



Closing the loop - Reporting, summarizing, and responding to input

Reporting back to the public and closing the loop on the input received and the decision-makers response to the input is an essential element to bringing closure to your outreach process.

It is good practice to report back to those who participated in your process, as soon as possible on the input received. You can do this through a publically available report that summarizes the range and nature of the views shared. Including verbatim comments can lead to more trust and transparency in your process but ensure that you are protecting the privacy of individuals and remove any personally identifying information before posting. It's also good practice to remove offensive language, indicating where you have done so.

While it may be tempting to highlight only the positive remarks received about your project, it is critically important to acknowledge all views (positive and negative) that were raised. Best practice includes providing a response to how ideas were or were not integrated into your final proposal and why.

We recognize that it can be infeasible to reconcile all issues of public interest and outreach does not equate to public appeasement. Outreach is undertaken to enable decision makers to make better decisions with an understanding of issues, ideas and concerns from the public. This inevitably results in some interests and ideas being favored over others, where people perceive winners and losers. Thus some participants will be unhappy with your process. But the goal of outreach is not to make everyone happy, it's to provide an opportunity for everyone to be heard and share comments. This is why reporting and closing the loop in a transparent and open way is a critical component of your outreach process.

When drafting your report be sure to “tell your story” this can include:

- What informed your outreach process?
- What were your objectives?
- How will input (if collected) be used to inform decisions?
- What are the project milestones, next steps, and how will you close the loop with stakeholders?

How to identify themes and create your report from your comments received:¹

- All comments or feedback received during your required outreach should be reviewed by your team and used to prepare a summary.
- Avoid including personal information about the people who shared comments. Do not use names (first or last), gender pronouns (he/she/him/her), or location specific information (e.g., “next-door neighbor”) that would give away the identity of any individual.
- Summarizing dozens of comments, questions, and other feedback from different people using multiple outreach methods at different points in time can be difficult, and will



require some generalization. However, themes of the community's priorities for your project will likely emerge.

- You do not need to include individual ideas in the summary, but you should try to wrap them up into themes as much as possible. For example, a comment suggesting that the building install solar panels on the roof could be bundled up into a general priority of energy performance/environmental sustainability. If you have a few comments that truly don't fit on their own, feel free to list them under "miscellaneous" or "other".
- If one person has a comment that is distinct from others it is fine to list it on its own, particularly if you get the sense that other people in the neighborhood may feel the same way. As an example, a single comment may suggest putting in benches because a lot of elderly residents from an apartment building nearby tend to walk up and down the street near your site.
- Try to capture the sentiments that appeared multiple times or across multiple outreach methods. Be as inclusive as possible (within reason).
- When necessary or when a comment is unclear, use your best judgment.
- Pay attention to whether the feedback is sharing a concern, offering a suggestion, or asking a question. Use phrases like "expressed concern," "supported the idea of," and "questioned whether".
- Do your best to represent the feedback accurately and fairly even if you don't agree.
- When listing comment themes, place the most common themes near the top and the least common themes near the bottom.
- When summarizing a theme it can be helpful to include sample comments to help illustrate.
- If you have statistics from a survey or other numeric ways to represent feedback, consider including it; particularly if it addresses a common theme.
- When it may not be possible, appropriate, or necessary to provide exact numbers for all comments, consider using graded quantifiers like "most", "several," "some," "a few", where appropriate.

If you are in a position where decisions have been made, use your report as an opportunity to close the loop and report back on "what you did", this includes responding to each theme with how issues were addressed or a statement on why they couldn't be considered.

If you have never drafted a report before, we have created this [reporting template](#) for you to consider using.

When submitting your application, ensure you include an overview of your outreach program, by completing and including [this summary](#) with your submission.

¹ List adapted from: <https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/outreach-and-engagement/design-review-for-early-outreach>