However, HB3293 does allow providers of water project support to provide additional water project support to local organizations and governments facilitate the development and implementation of community engagement plans. The Water Resources Department (OWRD) was directed to lead HB3293 to ensure that the coordination among providers of water project support occurs at least once every five years.

ORS 541.551 mandates that Providers of Water Project Support:

“MAY”:

- Make water project support (including funding) available to develop and implement community engagement plans related to a water project.
- Condition support for community engagement planning on the local organization or local government identifying disproportionately impacted communities and local demographics through the use of established systems.

“SHALL”:

- Require that community engagement plans supported by the provider utilize goals and approaches for increased participation of disproportionately impacted communities.
- Require that community engagement plans supported by the provider utilize best practices recognized by the provider.
- In coordination with the other providers adopt rules recognizing best practices for **use by the provider, local organizations, and local governments** to ensure that community engagement planning activities are carried out in the manner described in this section" of HB3293.
- Periodically coordinate with each other to ensure that best practices recognized by the providers are updated as necessary and are administered and used by the providers in a consistent manner. The coordination process shall occur at least once every five years.

Key Terms as Defined by ORS 541.551:

- **WATER PROJECTS** include actions related to watershed enhancement, in-stream flow protection or enhancement, water resource conservation or development, or water supply and wastewater treatment and disposal projects. Water Project Support is planning, technical assistance, or financial support provided by state agencies related to a water project.
- **PROVIDERS OF WATER PROJECT SUPPORT** include the following named agencies: the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD), the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), Oregon Business Development Department (OBDD), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB).
- **DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED COMMUNITIES** (for the purpose of water planning) may include rural communities; coastal communities; areas with above-average concentrations of historically disadvantaged households or residents with low levels of educational attainment; areas with high unemployment, high linguistic isolation, low levels of homeownership or high rent burden or sensitive populations; or other communities that face barriers to meaningful participation in public processes.
- **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN** is a plan to meaningfully engage and provide suitable access to decision-making processes for disproportionately impacted communities, underrepresented communities, tribal communities, and all persons regardless of race, color, national origin, or income in planning for water projects using identified best practices.

Timeline:

- **2021** - *Introduced into Oregon Legislature*
- **2022 – 2023** – *Project Paused*
- **Spring 2023** - *Initial Project Scoping*
- **Summer - Fall 2023** – *Document Drafting*
- **Winter 2023** – *Document Refinement*

- **Spring 2024** – *Community Engagement*
- **Early Summer 2024** – *Public Comment Period*
- **Late Summer 2024** – *Document Refinement*
- **Fall 2024** – *Beginning of Agency Rule Making*

Multiagency Vision for Outcomes: Through the collaborative development of Best Practices in Community Engagement, the named agencies aim to promote meaningful inclusion of disproportionately impacted communities in decisions related to the identification, planning, and implementation of water projects. If agencies make support available for the development and implementation of community engagement plans for water projects, those resources are dedicated to plans that follow Best Practices for Community Engagement.