



# North Carolina Department of Administration

## Public Access and Participation Plan

### Introduction

*The NC Department of Administration recognizes that all citizens of North Carolina have the right to access government services, to meaningfully contribute to government decisions, and to share equitably in the benefits of a prosperous North Carolina. We understand our mission is to enhance the lives of North Carolinians by providing foundational support to state government through asset management, advocacy, and operations.*

*However, we also acknowledge that there is more that we can do to reach communities across the state who may be unaware of and underserved by our programs. This includes communities of color, Indigenous communities, and low-and moderate-income communities. Consequently, it is necessary for these communities to be more meaningfully engaged as partners and stakeholders in government decision-making.*

*At the same time, building a more inclusive society affects and requires the participation of all North Carolinians. We have developed this initial “Public Access and Participation Plan” to better understand where gaps exist, and to encourage greater participation across the state in all areas of our programs and operations.*

*Improved outreach and public engagement will be critical for the Department of Administration to be successful in meeting our mission. Our priority is to serve all of the citizens of our state. To this end, our initial Public Access and Participation Plan includes the commitment to:*

- *Increase agency staff awareness and sensitivity to the value of incorporating the perspectives of underserved populations — especially from communities that have been overlooked — in agency activities and decision-making, through internal training;*
- *Develop staff facilitation capacity to improve meaningful public participation in agency public meetings;*
- *Develop staff capacity to represent the agency to the public, and to be responsive to citizens who contact our agency seeking help;*

- *Revisit and redesign the ways that the public accesses the agency, to increase transparency and better enable meaningful participation; and*
- *Adopt means of measuring success in public access and participation and incorporating lessons learned through public engagement, to ensure continuous improvement in these efforts.*

## Part 1: Public Meetings

Public meetings are central to the public's access to agency decision-makers, and to public understanding of agency plans and actions. They are an opportunity for agencies to engage communities whose opinions, for many reasons, have been overlooked. An agency relies on the exchange of information to provide a comprehensive view of agency proposals and to get a sense of the community's views on related challenges and benefits of agency plans or actions.

To improve public engagement and access, the Department of Administration shall:

- Review existing practices governing the conduct of agency public meetings, and adopt new practices where necessary to promote greater access and meaningful public engagement;
- Engage in community outreach to inform this work;
- Consult with sister agencies that may have done this already; and
- Adopt the goal of ongoing improvement of public access and public participation. (See Part 5: Ongoing Improvement of Public Access and Participation)

In its review of existing practices governing the conduct of public meetings, the agency shall take the following actions to remediate barriers to participation:

**Timing:** Adopting timing of informal public meetings at different hours of the day and days of the week to increase the likelihood of getting more representative participation.

**Notice:** Adopting discretionary notice practices that exceed statutory or regulatory minimum requirements for public input opportunities.

**Publicity:** Publicizing liberally using various media to promote meeting attendance.

**Outreach Intermediaries:** Utilizing indirect methods of outreach to publicize proposed state actions, including coordinating with intermediary organizations that possess their own networks.

Supporting the ability of intermediaries to assist with reducing barriers associated with the need for childcare and transportation.

**Venues:** In addition to providing virtual meeting locations, adopting a variety of locations in neighborhoods whose populations are predominantly Black, Indigenous, Latino or people of color, and who have an average income below the state's average, and in rural locations across the state.

Ensuring that venues are physically accessible and provide basic amenities.

**Languages:** Providing translation in American Sign Language and the top two spoken languages of a community, as determined by the most recent census.

**Additional Incentives:** Considering motivating attendance by providing guest speakers or other incentives.

**Non-Technical Information:** Providing relevant information and data to the public that is accessible to a non-technical audience.

**Varied Means of Input:** Providing multiple means of public input, augmenting in-person and virtual meetings, to include telephone, email, online comment portals, surveys, polls, and other means.

Division leaders are authorized to make meeting facilitation training available to staff. (See Part 3: Staff Training)

## Part 2: Plan Elements for Website Improvement

Just as the public will benefit from improvements to the ways that the Department of Administration conducts public meetings, website visitors will be able to engage more fully if the Department of Administration improves access to its digital presence and resources. Making sure the Department of Administration website is designed with a focus on user experience will increase traffic and engagement and improve the public's understanding of agency goals and activities.

The Department of Administration will:

- Review all website language describing agency policies, programs and processes, and, where necessary, update content with clear, plain-language statements;
- Engage in community outreach to inform this work;
- Consult with sister agencies that have taken steps to improve access to their websites; and
- Consider securing the assistance of website specialists.

In its review, the agency shall address the following barriers:

**Non-Technical Information:** Conveying information that is clear and accessible. Even technical information should be set out in a non-technical manner.

**Languages:** Publishing website content in the two most common languages spoken in the state as determined by the most recent census.

**Varied Means of Input:** Making available multiple methods for the public to provide input through the website and otherwise. This could include telephone, email, general comment portals and other means.

The Department of Administration will appoint staff to serve as “environmental justice liaisons” for the agency. These staff can be subject matter experts. Alternatively, they can be intermediaries between agency subject matter experts and the public. The agency will post their names, email addresses and telephone numbers on the website so the public has ready access to their help.

## Part 3: Staff Training

To build staff appreciation of the barriers faced by communities whose residents are Black, Indigenous, Latino or people of color, and to be better prepared to make agency processes more open to these communities, Department of Administration staff will participate in training starting in the fall of 2022.

There will be two types of training. First, to create greater sensitivity to the challenges that many communities face, staff will hear from community members regarding the barriers they face in accessing government services and engaging with state agencies. Trainings will also explore principles that will help illustrate why it is critically important for the agency to endeavor to be more inclusive. Reviewing and understanding the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing or the International Association of Public Participation's Core Values for Public Participation provide a useful starting point for staff training.

Meeting facilitation is a second important element of agency training that certain staff will undertake this year. While many agencies may have high-profile cases that are contentious and require the engagement of mediation and dispute resolution professionals, most DOA meetings do not. Well-trained staff can organize and conduct most informal DOA meetings. Basic facilitation skills ensures that public meetings run smoothly, and that DOA and the public get the most out of them. DOA will identify specific staff who can first learn basic public facilitation skills, and then use their understanding to teach their colleagues.

## Part 4: Ongoing Improvement of Public Access and Participation

The Department of Administration's adoption of a Public Access and Participation Plan is an important step in our commitment to developing a more accessible and responsive state government. However, this is a first step, and there needs to be a process that will ensure continued improvement of the plan. Responsible oversight will ensure the plan not only is producing the results that the agency is seeking, but it is able to demonstrate these results.

As with any administrative program, a formal plan such as this will be a complex undertaking. The initial plan will undoubtedly benefit from ongoing review and the adoption of improvements to its initial design and implementation process. Planning for periodic comprehensive review will help ensure this.

To this end, the Department of Administration will undertake a program review within two years of this plan's initial implementation, and within every two years after that, to ensure that it is promoting public access and participation.

Review should be organized and facilitated in a manner that encourages representation from diverse stakeholders, ensuring equitable opportunities for participation, without requiring formal intervention or representation by an attorney.

Basic components of program review will include, at a minimum, consideration of:

1. Plan impacts: a demonstration that DOA is providing opportunities for meaningful public participation.
2. Plan success: whether the plan has been successful in meeting its goals of being more inclusive and, specifically, whether DOA actions are reflecting this engagement by incorporating viewpoints of historically disenfranchised communities in North Carolina.
3. Future improvements, relevant circumstances, and issues that DOA and the public determine should inform the specific focus that the review would take and be incorporated into program review.

# Appendix: Agency Mission Statement and Equity Statement

## Agency Description

Established in 1957, the Department of Administration acts as the business manager for North Carolina state government, advocates for historically marginalized communities and provides facility services for state-owned buildings and grounds. The department oversees Government Operations such as building construction, purchasing, and contracting for goods and services, managing state vehicles, acquiring, and disposing of real property, maintaining state property and operating auxiliary services such as courier mail delivery and the sale of state and federal surplus property. The department's advocacy programs provide advocacy, assistance, and services to diverse segments of the state's population that have been traditionally underserved.

## Mission

Our mission is to enhance the lives of North Carolinians by providing foundational support to state government through asset management, advocacy, and operations.

## Vision

Provide high quality customer service effectively, efficiently, and economically for the people, agencies, and communities of our state.

## Our Values

1. **Belonging:** Intentionally promoting an equitable and inclusive workplace to reflect the communities we serve, and our diverse backgrounds and experiences are valued and recognized as strengths.
2. **Respect:** Treating others with consideration and civility. We value each other as teammates and human beings.
3. **Transparency:** Building a culture of trust through open and honest communication.
4. **Excellence:** Striving for the best for each other and our customers.
5. **Wellness:** Have joy and balance at work through spiritual, emotional, physical, and social well-being.

6. **Integrity:** We do the right things for the right reasons.
7. **Accountability:** We hold ourselves and each other responsible for all that we do.
8. **Innovation & Creativity:** Embracing challenges and change, while cultivating new ideas and implementing improvements throughout our organization.

## Equity Statement

The Department of Administration is dedicated to helping the people of North Carolina by providing foundational support to state government through asset management, advocacy, and operations. We are committed to providing high-quality customer service effectively, efficiently, and economically for our state’s people, agencies, and communities. We are also committed to ensuring that our service is equitable to the many diverse communities within North Carolina.

The Department of Administration is dedicated to the department’s core values of belonging, transparency, respect, integrity, and accountability. Deep-rooted structural injustice contributes to an inability to serve effectively. The Department of Administration will seek to engage actively with North Carolina’s diverse residents and businesses. By becoming a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization, we will be better equipped to expand our reach and deliver services across our state more effectively. We recognize that our state employees, boards, and commissions must reflect the many backgrounds and identities of North Carolinians.

Advancing equity is not a one-year or even one decade project– it is a lifelong commitment that will require continual partnership with those historically excluded from their government. We are committed to working to amend the historical, economic, and social harm existing within our state.