



Engagementworks

Community Engagement Tool Box

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How to use this document

Engagement is an essential part of the way effective organisations do business. Business strategy documents often outline a commitment to meaningful engagement with stakeholders and communities in the planning and delivery of its community outcomes.

This document is intended to support and build an organisation's engagement policy and will assist employees undertaking engagement across all phases of business, both internally and externally.

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Introduction to the Toolbox

Engagement is a process that can involve one or any combination of the OECD's **three levels of engagement**:

Information	Consultation	Active Participation
<p>Information can be used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – advise individuals and communities about your decisions, service disruptions, and upcoming consultation events – seek community participation in transport system and corridor planning – advise of emergency situations – advise legal and legislative requirements – provide facts about your services and activities in the community. <p>Communities can also provide information to you.</p>	<p>Consultation can be used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – obtain wider community feedback in all aspects of your organisation, including locations of structures and services, community amenity, safety, local environs – seek comment from communities on policies, planning, projects, services and operations – discuss the impact of existing policies, programs and projects – obtain suggestions to minimise impacts on a local community during delivery – infrastructure implementation – seek solutions to community issues. <p>Consultation alerts you to community issues, such as the impact of project timing on small businesses, level of support for infrastructure scale and location, design sustainability of amenities.</p>	<p>Active participation can involve information and consultation, but can also actively involve people in the decision process. It can be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – as part of community visioning in plans and future systems – planning – to work with affected property owners on issues affecting location of structures and amenities – to collaborate with tangata whenua on cultural heritage issues affecting proposed amenity locations and infrastructure projects – to negotiate with stakeholders on conservation interests and environmental issues and to partner with local authorities on integration of amenity and land-use planning, catchment issues and social issues. <p>However, some decisions cannot be changed (political decisions, legal and legislative conditions or the location and extent of a project), so it is important to be clear on what is and what is not negotiable and why. Community members should also understand their influence on decisions is not unlimited and that government has the final decision-making responsibility.</p>

This toolbox is designed to help with your engagement activities and has been compiled using resources given in the section *Where to find out more about the tools* on page 33.

The tools

There is no recipe for engagement. Knowing how and when to engage comes through training and experience. Choosing the right tool or mix of tools depends on a number of things, including:

- the issue
- legislative and regulatory requirements
- the objectives of the exercise
- political sensitivities
- whether a decision has already been made or not
- the negotiables and non-negotiables (choices and options available)
- available resources.

For many tools, it is how they are used that determines their suitability for information, consultation or active participation. For example, a workshop can have some of, or all three components, depending on your engagement objectives and the processes within the tool (see below).

Engagement level	Engagement objective	Typical process/agenda item for workshop
Information	Yes	1. Welcome and project overview – Project Director
		2. Background, needs, benefits and decision-making process – Project Officer
		3. Questions for clarification – Participants
Consultation	Yes	4. Group activity to identify and discuss issues relevant to project
		5. Small-group presentations to Project Director
Active Participation	Yes	6. Whole-group activity to prioritise the issues
		7. Small-group activity to develop possible outcomes or suggestions
		8. Presentation to whole group
		9. Whole group priorities and weights possible outcomes
		10. Concluding remarks – Project Director

The example demonstrates that the information workshop concludes after agenda item 3 as explained in the table above.

Concluding remarks would acknowledge participants' interest in the project, reinforce the key information points, and perhaps invite those present to make later submissions or participate in further engagement opportunities.

Clearly this workshop's objectives are focused on providing information, a one-way process of communication. In this example it may have been important to brief many people simultaneously and accurately.

If this workshop continues and includes agenda items 4 and 5, then this provides for feedback from participants and is clearly a two-way process of information exchange, with the engagement objectives for this workshop including both information and consultation.

The concluding remarks would summarise the value of receiving feedback from participants, gaining a better understanding of their issues, which you will consider later when shaping the outcomes.

If this workshop continues and includes agenda items 6–9, this would then provide an opportunity for active participation through more direct collaboration and higher influence over outcomes, particularly if agreement were reached. The concluding remarks would then focus on the value of joint problem solving, commitment or collaborative outcomes.

Therefore the tool itself did not deliver information, consultation or active participation, but rather the processes within the workshop.

Some of the following tools are specifically designed around the three components (information, consultation, active participation), although with some modification to the agenda/process the tools may be used with varying degree of influence over the outcome – that is, consultation and/or active participation.

For effective engagement, consider using a combination of techniques to obtain an accurate picture of stakeholder values, needs and expectations.

The tool guide

The tools are not exhaustive but do include common methods of engagement that you may be currently using and other not so common methods that could be considered for future use. The tools can be used in stages of project management and across all phases of your organisation.

11 tips for using the tools successfully

1. **Take engagement seriously** – producing a lot of glossy brochures is not enough to strengthen relationships between you and your communities. Being successful is about planning information, consultation and active participation, setting goals, working together and evaluating whether the engagement achieved its goals.
2. **Start from the public's perspective** – consider the community and individual's perspective first and treat them with respect. People are often reluctant to be involved and might mistrust you and your motives. Expectations are created when government gets people involved. By putting yourself in the other's shoes you will realise that people's time is a scarce resource and that it takes hard work to get people engaged. Having the right mix of information, consultation and active participation appropriate to your issue/project is important. Being open, interesting, friendly, honest and adaptable and demonstrating how people's input is taken into account are hallmarks of good engagement.
3. **Deliver what is promised** – keeping your word and building trust are essential. Conducting engagement for its own sake – just to be able to say people were involved – will backfire. This will make it more difficult to involve people in the future. Engagement tools must be used correctly and not as cosmetic actions or to defer difficult decisions. Be open about your negotiables and non-negotiables; only promise what you can deliver. Using the right tools for the task will help here.
4. **Watch the timing** – stronger relationships between you and your communities need time to be built to show results. Information, consultation and active participation all take time. People need time to familiarise themselves with the issues, be involved and contribute to decisions that impact on their lives. Involving people too late can have negative impacts, while involving people earlier in decisions can achieve better outcomes with properly managed expectations.
5. **Be creative** – there are no ready-made solutions to your challenges. Relationships between you and your communities are dynamic and ever changing. New stakeholders emerge. Engagement must be tailored to a specific situation and challenge. Be flexible, learn from others and identify new opportunities. Look at new tools and technologies and how these complement more traditional methods.
6. **Balance different interests** – information, consultation and active participation can lead to broad accommodation of interests and broad consensus, but can also raise divergent views and many questions. Learn how to balance these diverse views and input. Build and sustain relationships to foster understanding and clarify issues, provide opportunities for community and individual voices to be heard and share input with others. This gives consensus a chance.
7. **Be prepared for criticism** – engagement is no guarantee against criticism and conflict, which are a normal part of democracy; so expect some conflict and pain. Remember if you invite people to say what they think, then do not be surprised if they end up doing exactly that. Be prepared to find out that their ideas and your ideas may not be the same. The goal of good engagement is to get input from citizens when your project has room for this, not a round of applause. Some community representatives (news media, interest groups, lobbyists) may use your engagement process to articulate their position and this can lead to conflict if not

properly managed. Try not to leave unjustified criticism unanswered. Work towards constructive outcomes.

8. **Involve employees** – be open and engage internally as well as externally. Use information, consultation and active participation as a mirror to ask how issues are dealt with internally. Employees' input is important and practicing internally what is aimed for externally can lead to better decisions. An organisation with values through behaviours that build openness, transparency and involvement, will support strengthening relations with communities and individuals.
9. **Develop a coherent policy** – strengthening relationships between you and your communities is a business policy and is a useful support for decision making and the process of democracy. However, it is not a substitute for you to make decisions, but complements formal institutions and processes of representative democracy. The way you carry out your engagement policy counts, including reporting on how decisions were made, who was responsible, who was engaged and how.
10. **Act now** – prevention is better than cure. Be more proactive, use existing opportunities and involve people before decisions are made. Take a step-wise approach to the tools in this toolbox, learn from experience and make sure you use the right tool for the task at hand.
11. **Follow up** – relationships with communities are ongoing and need to be based on trust and mutual respect. Relationships should not end when a particular engagement process does. People and individuals who participate in an engagement process should be informed of the process's outcomes. This Tip relates to delivering the principles outlined in Tip 3.

Source: Adapted from the Department of Transport & Main Roads Queensland (2010) *Community Engagement Toolbox*; and OECD (2001) *Citizens as Partners: OECD Handbook on Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy Making*, pp. 91–101

Deciding which tool to use

Do you need to provide information?

- ☐ Newsletters, brochures, leaflets, press releases, letters
- ☐ Public exhibitions
- ☐ News releases (mainstream and community-based papers)
- ☐ Radio advertisements and interviews (main stream and community-based stations)
- ☐ Social networking media
- ☐ Community events
- ☐ Online communication
- ☐ Exhibitions and displays

Do you need a representative response?

- ☐ Citizens' panel
- ☐ Sample surveys
- ☐ Representative focus group

Do you want to identify all issues and concerns?

- ☐ Letters
- ☐ Submissions
- ☐ Telephone hotline
- ☐ Online communication
- ☐ Surveys
- ☐ Public meetings
- ☐ Search conference
- ☐ Workshops
- ☐ Community events
- ☐ Open days

Do you need to deal with a complex issue?

- ☐ Information displays
- ☐ Focus groups
- ☐ Online forums
- ☐ Surveys
- ☐ Regular meetings
- ☐ Road shows
- ☐ Expert panel
- ☐ Representative forums

Do you need to get input from as many people as possible?

- ☐ Public displays
- ☐ Newsletters with enclosed response forms
- ☐ Free telephone hotline
- ☐ Press releases
- ☐ Online tools
- ☐ Surveys (door-to-door)
- ☐ Community events
- ☐ Citizens' panel (for a representative group)
- ☐ Targeted postal surveys accompanied by a marketing campaign
- ☐ Submissions
- ☐ Seminars and forums

Do you need to include people who are often excluded and reach larger numbers?

- ☐ Advertising, news media, newsletters, brochures
- ☐ Public displays and exhibitions
- ☐ Online tools, including forums
- ☐ Community events
- ☐ Social networking media
- ☐ Focus groups
- ☐ Meetings with existing groups and community and cultural leaders
- ☐ Involving other state agencies and levels of government
- ☐ Involving community groups
- ☐ Surveys

Do you need to review or improve the service or test new approaches?

- ☐ Focus groups
- ☐ Learning from employees on the ground
- ☐ User/non-user surveys
- ☐ Suggestion schemes
- ☐ Stakeholder meetings
- ☐ Employees feedback
- ☐ Effective complaints system

Do you need regular dialogue with the same people?

- ☐ Newsletters with a feedback mechanism
- ☐ Social networking media
- ☐ Leaflets, press releases, radio advertisements
- ☐ Exhibitions, displays

Do you need to build relationships and involvement?

- ☐ Letters
- ☐ Social networking media
- ☐ Meetings with key individuals
- ☐ Community events
- ☐ Open days
- ☐ Advisory committee
- ☐ Steering committee

Do you need to deal with conflicts of interest?

- ☐ Stakeholder meetings
- ☐ Mediation

Do you want specific public inputs into your decision making?

- ☐ Online tools, including forums
- ☐ Exhibitions and displays
- ☐ Submissions
- ☐ Telephone hotlines
- ☐ Surveys
- ☐ Social networking media
- ☐ Public meetings
- ☐ Online tools, including forums
- ☐ Search conferences
- ☐ Expert panel
- ☐ Workshops
- ☐ Community events
- ☐ Advisory committee
- ☐ Steering committee

Source: Adapted from the Department of Transport & Main Roads Queensland (2010) *Community Engagement Toolbox*, Oldham Council (2002) *A Guide to Better Consultation*, pp. 25–27 and TransportSA (2000) *Community Consultation, Guidelines for the Selection of Tools and Techniques*

Description of the tools

News releases and advertisements

Description

An effective way to provide information and to seek participation in other ways, including public notices, early general news, written or verbal materials in newspapers or on the radio

Who

General community

When to use

- Advise on infrastructure updates and service disruptions (time critical)
- Communicate a decision
- Increase awareness of upcoming engagement opportunities
- Provide regular updates
- Reach a wider audience

Advantages

- Leads to a better informed public
- Is a means for information to be given to the community about your organisation and its activities
- People can quickly access more information
- Public notices on community radio are an effective way to disseminate information
- Reaches a wider audience
- Ethnic radio stations will reach people of a non-English-speaking-background

Disadvantages

- Time needed for internal approval processes
- Time needed to adhere to news media deadlines
- Time needed to make information accessible and understandable for all relevant stakeholders
- People may not read the advertisement/news release
- Cost of multi-media, particularly television
- Does not reach those without access to newspapers, internet or radio
- Restrictions in community newspapers (may only have a publication once or twice a week)

Brochures, newsletters and community letters

Description

Effective way of providing information, inviting feedback and seeking input and participation in other engagement activities

Who

General community or targeted to interest groups or a project's geographic areas

When to use

- To reach a wide and/or targeted audience
- To advise on public works or service disruptions
- To communicate a decision
- To increase awareness of upcoming engagement opportunities
- To provide regular updates

Advantages

- Quick and simple to set up

- Public information program to give the public relevant and accurate information about your organisation and its activities
- Can be more personalised if delivered to postal address
- Can be aimed at targeted stakeholders
- Can be distributed through schools and other community/public areas
- Generally a cost-effective way of disseminating information
- Properly formatted (including font size, audio versions, language translation, plain English, no jargon) can be more accessible

Disadvantages

- Production needs a personal computer – for more sophisticated publications a desktop publishing package is required, which may also require a specialist to operate it
- Cost to produce commercially
- Time frame to approve process and produce brochures and newsletter (design and print)
- Letterbox distribution agencies require a lead time to schedule delivery
- Non-delivery to letterboxes marked “no junk mail” as well as those in apartment blocks
- Time taken for your organisation’s employees to deliver information if a pamphlet distribution company is not available
- People may not read information, classing it as “junk mail”

Hotline and information lines

Description

Telephone line used for a specific purpose; useful to support other engagement tools

Who

General community, people with mobility impediments, access issues or low writing skills

When to use

- When immediate two-way communication and information is required on a one-to-one basis
- To record and distribute information, respond to straightforward enquiries and to record on tape public enquiries, complaints and comments
- To record and distribute specific information
- To respond to straightforward enquiries about a plan, project or service
- To record public enquiries, complaints and/or comments and respond to call

Advantages

- 24-hour access
- Quick and simple to set up
- Potentially wide access as most households and businesses have telephones
- Can be directed to a combined fax/answering machine
- Potential to reach all parts of a community
- The response to an enquiry can be immediate
- Works well if comprehensive data are provided to employees to respond accurately or if employees are familiar with the project/issue
- Can complement other engagement tools

Disadvantages

- Needs a continuous advertising campaign to increase awareness and sustain use (posters, leaflets, local press releases, radio advertisements, posting on the internet)
- Problems if employees responding to issues cannot supply the information requested

- Time required to train and support employees to handle callers and content
- Short-term or one-off projects may require contracted call centre services
- Impersonal approach
- Restrictive for those who do not have access to telephones
- Tends to be little take up
- Results not representative of total community

Comments and complaints system

Description

A comments and complaints system enables direct feedback and identifies changes to service provision on a continual basis

Who

General community

When to use

- When an ongoing process is needed to give people an opportunity to provide input into a service provision within and outside an engagement process

Advantages

- Provides first-hand experience
- Opportunity to gather detailed information
- Opportunity to involve users in finding solutions
- Shows commitment to service improvement through listening and responding to comments and issues

Disadvantages

- Unlikely to yield positive comments
- Does not give balanced information
- Information may not always be reliable
- Requires confidentiality to be maintained
- Danger of being drawn into the details of the complaint
- Resources needed to review and deal with complaints
- Needs mediation and facilitation skills
- Needs to provide equal opportunity for all to participate (translation services, various means to make a complaint – email, letters, verbally)
- Needs feedback to complainant within reasonable time frame

Site/field office

Description

An employee's space/temporary project office in the local community open to the public which can be used as a meeting place, workshop venue or information display

Who

General community

When to use

- When visibility is a prime consideration
- When issues are likely to have a significant community impact
- When the project team wants to genuinely interact with the community and interested stakeholders

Advantages

- Provides opportunity for ongoing contact with the community and interested stakeholders
- People can interact with project team members to discuss issues and provide input
- People can access at a time of day suited to their needs
- Provide a venue for reports and project displays to be readily available

Disadvantages

- Resources to employees office and answer queries
- Cost to establish and maintain an accessible and visible office
- Consider cost of after hours access to be more inclusive in who has access
- May not attract the wider community and key stakeholders, unless visibility is high
- Employees workplace and safety issues

Open days and exhibitions

Description

A method of disseminating information and gathering a large number of opinions on a topic or service through a publicised gathering of the public

Who

General community, targeted geographic areas

When to use

- To inform communities and individuals about your organisation's planning, proposals and projects
- To contact the community
- To communicate a project or proposal visually

Advantages

- Usually well advertised and attended by large numbers of people, thus a good chance of exposure
- Can use a variety of mediums to inform and educate
- Flexibility for the public to attend at a time suitable to them
- Interactive displays can get the public involved in the project/activity
- Provides ad-hoc and quick feedback about your organisation and its activities
- Increases your organisation's visibility in the community and is an easy way to publicise yourselves
- Can reach those people who would normally be hard to engage
- Provides an opportunity for face-to-face meetings and can help to build relationships

Disadvantages

- Attendance at a display by the public may not be representative and may only reach those who are interested in the topic
- May only attract people with negative views unless something of obvious benefit is on offer
- Feedback may be limited
- Difficulties in recording responses, especially during busy times
- Requires suitable venue, thus size of display may be limited by this
- Timing is important – of the display and the time needed to put the material together and have it approved
- Publicity, organisation, venue, media and employee costs
- Need to have knowledgeable personnel staffing the display (wrong information may be given out if employees are not briefed properly or do not have enough knowledge)
- Material needs to be relevant to project goals

Staffed public displays

Description

A tool to provide readily accessible information for a large number of people

Who

General community

When to use

- To provide information and gather feedback and comments from a large cross-section of affected stakeholders for a process/project or activity
- To communicate a project or proposal visually
- To find out the opinions of a wide range of people

Advantages

- Provides information for large numbers of people who can visit a display at leisure
- Provides an opportunity to correct misinformation in the community
- Can reach a wide cross-section of the community
- Provides visual, hands-on material and can overcome language barriers
- Provides ad-hoc and quick feedback about the process/project or activity
- Can reach those people who would normally be hard to engage
- Advertisements can advise the times when employees will be there to encourage people to visit the display and have their questions answered
- Can be used at various phases of business (policy, planning, program and delivery)
- Comment sheets can facilitate feedback

Disadvantages

- Public attendance may not be representative
- Information provided may not match public expectations or may not be in a variety of languages
- Feedback may be biased, depending on the location of the display and the attitudes of people attending
- There may be difficulties in recording responses
- Requires suitable venue
- Needs enough time to give every opportunity for community/individuals to attend
- Employees may need to work after hours and on weekends
- Security of employees and display materials needed
- Resources required, including knowledgeable personnel to set up and employees the display
- Time needed to put the material together and have it approved
- Display material must be relevant to the project's goals

Surveys

Description

A means to gather views and opinions and measure attitudes, satisfaction and performance, by collecting comparable data and asking questions in the same way so as to minimise bias. Usually not done in isolation but to support other tools

Who

Population sample or sub-group selected randomly to represent the community

When to use

- When information is needed from a large number of people
- When quantification and qualification are needed

- When data are needed to compare local, state and national benchmarks
- When confidentiality and anonymity of respondents is preferred

Advantages

- Provide data about probable effects of a proposal, can satisfy a need to gauge public reaction to a proposal, policy, service or project
- Potential to access more people
- Allows for anonymity and can be used to consult on sensitive issues
- People often feel more comfortable expressing views in writing than on the phone
- Phone surveys give people with low literacy skills the ability to participate
- Can be an economical and efficient means to collect data from a large number of people
- Can provide strong analytical data showing which trends are happening

Disadvantages

- Unsuitable for complex issues as a survey usually asks respondents to answer set questions with predetermined answers
- Time and resource intensive
- Usually low response rate for mail surveys, face-to-face or telephone
- Cannot control how people interpret questions
- Need statistical and research expertise to design surveys and analyse findings
- Difficult to engage those hardest to reach
- The public may feel over surveyed and suffering from 'consultation fatigue'
- Written surveys may isolate people with low literacy skills or people from non-English-speaking backgrounds – need to be reproduced in a variety of formats (such as for sensory impairments, minority languages)

Public meetings

Description

Meetings usually open to anyone who has an interest or stake in the issue or topic under discussion

Who

General community, people with an interest in the issue

When to use

- For structured local meetings involving members of the public and stakeholders to talk about issues of local importance – open to anyone and held in a public place
- When an open and transparent way is required to demonstrate public engagement
- When information sharing is needed
- When a forum is needed to air views, seek preferences and present issues for public consideration
- When a more balanced context is needed for understanding the impact of a proposal

Advantages

- Can be a useful forum to exchange information between government and the community
- Useful to share information with a wide range of people
- Can be targeted to specific groups (such as young people, people with a disability)
- A time-saving way to find out community reaction
- Relatively cheap depending on how meeting is organised
- Used carefully can complement other engagement tools

Disadvantages

- Poor advance planning and advertising may result in low attendance

- Requires a neutral chairperson
- Open meetings are usually more for an information exchange rather than negotiation
- High failure risk – engagement team has only one chance to do it right, can raise expectations which may not be realised
- Challenges – complex logistics, unpredictable dynamics, potential angry participations (for example mob mentality)
- The ability of people attending to contribute to strategic issues may be limited by lack of knowledge and possible lack of interest
- Participants may raise unrelated issues or personal, topical issues
- Must be accessible to all relevant stakeholders (especially people with a disability)
- People may attend with their own agenda, manipulate the meeting and intimidate others
- Easy to lose control of the meeting when emotions run high
- Accusations can become personal at highly emotional meetings
- Attendance of the meeting may not be representative of the whole community and their views
- Publicity costs

Written submissions

Description

Submissions can be called for as part of a planning process, review of a program or service or on discussion papers

Who

General community

When to use

- To provide written information to the public and in turn invites the public to submit written comments on specific proposals
- To give interested parties detailed information on issues
- To allow interested parties to respond formally to specific processes/projects or activities

Advantages

- Most tangible evidence of a consultation process
- Provides people with detailed information
- Respondents can consider their point of view based on accurate information
- Written information has less room for interpretation
- Demonstrates that your organisation is committed to engagement and open planning
- Provides a concrete point of reference for written submissions

Disadvantages

- Possible poor response rate
- Certain level of experience required to write submission proposals
- Isolates people with low literacy skills and people from non-English-speaking backgrounds

Interviews

Description

Interviews are used to collect quantifiable information on issues and can be used to collect views and opinions and measure attitudes, satisfaction and performance. Can be face-to-face, telephone or groups (structured or unstructured, formal or informal)

Who

Targeted groups, population sample

When to use

- When information from a small number of people is adequate
- When seeking specific feedback
- When evaluation of the engagement process, project or activity is required

Advantages

- Can provide relatively objective information to help guide engagement processes and evaluate outcomes
- Helps to improve your organisation's decision processes
- Can help engage hard-to-reach groups
- Structure of interview can be changed to fit in with what the respondent wants to discuss
- In unstructured interviews the interviewer can explore a theme without being restricted by questions, and can probe deeper on issues

Disadvantages

- Time consuming
- Need skilled interviewers with statistical, research and analytical skills
- Questions tailored to an individual increases the difficulty to categorise findings
- Phone interviews – low-income groups may not have access to a phone
- Phone interviews may need to be conducted out of regular working hours to suit the public
- Face-to-face interviews can pose personal safety risks for those involved
- People can feel 'over surveyed', bored and suffer from 'consultation fatigue'

Online communication

Description

A web-based tool that uses Internet, email, chat rooms, social networking media, moderated forums¹, video-conferencing and web-based surveys on issues

Who

Population with access to a personal computer or smart phone² and who are comfortable with technology

When to use

- To consult and provide information using web technology
- When engaging with those hardest to reach
- When looking at complex issues
- When panel surveys are required
- When structured feedback is required

¹ Such as Bang The Table

² A mobile phone with internet access

Advantages

- A relatively cheap way to obtain views
- Web-based surveys are very fast and practically no cost once set up
- Background information can be made readily available
- Potentially wide-reaching and can access a new sectors of the public
- Can provide a forum for interactive deliberation on ideas, topics, projects
- Moderated chat rooms and online forums can address complex issues
- Good way to reach young people who do not access other processes as readily

Disadvantages

- Only accessible for people who are computer literate and have access to appropriate equipment
- Cannot substitute for representative community consultation as some community members are reluctant to use computers and the internet or do not have access to these
- Not likely to capture the views of older people or those with limited personal computer or smart phone access
- People can easily quit out of web surveys
- Web survey respondents can live anywhere in the world; need to filter responses
- Limited interactions

Social networking media

Description

Web-based forums that enable people to interact and discuss information and themes that are of interest to them. These forums can be accessed by personal computers, mobile computing devices and mobile phones with internet access. These forums include: Facebook, Google+, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube, Pinterest, MySpace

Who

Population with access to a personal computer or smart phone and who are comfortable with technology

When to use

- To engage and provide information using web technology
- When engaging with those hardest to reach
- When looking at complex issues
- For informal community surveys
- When structured feedback is required

Advantages

- A relatively cheap way to obtain views
- Background information can be made readily available in multi-media formats
- Potentially wide-reaching and can access a new sectors of the public
- Can provide a forum for interactive deliberation on ideas, topics, projects
- Good way to reach young people who do not access other processes as readily

Disadvantages

- Only accessible for people who are computer literate and have access to appropriate equipment
- Cannot substitute for representative community consultation as some community members are reluctant to use computers and the internet or do not have access to these

- Not likely to capture the views of older people or those with limited personal computer or smart phone access
- Respondents can live anywhere in the world; need to filter responses
- The time needed to monitor these forums can be extensive, depending on the level of engagement

Community events

Description

An event to attract more people than through formal processes and can be used to provide information, enable input into decisions or to celebrate the end of a project or engagement activity

Who

Local community with invited representatives (for example elected representatives, special guests)

When to use

- To provide information at the start of an engagement activity
- To obtain people's inputs into plans and projects at key points, including evaluation of the engagement process
- To celebrate the end of a project with the local community
- When highly visual and interactive materials are available to engage communities

Advantages

- Gives people the opportunity to participate who might otherwise not, including young people, people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, people from diverse cultural backgrounds

Disadvantages

- Can be expensive and viewed as tokenistic unless integrated into a broader engagement plan
- Requires publicity, lead time and a venue chosen well in advance
- Themed events can preclude participation
- Budget considerations include refreshments, entertainment, venue protected from the elements, publicity and advertising materials

Community meetings

Description

A tool to give people the opportunity to listen to information, be consulted and actively participate in decisions affecting their lives. Involves smaller, less localised groups than does a "public meeting" with a less structured meeting agenda

Who

General public, interested individuals

When to use

- To gain more in-depth and specific information from targeted stakeholders
- To give information to targeted stakeholders
- When a more personal, flexible and unstructured approach is desirable
- When language and cultural barriers need to be overcome
- When details about other interested parties are wanted ('snowball' meeting)

Advantages

- Can effectively involve people in planning, publicising, moderating and evaluating
- A good tool for discussing political issues
- Good tool when a community is polarised

- Relatively inexpensive
- Design is flexible and a variety of techniques can be incorporated
- Ability to explore sensitive issues and overcome barriers
- More personal contact with people and builds better rapport
- Demonstrates your organisation is committed to engagement
- Shows your organisation cares and is interested in the best outcome for all parties, wherever possible
- Can expand the project's stakeholder list by talking to other stakeholders and obtaining other contacts
- Can provide information to help guide engagement processes and evaluate outcomes

Disadvantages

- Can be time consuming if many meetings are needed
- Poor advance planning and advertising may result in low attendance
- Need a wide range of skills to cope with any meeting situations, especially in meetings when vocal minorities might dominate and conflict emerges
- Skills required to record information shared
- Face-to-face meetings can pose personal safety risks for those involved
- People may feel over-consulted and suffering from 'consultation fatigue'
- Public setting may restrict the type of information people will reveal, compared to one-on-one tools
- May have to be outside regular work hours to suit the public
- May generate more questions than answers

Nominal groups

Description

A highly structured group meeting that asks group members to respond to a question in writing about community issues. Responses are gathered, clarified and ranked in order by participants

Who

Invited people from key groups and organisations

When to use

- In combination with other techniques as part of a community needs assessment process

Advantages

- If well organised can lead to definite group conclusions
- Can be used to expand information from other sources
- Generates many ideas in a short period of time
- Motivates participants to become involved because they can see how they are personally affected
- Gives all participants an equal opportunity to have their say in a non-threatening environment
- Stimulates creative thinking and effective dialogue
- Can act as a sounding board
- Identifies priorities on problem issues

Disadvantages

- Time consuming
- Generation of ideas is limited to the actual time spent at the meeting
- Lack of anonymous authorship can make participants play safe
- Small group size (<9) preferred, more difficult with larger numbers

- Needs follow-up surveys, observations and analysis
- Can give participants a sense of power that cannot be acted on
- Needs good facilitation skills to ensure assertive personalities do not dominate
- Process may seem rigid if agenda building and respect for all ideas is not shown
- May not be representative of the wider community and stakeholders

Key informant meetings, interviews and forums

Description

A tool to obtain information and seek participation from people in a position to know their community. Key informants should be people who understand the issue and can express their thoughts, feelings and opinions

Who

Targeted and representatives from key groups in communities

When to use

- When known that the participant has sufficient knowledge, respect and experience with the target population
- When time constraints exist
- When a small sample is needed

Advantages

- Small samples cost less compared with larger surveys
- Can easily be combined with other tools
- Opportunity to get an insider's view
- Can increase your organisation's visibility by involving key community leaders
- Can obtain views from many people, including from all age groups, minority groups and the silent majority
- Can assist in priming key people for their later involvement
- Provides flexibility to use structured or unstructured techniques
- Can gauge what the community reaction may be
- Can assist in determining who other important stakeholders are

Disadvantages

- May not be inclusive of the broader target
- May not be representative of the community
- May cause community jealousies and resentment at being left out
- People may give their own impressions and biases
- Information received may be hard to quantify and organise
- May build an expectation of being included for all of your organisation's activities
- Takes time to select good informants and build trust
- May build an unreal expectation of becoming 'an expert' in the community in two ways – people thinking they know it all and their community thinking their leaders know it all

Small group discussions

Description

A small group of people convened to present information to and participate in identifying problems and solutions

Who

Targeted group from general population

When to use

- When information is needed to be conveyed in a less-inhibiting environment
- When time is available to get more detailed input
- When a cost-effective approach is needed

Advantages

- Allows more people to participate
- People often feel more comfortable in small groups and may divulge more information
- More detailed input is gained through concentrated time to discuss issues
- More cost effective than large public meetings
- Runs to a specific agenda
- Allows participants to hear conflicting perspectives in a safe environment

Disadvantages

- Fewer people engaged
- Time needed to attend numerous small-group discussions
- Less opportunity for those not linked to groups to have input
- Time needed to develop material for discussion
- Requires experienced facilitators
- Group rules need to be established to formalise the process
- Some people will not speak in front of a group, no matter how small the group
- Might be dominated by particularly outspoken people with their own agenda
- Might end up being a lengthy process if there needs to be a wide sector of the community involved
- Resources need to be allocated, including employees and time for activities to be completed
- May need to be held outside of regular working hours to ensure maximum participation

Focus groups

Description

Group discussions usually involve between 6 and 12 people and focus on a topic or membership (experience in common)

Who

Targeted group from general community

When to use

- For group discussion in a non-threatening environment where participants (who share common characteristics) openly share ideas and opinions
- When a fast and inexpensive tool is required
- When preliminary guidance is needed to set an agenda at an early stage
- To identify key issues

- To obtain a detailed response and input to preliminary proposals from the public
- To get a snapshot of the needs, issues and their intensity
- To discover new ideas, diversity of responses and solutions
- To identify interest groups
- To gain additional information to further develop issues
- To seek views of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds and people with low literacy skills

Advantages

- Can be designed to involve those hardest to reach
- Ability to find out the 'hot' issues
- Can stimulate participants to generate ideas and help them consider the issues and views of others
- Can provide insight into the extent and intensity of opinions
- Can be targeted at a certain audience to gauge a greater community reaction

Disadvantages

- Not a vehicle for seeking/building consensus, or making decisions
- Use in conjunction with other tools (not a stand-alone tool), but to complement surveys and other consultation techniques
- Needs carefully crafted questions to guide discussion
- Needs employees skilled in facilitation, working with groups, analysis and reporting
- Lack of confidentiality may inhibit some participants
- Not a sample of the community as a whole, but reflects a set of interests
- Group views can tend to dominate
- Difficult to prioritise issues
- Does not provide statistical information (gives the 'why' and not the 'how')
- Cost and incentives for people to attend
- Participants may not speak out in front of other people
- Ground rules needed
- Group could be dominated by people with their own agendas

Workshops

Description

Brings together people to work in a group on identified tasks that can clarify issues or provide direction for future activities. The objective is to solve problems and build consensus for action

Who

Invited selected representatives from groups and organisations

When to use

- To define, examine, discuss issues and formulate alternatives
- To understand people's needs, educate participants and produce results
- When a large number of opinions are sought, especially multidisciplinary
- When dialogue is needed between an organisation and its stakeholders to build consensus and arrive at workable compromises

Advantages

- Good for exploring a range of issues and for participants to understand different points of view

- Provides local experts and interest groups a means to participate in, or contribute to, decisions and problem solving
- Allows individuals not connected to specific groups to express their views
- Group work can lead to more innovative solutions
- Can be a time and cost-effective way to engage
- Establishes dialogue between those involved and can lead to a sense of ownership

Disadvantages

- Needs a skilled facilitator, chair and scribe
- Needs considerable time and resources to organise, undertake and analyse findings
- Needs pre-workshop input, such as a discussion paper distributed to participants outlining main issues
- Ground rules need to be set
- Only a limited number of participants involved thus attendance may not be representative of the community
- May need to be held out-of-hours – consider available employees, venue, transport and child care
- Participants may come along with their own agenda and unduly influence the proceedings
- Failure to disseminate findings can increase community cynicism and mistrust

Citizen panel

Description

A large group recruited via self-completed survey or face-to-face interviews to capture information, view and opinion, and to measure attitude, satisfaction and performance. Work is ongoing (two–four years). Can also be done online

Who

General community, self-selected, or matched to Statistics New Zealand’s demographic profile for the community

When to use

- To gather views and to measure attitudes
- When a snapshot of local opinion is needed
- When representativeness is needed
- When cross-sectoral issues need to be examined
- To reach those hardest to reach
- To encourage active citizenship

Advantages

- Involves a large pool of residents (>50 to several thousand) and can be structured to be representative
- Encourages active citizenship
- Ability to engage the hardest groups to reach in communities
- Can engage on various issues and tackle more technically complex issues and use as input into other engagement tools
- As membership is voluntary, people are more likely to be committed to responding to questionnaires
- Special needs of some panel members can be known in advance and planned for
- Ability to collect views of particular groups in the population
- Once setup, the cost is less than a one-off large survey

- Panel members may become advocates of for your organisation
- A tangible resource for building and sustaining relationships
- When used online, can be fast and flexible means of gathering information

Disadvantages

- Significant time and money to set up and provide administration
- Membership is not anonymous, so confidentiality is not assured
- Panel members can become 'atypical', so tracking is not advisable over long periods
- Panel members may self-select and be unrepresentative without careful checking and weighting of results
- When used online, can discriminate against people who lack internet access or technology skills

User panel

Description

A small group of users (<15) and senior managers formed to discuss user concerns and prioritise issues, and meeting regularly over a long time frame

Who

Invited group from community with an interest in issue

When to use

- When early warning is needed of problems to arrive at solutions ahead of time
- When concentrated effort on a user issue is needed
- When testing of changes is needed
- When a sounding board is needed
- When additional credibility for an engagement process is needed

Advantages

- Focuses on user issues
- Members have direct experience of the service and usually a genuine desire to make services better for the future
- A useful sounding board on which to test plans and ideas
- Provides relatively quick feedback
- Creates continuing dialogue between your organisation and users
- Concentrates on users' perspective, not your organisation's

Disadvantages

- Must have clear objectives
- Consider costs to support
- Can be less exploratory than focus groups
- Must ensure that users bring positive and negative experiences to the group
- Management may think that a users' panel is the only engagement tool required
- Users can become too close to the organisation – membership time needs to be limited
- Does not provide much statistical information
- To be effective it requires good input and commitment from management
- May provoke news media attention
- Often excludes minority groups and the disadvantaged

Expert panel

Description

Comprises four to six people who contribute to a special issue or problem

Who

Targeted small group, selected for prior expertise

When to use

- When different perspectives are required on an issue
- When expert contribution on an issue or problem is required

Advantages

- Ability to gain wider and more knowledgeable perspectives on an issue
- Broadens participants' understanding of an issue
- Stimulating environment as viewpoints are exchanged and lateral thinking is required

Disadvantages

- Must be used with other techniques, such as a seminar, forum or public meeting
- May not represent diverse perspectives
- Different points of view may block the progress of the meeting
- If a unified position is required, the technique may not be appropriate

Citizen jury

Description

Brings a small group of people (12–25) together to consider an issue, often controversial, in a quasi-judicial setting with witnesses and make recommendations

Who

Randomly selected and demographically representative of the community

When to use

- When an issue can be deliberated in advance, or when issues need expert involvement, high levels of knowledge and in-depth discussions
- When an issue is complex or controversial or the public has a pre-formed opinion (such as on a new transport project) and decision makers cannot readily resolve the issues
- When participants can be made fully aware of an issue but can come to a decision from a 'lay' perspective
- When it can be representative of the community to which the issue relates

Advantages

- Independent of the authority convening the jury and other interested stakeholders
- Brings new thinking to the issue at hand
- Because information is provided beforehand, participants are well informed
- Interactive tool
- Participants are randomly selected
- Participants provide 'expert' witnesses, which brings the infusion of higher levels of knowledge and experience to the process
- Allows for more in-depth and complex discussions
- Can help build participant capacity through involvement and increased knowledge (for example, good briefing, materials and clear frameworks for discussion)
- Clear demonstration of active participation as recommendations are formulated and published in a formal report, representing a tangible product from the engagement

Disadvantages

- Only appropriate for major development and policy issues
- Time needed to engage people as volunteers and ensure that participant selection is representative of the citizen body being engaged (such as age, gender, usual place of residence)
- Needs jurors with demonstrated competence and ability to deal with decision-making dilemmas
- Sample is small
- Requires a skilled facilitator and particular expertise
- Time consuming (especially organisation)
- Expensive to conduct in terms of employees, payment of jury and experienced facilitator
- Involvement of a small number may limit ownership of results
- Recommendations should be implemented, or sufficient grounds provided publicly to explain why not

Advisory committee

Description

A group whose role is to provide an oversight and review and can be a formal link between community and government. Membership can be professionals and all key stakeholders. Provides advice and a point of reference for major studies and issues

Who

Selected by call for nominations, appointment or invitation

When to use

- When a specific issue is being investigated
- When sources of data are needed that are not readily available elsewhere
- When a diversity of perceptions, views, opinions and advice is needed
- When prioritising community issues is important
- When expert opinion is sought

Advantages

- Can utilise existing groups and organisations
- Works well when the composition of the group remains stable
- Able to deal with a specific issue in a detailed way
- Potential for large number of representativeness on specific issues, thereby increasing representativeness
- Capacity building for participants through proactive input
- Provides more input than from some other methods
- Assists in developing a collaborative approach and consensus in problem solving and service development
- Helps build trust and cooperation between key stakeholders

Disadvantages

- Must be able to represent diverse perspectives
- Needs a clear purpose, terms of reference, role and responsibilities
- No clear formal decision-making role
- Needs an appropriate appointment process
- Participants must commit time, energy and actively contribute
- May be useful only for general issues

- May not be specific to communities
- Participants may become the ‘experts’ and no longer representative, requires them to keep in touch with their communities from time to time
- Needs a formal mechanism to input into your organisation’s decision-making processes
- Requires a clear line of communication between the group and your organisation
- Needs an exit strategy/sunset clause to ensure committee closes down when the job is done

Steering committee

Description

A small group representing a variety of experience, views, organisations and groups. Membership is by election, appointment or nomination. Committee provides guidance to a project team and direction to the broader engagement process

Who

Selected by call for nominations, appointment or invitation

When to use

- When issues are to be debated
- To monitor the progress of strategic projects/issues that involve a diverse range of views and interests

Advantages

- Allows quick and informed decision making
- Members have a sense of ownership of the outcomes

Disadvantages

- Significant time commitment
- Committee members might not represent wider views, or have the authority to make decisions on behalf of their organisation
- Committee members might not liaise with their respective communities and organisations
- Some committees keep momentum going after the task is completed, needs an exit strategy/sunset clause to ensure committee ceases when the issue is finished
- Disproportionate membership can occur (committee’s convening body may outnumber others)

Charrette

Description

A deadline-oriented, problem-solving and collaborative planning process that brings together all interest groups (planners, communities and wider stakeholders) and can last from several hours to several weeks, depending on the complexity of the problem

Who

Convened with groups and individuals selected to participate

When to use

- When a rapid process is required and agreement needed in a known time frame, and when some community participation is required
- When a diversity of opinions is required
- When all parties are committed to resolve differences and establish an acceptable way forward

Advantages

- Can result in problem resolution, a plan and support for it, and commitment to pursue the agreement

- Because all parties are involved, including hostile ones, there are fewer delays and barriers to implementation
- Allows for expert input into finding options
- Community input is meaningful and well placed in problem solving and the assessment of outcomes, because it can happen at many stages of the planning exercise

Disadvantages

- Time and resource intensive because of advance preparation and the highly skilled people needed to manage the process
- Time limits may leave some participants feeling they did not understand the issue or process
- Requires all parties to participate willingly to resolve differences and key decision makers may be difficult to engage
- Requires all parties to be present and remain until resolution is reached
- Requires skilled facilitation in both technical and group processes
- Not representative of the community

Planning and visioning

Description

A tool to engage people in discussions about their community, what it means to them and what they hope the future holds

Who

General community

When to use

- When a strong forward orientation is needed to visualise options for the future (includes scenario building to look at alternative future states)
- When a whole-of-transport-system approach is needed
- When a focus is needed for a range of other engagement techniques, including conferences, workshops, public meetings and a future search conference
- Can be used online

Advantages

- Provides an interesting, engaging and a highly visual way to deal with an issue
- Encourages a systems approach
- Participants actively involved in developing future scenarios, creating a sense of involvement and ownership
- Can build consensus

Disadvantages

- Needs specific skill sets, including social science, computer hardware and software, GIS, planning, design and modelling
- Time consuming and can be expensive
- Can raise expectations that need to be managed
- May require the purchase of specialised computer software

Search conference

Description

A process for reaching a shared vision of a future state among diverse stakeholders (usually involves a group of about 20–50) towards which they can agree to work

Who

Invited participants selected for their specific knowledge and ability to represent parts of the community

When to use

- At the beginning of a planning process to develop a shared view of a desirable future state
- When collaborative action is needed around identified outcomes, which can then be tested against community values
- When a response to a proposal is needed
- When it is important to envision future scenarios
- When an action-oriented approach is needed
- When the needs of different user groups are important
- Address conflict between competing needs to depolarise opinions

Advantages

- A useful forum for information dissemination and exchange
- The focus is on issues and not personal positions and views, leading to better exploration of issues
- Can bring together a wide range of people to find common ground
- While not a substitute for broader engagement, it can be used as a precursor to broader planning studies or policy making
- Can reveal creative and innovative solutions to often intractable problems
- Develops a vision and then works backwards to develop long, medium and short-term action plans essential to achieving the vision
- Seeks responses to proposals

Disadvantages

- Needs a good facilitator, chair and scribe
- Needs to manage expectations as it may result in a ‘wish list’ of unrealistic future requirements
- Focused decision on one issue is difficult
- Not representative of wider community attitudes, with the more articulate likely to dominate and not speak on behalf of, or represent, the views of the wider community
- Resources needed as outcomes will have to be tested with additional engagement that involves the broader community
- Requires substantial commitments from participants
- Participants’ shared view may be ahead of the broader community
- Needs sufficient time

Partnerships

Description

Partnerships include formal or information relationships and alliances to work together towards a shared goal or purpose. Useful to build and sustain government-community relationships

Who

Selected individuals and groups to work on specific issues

When to use

- To get close to local communities, public bodies and organisations and involve communities in issues affecting on their lives
- To achieve results quickly through informal partnerships
- Use formal partnerships when there is a wide variety of interested parties

Advantages

- Gives each partner an equal say in decisions that affect them
- Good for building long-term relationships
- Harnesses the collective knowledge and expertise of partners and a way to work towards shared outcomes
- Opportunity to network

Disadvantages

- Requires resources to maintain partnerships
- Requires extensive negotiation around terms of reference, nature of the partnership, etc
- Costs – childcare, transport, guest speakers, researchers and administrative support
- Because all partners must be equally informed, materials must be in appropriate language, styles and formats
- Many stakeholders do not want to partner with government and do not have the resources to do so
- Power may not be equal in the relationship, power grabs can occur and some participants may feel isolated and voiceless

Where to find out more about the tools

Australian resources

Aslin, H. and Brown, V. (2004) *Towards Whole of Community Engagement: A Practical Toolkit*, available through the Murray Darling Basin Commission <http://www.mdbc.gov.au>.

City of Maribyrnong Community Engagement Framework (2000), http://www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/Page/Page.asp?Page_Id=314&h=1.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Murray Darling Basin Commission (2004) *Towards Whole of Community Engagement: A Practical Toolkit* <http://www.mdbc.gov.au/>.

Dick, R. (2000) *Structured focus groups* <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/focus.html>.

Maroochy Shire Council (2003) *Public Participation Manual* <http://www.maroochy.qld.gov.au>.

New South Wales (nd) Community Builders <http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/>.

Queensland Department of Emergency Services (2001) *Guide to Effective Community Engagement*, Department of Emergency Services <http://www.emergency.qld.gov.au/publications/>.

Queensland Government (2004) *Engaging Queenslanders: A guide to community engagement methods and techniques* <http://www.get.involved.qld.gov.au>.

Queensland Government (nd) Generate <http://www.generate.qld.gov.au>.

International resources

COSLA (1998) *Focusing on Citizens: A Guide to Approaches and Method* <http://www.communityplanning.org.uk/documents/Engagingcommunitiesmethods.pdf>.

Department of Transportation (1997) *Public Involvement and Techniques for Transportation Decision Making* <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/tranfair.htm>.

Improvement and Development Agency <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=1>.

International Association for Public Participation (2000) *Public Participation Toolbox* <http://www.iap2.org/>.

Minnesota Department of Health (nd) *Community Engagement* <http://www.health.state.mn.us/communityeng/>.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2001) *Engaging Citizens in Policy Making* <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/24/34/2384040.pdf>.

Scottish Centre for Regeneration (nd) *Citizen Juries, Involving Civil Societies in the Work of Parliaments* <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/government/devolution/cpsp-07.asp#bm08>.