

Lake County Community Engagement Plan

This Community Engagement Plan describes how the General Plan and Local Area Plans Update process will reach the entire Lake County community, with a focus on hearing from community members that are hard to reach. This engagement plan includes an overview of the engagement objectives, strategies to reach target audiences, an outline of the engagement activities and tools to communicate with community members, and an engagement schedule.

Throughout this plan, there are references to “the project team,” which consists of County staff and the consultant team. At various points in the process, the project team may also include AmeriCorps members who are assisting County staff with outreach. The County will also use other resources available as appropriate to help spread the word about opportunities to engage, such as public relations staff and consultants.

1. ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Broadly, the goal of this engagement plan is to solicit input about the future of Lake County from a wide range of community members, reflecting the range of opinions within the community and the county’s demographics.

Specifically, there are three desired outcomes for the engagement process:

- 1) To ensure Lake County residents are aware that the General Plan and Area Plans are being updated, what the General Plan and Area Plans are, and why it is important to all community stakeholders.
- 2) To have robust and diverse community participation throughout the process that is representative of the full range of demographics, perspectives, and experiences in the Lake County community. This includes an explicit focus on historically displaced, marginalized, and underrepresented communities in the process, including tribal communities, people of color, and low-income communities for whom barriers such as language and cultural differences, lack of access to technology, and fear of government may hinder involvement.
- 3) To build a level of public trust in the update process and support for the General Plan and Area Plans that will lead to successful implementation after adoption.

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2. TARGET AUDIENCES AND STRATEGIES

A major goal of the General Plan and Area Plans Update is to ensure that all segments of the community can participate in the engagement process. We also know that, historically, certain groups have been underrepresented in planning-related decision-making and disproportionately harmed by unjust practices. Throughout the General Plan and Area Plans Update, we will make intentional efforts to reach and include these traditionally underrepresented groups including communities for whom language and cultural differences may preclude or discourage involvement. From preliminary demographic research, the target audiences for the Lake County General Plan and Area Plans update include:

- Low-Income Households
- Native American Tribes
- Non-English Speakers
- Older Residents
- Younger Residents
- Renters

Low-Income Households

Within Lake County, approximately 17 percent of people are below the federal poverty level (FPL).¹ Poverty is defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to determine eligibility for certain programs and benefits like Medicaid, and it is based on a percentage of nationwide median income. Incomes and costs of living are higher in California compared to other states, so using the Federal Poverty Line is a relatively conservative estimate of the percentage of people or households in any California community who may be struggling financially. A census tract in the southern part of the county in Clearlake has the highest percentage of residents living below the poverty line at 30 percent, followed by the unincorporated Lower Lake area at 28 percent.

Housing cost burden is defined as the percentage of household income spent on housing costs (rent or mortgage), with 30 percent or more considered ‘housing cost-burdened’ and 50 percent or more considered ‘severely housing cost-burdened.’ Within Lake County, the Shoreline and Lower Lake Communities have the highest shares of housing cost-burdened households.² Within these two areas, between 19 and 26 percent of households are housing-burdened with incomes below the Federal Poverty Line (FPL).³

¹ United States Census Bureau, 2022, Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1701?g=050XX00US06033&moe=false>.

² California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Indicator Maps, <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ed5953d89038431dbf4f22ab9abfe40d/page/Indicators/?views=Housing-Burden>.

³ California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Indicator Maps, <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ed5953d89038431dbf4f22ab9abfe40d/page/Indicators/?views=Housing-Burden>.

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Low-income households may overlap with other target demographics discussed in this section, including non-English speaking households and renters, and may face compounding challenges, including housing instability, household overcrowding, long commutes, multiple jobs or shift work, few childcare options, and a mistrust of or lack of faith in government to be responsive to their needs. As a result, engagement approaches to low-income communities will need to emphasize flexibility and transparency, including by providing multiple ways to participate that can accommodate different schedules and geographic locations, working with local partners to provide child care when possible, and being clear about how and when community input will be used in the process.

Native American Tribes

As of July 2023, approximately 5 percent of Lake County residents identify as American Indian or Alaska Native alone according to the US Census. This is a significantly larger portion compared to 1.3 percent for the entire US and 1.5 percent for California. Within Lake County there are multiple Pomo Tribes including:⁴

- Big Valley Band of Pomo Indians
- Elem Indian Colony of Pomo Indians of the Sulphur Bank Rancheria
- Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake
- Koi Nation of Northern California
- Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Robinson Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California
- Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians of California
- Mishewal Wappo

The project team will maintain mutually supportive working relationships with Lake County tribal governments and organizations and will engage tribes throughout the entire General Plan and Local Area Plans Update process to guide policy development and drive decision-making, building on relationships that County staff have been cultivating in recent years.

Non-English Speakers

Within Lake County, US Census data indicates that 2.4 percent of Lake County residents speak Spanish at home and 25 to 30 percent of residents identify as Latino or Hispanic.⁵ This data points to the importance of connecting with the community at Hispanic and Latino cultural events and of developing mutually supportive relationships with Hispanic and Latino cultural organizations and affinity groups, such as the annual Cinco de Mayo festival in Lakeport hosted by Lake County Tribal Health and Latinos United of Lake County. This also suggests that engagement materials should also be available in Spanish where possible, and otherwise sensitive to the needs and experiences of Hispanic and Latino residents in the county. Project staff will ensure that all printed versions of engagement materials will be in English and Spanish.

⁴ Lake County, History of Lake County Pomo Indians, <https://www.lakecountyca.gov/1524/History-of-Lake-County-Pomo-Indians>.

⁵ US Census Bureau, 2022: ACS1: 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Languages Spoken at Home, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1601?g=050XX00US06033&moe=false>

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Project staff will distribute multi-lingual printed materials (e.g., fliers and surveys) to key locations, like the Community Development Department, other County offices, and libraries, for the public to read and take.

Census tracts with the highest concentration of residents identifying as Hispanic or Latino are in eastern Clearlake (47 percent) and Kelseyville (43 percent), with 36 percent and 35 percent of households in each census tract respectively speaking Spanish at home, but with only 7 percent and 3 percent of households respectively identifying as speaking limited English.

Older Residents

Within Lake County, 25.3 percent of Lake County residents are 65 years or older.⁶ This is higher than the average share in California (15.8 percent) and in the United States (17.3 percent). Within Lake County, 14.2 percent of residents are 65 to 74 years old, 8.6 percent of residents are 75 to 84 years old, and 2.5 percent of residents are 85 years and over. The areas that have the highest concentration of older residents are in the Lower Lake, Hidden Valley Lake, Clearlake Oaks, and Spring Valley regions.

Older residents face a variety of barriers such as limited mobility and limited access to technology. The project team will coordinate with County service departments and community-based organizations providing services to elders to learn about how best to gather input from older community members in person and at familiar and convenient locations to the extent possible. In addition, the project team will print paper copies of the online survey described in Section 3 to distribute to key locations that serve seniors and other households without internet, such as at community centers that offer programming for seniors or through meals-on-wheels programs.

Younger Residents

Within Lake County, 32.9 percent of residents are 15 to 44 years old.⁷ Engaging with younger residents is an important aspect of community engagement; because the General Plan and Local Area Plans are long-range plans, they will have a strong influence on younger residents as they make important decisions about school, career, and family.

When engaging with younger participants, there may be a variety of barriers. Student-age residents, many of whom are not yet of voting age, are less likely to have experience engaging with government and may be focused on academic, athletic, and social priorities. Young single adults may be juggling multiple jobs and commutes. Parents of young children face obvious challenges to balance work, childcare, and family responsibilities. The methods below of spreading the word in person and offering online engagement are specifically intended to engage these residents on their own terms and on a flexible schedule. In addition, working with a local partner to provide childcare at engagement activities can help encourage attendance from young families.

⁶ US Census Bureau, 2022: ACS Demographic Housing Estimates, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP1Y2022.DP05?g=050XX00US06033>.

⁷ US Census Bureau, 2022: ACS Demographic Housing Estimates, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP1Y2022.DP05?g=050XX00US06033>.

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Renters

Renters make up 26.2 percent of Lake County households.⁸ Although this is lower than the average share of renters in California (44.2 percent) and in the United States (34.8 percent), renters still make up a quarter of all Lake County residents and are more likely to experience housing instability than homeowners. General Plan and Local Area Plan engagement activities will be tailored to the extent possible to seek input from renters on the future of the county.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES AND MARKETING TOOLS

The project team will use both conventional and non-conventional engagement techniques to include diverse perspectives in the process to develop the updated Lake County General Plan and Local Area Plans. This section details the five separate but linked engagement methods.

All engagement materials will be visually compelling and accessible with minimal use of jargon. Following each meeting, the project team will prepare a description of the event and document the feedback that was given, explaining how it will be incorporated into the process.

General Plan Advisory Committee

Engagement will begin with the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC). GPAC members will represent a broad range of stakeholders in Lake County, like tribes; community advocacy, service, and other organizations; public agencies; and utility providers. One of the GPAC's main functions will be to serve as ambassadors to the community, letting community members know about the project and opportunities to participate. There will be five GPAC meetings at key points in the process. The meetings will focus on the following:

- Meeting 1—Review this Community Engagement Plan, introduce the GPAC to the project, and review roles and responsibilities. In this meeting, the project team will also work to empower and encourage GPAC members to help promote participation throughout the process.
- Meeting 2—Review the Draft General Plan Overview Document and provide initial input on countywide policy issues.
- Meeting 3—Review the Draft Land Use Maps and provide input on key land use issues.
- Meeting 4—Review the Draft General Plan.
- Meeting 5—Review the Draft Local Area Plans.

⁸ American Community Survey, DPO4 Selected Housing Characteristics, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP1Y2022.DP04?g=050XX00US06033>.

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Local Area Plan Community Meetings

Engagement efforts will include three rounds of community meetings for each Local Area Plan over the course of the Local Area Plans Update process. During each round, the County will hold one meeting in each of the eight Local Area Plan planning areas. These meetings may be held as part of a meeting hosted by the established advisory body for each planning area.

For each round of Local Area Plan community meetings, the project team will prepare a flyer and workshop materials in English and Spanish and will bring a Spanish speaking staff member to facilitate a small group discussion in Spanish.

The three rounds of Local Area Plan community meetings will include:

- Round 1: Introduce the project to the community, review background information, and identify issues.
- Round 2: Review and make decisions about policy and land use alternatives and identify Special Study Areas for each Local Area Plan.
- Round 3: Review the Draft Local Area Plans.

Stakeholder Focus Groups

Three stakeholder focus group meetings will be held virtually to discuss specific topics of concern for the General Plan and Local Area Plans Update. These topics could include environmental justice, economic development, and tourism, although decisions about the topics should be informed by initial community conversations. The project team will collaborate to identify the composition of these focus groups, which could include representatives from community-based organizations, tribes, chambers of commerce, and major retreat centers operating in the county. These meetings should generally be held early so that the information gathered can shape the direction of the planning process, but after some initial community engagement has occurred to inform decisions about topics and stakeholders.

Project Website and Communications

A dedicated website is being developed for the General Plan and Local Area Plans Update, which will include a short introduction to the project, upcoming events calendar, and project updates as milestones are reached, including publishing PDF versions of important documents and meeting materials when available. The website will also offer a quick and easy way to sign up for a mailing list and submit comments or questions.

The website will include an online survey in English and Spanish, published and circulated early in the Local Area Plans Update process to ask community members questions about their goals, issues, and priorities for improvements in the county. This survey will allow community members who may not have the time or interest to attend meetings to be heard. The survey will request that survey participants identify their community so that the project team can disaggregate the data among the Local Area Plans. As noted in Section 2, the project team will print and distribute paper copies of the online survey to target audiences who lack internet. Project staff may also incentivize survey responses by entering respondents in a raffle to win gift cards or by distributing other incentives to survey respondents.

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In addition to the digital and print survey, the project team will also perform additional in-person community engagement, which may include follow-up paper surveys, community polling at pop-up events, or other activities to survey the broader community on the topics to be discussed in the Local Area Plan community meetings.

Marketing

To help spread the word about the project and upcoming events, the Project Team will use a variety of media, including:

- Press releases/newspaper ads
- Business card with QR code to the project website
- Project email list and periodic email updates
- Posts to the County’s existing social media platforms
- Announcements on the KPFZ 88.1 Lake County Community Radio station, which reaches a broad audience across Lake County, including many senior residents and residents without internet access.

In all marketing and project materials, the project team will use a consistent format/aesthetic approach to provide a sense of cohesion and easy recognition of the project.

The project team will also coordinate to spread the word in person using County staff, AmeriCorps team members, and local partners at gatherings and events held throughout the county (e.g., Neighborfests). The project team will ensure that the content, messaging, and formatting of any engagement materials for these informal events are consistent with other project engagement materials.

4. ENGAGEMENT SCHEDULE

The anticipated schedule for community engagement will occur between winter 2023/2024 and summer 2025, as detailed below. After summer 2025, the project will be focused on the preparation of the Environmental Impact Report prior to adoption hearings in summer/fall 2026.

- **Winter 2023/2024**
 - Website development
 - GPAC formation
 - Community survey preparation
- **Spring 2024**
 - Conduct survey and summarize results

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- GPAC Meeting 1 (introduce GPAC to the project; review roles & responsibilities; review & GPAC feedback on Community Engagement Plan; empower and encourage GPAC members to help promote participation throughout the process)
- Local Area Plan Meetings Round 1 (introduce the project to the community, review background information, and identify issues)
- **Summer 2024**
 - GPAC Meeting 2 (review the Draft General Plan Overview Document and provide input on initial set of key policy issues)
- **Fall 2024**
 - Local Area Plan Meetings Round 2 (review and make decisions about policy and land use alternatives and identify Special Study Areas for each Local Area Plan)
 - GPAC Meeting 3 (review the Draft Land Use Maps and provide input on key land use policy issues)
- **Winter 2024/2025**
 - GPAC Meeting 4 (review the Draft Countywide General Plan)
- **Spring 2025**
 - Local Area Plan Meetings Round 3 (review the Draft Local Area Plans)
- **Summer 2025**
 - GPAC Meeting 5 (review the Draft Local Area Plans)