Memo: Community Engagement Best Practices
To: City of Cambridge and the Cycling Safety Ordinance Advisory Group
September 2023

Memo objective:
This memo aims to document and share the Cycling Safety Ordinance Advisory Group's advice on community engagement and outreach best practices, based on feedback heard during meetings and in the Consensus Building Institute's initial assessment interviews with members. This memo is a living document, and may be edited by the Advisory Group in the future. *(Last edit: September 29, 2023 after CSO Advisory Group Meeting #6)*

Who implements the Cycling Safety Ordinance?
The three City departments most involved in the design, community engagement, installation, and construction of Cycling Safey Ordinance projects are the Community Development Department, Public Works Department, and Traffic, Parking + Transportation Department.

Best Practices for Community Engagement on Future Projects Related to the CSO:

- **Engage early and consistently.** Early engagement provides community members with time to learn and share feedback about a project. Community members are busy, so early engagement increases their ability to be involved in a project. Consistent engagement keeps community members informed as a project evolves, allowing them to see how their feedback is incorporated and track a project's progress. Conducting outreach multiple times and through multiple avenues reaches a broader audience as community members receive information from different sources and are available at different times.

- **Broaden the catchment area of engagement to capture more adjacent streets and reach potentially interested residents and businesses.** Engagement efforts should target a broad catchment area of residents and people who use the road via any mode. Neighboring streets may experience changes related to project construction/installation, parking availability, bike infrastructure, and/or new traffic flows, and should be engaged.

- **Engage through trusted and well-networked ambassadors.** Engage community members by sharing information through known ambassadors, because many people are more open to information from known and trusted entities. Trusted ambassadors will vary by population and neighborhood, and research is necessary to identify ambassadors relevant to each CSO project. Examples of ambassadors include neighborhood block captains, support service organizations, churches, local schools, small business owners, business organizations, and local advocacy organizations.

- **Use plain language, accessible terminology, and locally spoken languages.** Information about CSO projects should be easy to understand by community members without technical backgrounds. Avoid technical terms where possible and define if used.

Language used should be clear, concise, and easy to follow. Outreach materials should be translated into languages commonly spoken in the neighborhood.

- **Pair virtual engagement with in-person engagement – and provide other asynchronous options to weigh in.** Virtual engagement – both meetings and available information – increases accessibility for many community members. Providing asynchronous ways for community members to learn more and provide feedback allow community members with limited time to attend meetings. This could be achieved through QR codes on flyers that link to mini-surveys or more robust online surveys. Some community members do not have or are not savvy using computers or the internet, and require in-person meetings and information sharing.

- **Expand practices to notify community members about CSO projects.** Increase signage (both the amount and the geographic range covered), use email alerts, send postcards, publicize the project website, and use other creative means. Ensure signage is clear and accessible. The City should partner with their Community Engagement Teams and Cambridge Language Access and Justice team to improve outreach.

- **Make the timing and sequencing of the CSO plan as clear as possible.** It is helpful for community members to understand the timeline of individual projects (i.e., from design to implementation), the CSO network (i.e., the phasing of projects on various streets, and when the network will be completed), and when to engage. The City should share the next steps for individual projects and the broader CSO network in each engagement activity.

- **Share the rationale behind decision-making.** Community members should be able to understand how and why the City made certain decisions about CSO projects. This is true for high-level decisions about the CSO (such as where the CSO requirements came from), as well as more granular outcomes (such as whether parking spaces can be maintained or not, or why a bus stop is moved). The City should have clear and accessible explanations for what considerations factor into these decisions (such as City policies and ordinances, long-term planning goals, street widths, etc.). Understanding the rationale allows community members to see the intention and carefulness of decisions and understand the outcome, even if it is not their desired one.

- **Be transparent about where feedback can influence decision-making.** The City should be transparent about where community feedback can influence the decision-making process and where it cannot.

- **Develop metrics to gauge successful outreach.** Develop metrics for successful outreach that can be monitored. Understanding how the outreach is going will help the City and the CSO Advisory Group improve future engagement efforts.

- **Explain the big picture goals.** It is helpful for community members to understand the aims of the CSO and how individual projects are incremental steps to the long-term Bike Network Vision and other City goals. Ultimately, the Bike Network Vision brings together separated lanes, low-volume, low-speed streets, and off-street paths. The City should share information that includes explicit connections to the City's long-term goals, such as increased safety, sustainability, reduced emissions, better air quality, net zero ("zero carbon") transportation options, better quality of life, increased mode choice, Vision Zero, etc.