

Lancaster district

Community Engagement Guidance

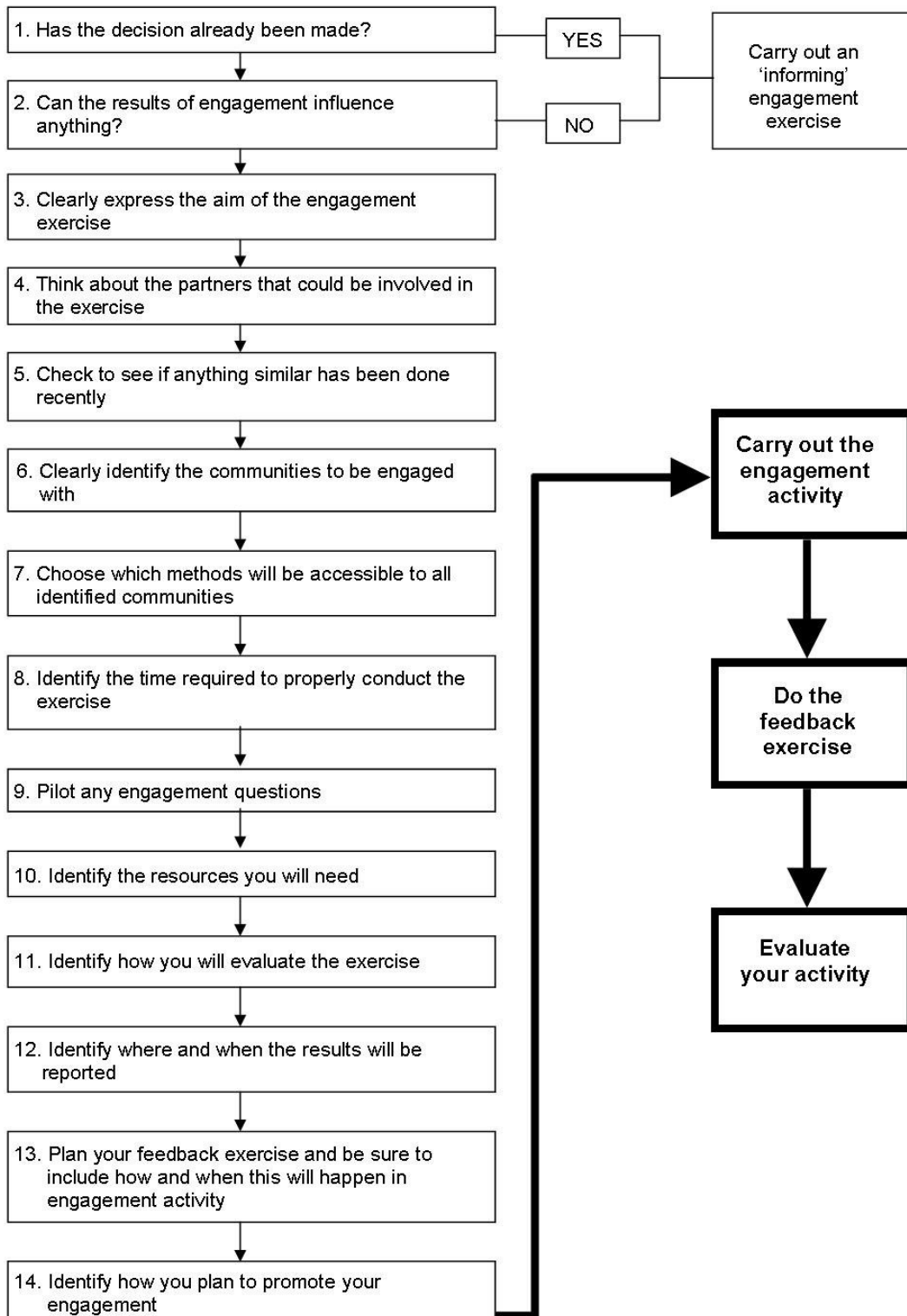
Engagement decision
making path
and checklist



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Engagement decision path



The decision path

The chart takes you through the decisions that have to be made **before any engagement exercise can take place**. Ensuring that all these issues are carefully addressed before final decisions are taken about engagement will give the best chance of a successful outcome. An engagement mechanism should not only take into account the primary stakeholders but also be accessible to the broader community. A wide range of engagement techniques should be utilised to ensure greater participation levels.

Poorly managed engagement activity can influence public confidence and can unrealistically raise public expectations.

The following gives further information about the issues contained in the decision path. The numbers correspond to those shown in the boxes on the decision path flowchart.

1. Has the decision already been made? Do we need to engage or communicate?

Community Engagement is the process of involving people in decisions that affect them. If a decision has already been made, then engagement is inappropriate. It is a dangerous practice to assume that engagement will 'rubber stamp' a decision that has already been made.

If a decision has been taken it is more appropriate to put effort into informing those affected or interested in the decision of the reasons behind it and the implications for them.

2. Can the results of engagement influence anything?

Make sure you know how the results of an engagement exercise will be used to influence decision making, service provision or any other aspect of organisation activity. Participants need to know that the effort they have made to a response for help was of value.

Our research showed that people have had a negative engagement experience when they didn't think involvement would make a difference to the decision making. People need to feel that it will be worth while for them to get involved.

3. Clearly express the aims of the engagement exercise

You need to be sure of the aims of any engagement and be clear what you want to get from the results.

For example do you want to:

- Challenge the existing service
- Look for unmet needs
- Shape the way your service is delivered
- Measure satisfaction within your service
- Prioritise future spending
- Set targets for the service
- Check out reaction to new ideas or initiatives
- Look for quality improvements
- Check opinions, views and attitudes
- Assess potential interest in something
- Improve customer relations

Ask colleagues involved in the work for their views and ensure managers express clear views about their expectations. This will assist you in asking correct questions in the engagement exercise.

4. Think about the organisations that could be involved in the exercise

Community engagement is resource intensive so working together would help to share the costs, reduce duplication between organisations and reduce consultation fatigue within our communities.

Other organisations may have already undertaken similar research or have relevant information which you could use.

5. Check if anything similar has been done recently

Before starting any consultation exercise, find out if any other organisations have asked the same questions, or if they are any engagement plans that you could work together on.

It is important to find out if your target audience has been consulted recently. Too much engagement can result in 'consultation fatigue'.

6. Clearly identify the communities to be engaged with

It is important to recognise that 'communities' can be defined in different ways.

Community of place

A group of people who share a locality or geographical area such as a neighbourhood, a housing estate or a village. This location will usually have physical boundaries.

Community of interest

A group of people with a shared interest or experience. A community of interest includes service users (for example, people interested in climate change, members of a disability support group, patients registered with a particular GP, library users, pupils of a school).

Community of identity

A group of people with something in common - how people identify themselves or how they are identified by society, usually by demographic characteristics (age; disability; ethnicity; faith; gender; sexual orientation; and transgender).

A person can be part of many communities at one time. This means that communities can be very diverse and we must give due consideration to this when we approach different communities. Some people may feel that they are not part of a community regardless of sharing some of the above characteristics. A lack of identity with a particular community should not result in exclusion from the decision making process affecting that community.

Our research has shown that engagement activities can bring people together and create a sense of community. It has also shown that people have a more positive engagement experience if a subject interests them.

A very broad approach is appropriate for some engagement but a more focused-approach is likely to result in better rates and avoid accusations of time wasting. It is important therefore to think carefully about everyone:

- Who will be directly impacted by an issue?
- Who will be indirectly impacted?
- Who will be potentially impacted?
- Whose help will you need to make it work?
- Who knows about the subject?
- Who will have an interest in the subject?

Your list needs to be exhaustive and the service involved is the best placed to draw up a comprehensive list.

Having identified these communities, each one needs to be further broken down in order to be as specific as possible. Use this checklist as a basis to think about and map your stakeholders:

Key customers

- People who pay directly
- People who pay indirectly
- Users of services
- Internal customers

Non users

- People who are unaware of the service
- Dissatisfied or ex customers
- People who might need the service at a later date

Others

- People we enforce against or who are regulated (e.g. landlords)
- Citizens/local people
- Interested agencies – voluntary, private, public sector
- People affected by policies or development (e.g. planning)
- Local Councillors, Neighbourhood Forums, Parish Councils, MPs. Carers or Advocates, Local Businesses, etc.

By identifying communities and then breaking them down, you will have a list that is detailed enough to allow you to allocate the most appropriate engagement and communication methods for their particular needs.

Internal communities

Some engagement carried out by organisations has as its community other departments or individuals within that organisation; other exercises have a mixture of internal and external consultees. These internal consultees are another type of community and need the same sort of consideration.

It may be that engagement can be carried out more quickly and efficiently with these internal communities. However all the same considerations about appropriate questions, feedback mechanisms etc still apply.

7. Choose which engagement and communication methods will be accessible to all identified communities

Our research has shown that our chosen methods can impact on whether people have a positive or negative engagement experience. Our research has also shown that people have a positive experience when they understand what is being asked.

A wide range of engagement methods should be used to provide a menu of opportunities for people to have their say or get involved with decisions and services that affect them and to make sure consultations are inclusive and accessible.

If organisations choose to use only one consultation method groups will be missed out. Everyone has different consultation preferences therefore a mix of methods should always be used. Consultations should be tailored to different audiences.

Please refer to the Toolkit for information on engaging with specific groups and engagement methods guidance. www.peopleandparticipation.net provides a process planner which helps to identify appropriate methods.

Making engagement inclusive

If communities are carefully identified and appropriate engagement and communication methods used, engagement will be more inclusive and not give too great a say to articulate but unrepresentative sectors of our community. It is accepted that engaging with some groups is easier than others and there are a number of reasons for this including:

- Some groups such as working parents, have less spare time than others (e.g. some retired people)
- Some people do not have a great understanding of written or spoken English
- Some groups feel culturally isolated from the mainstream of the organisations activity
- Some groups feel alienated from, or even suspicious of, the organisation that is engaging with them
- Some people experience disadvantage; discrimination; and inequality
- Some communities are geographically isolated
- Some people have no permanent address
- Some people may just not be interested in being engaged by organisations

These groups are sometimes bundled together and termed 'seldom heard' or 'hard to reach' groups. This is an accurate description to an extent – it may well take more imagination or more effort to engage with people who speak little English or are alienated from organisations. Nevertheless, labelling some people 'seldom heard' or 'hard to reach' implies that the problem lies with them when, in reality, it is our job to make sure that engagement is inclusive.

Making engagement inclusive is important because engagement exercises often need to find out the views of an accurate cross section of the population as a whole, and different sections of the community, particularly minorities, may have needs or

views that are different from those of the majority and, if they are not engaged with effectively, these needs or views may remain invisible.

Our research has shown that it is important to remember that 'no size fits all' and that community groups can have very different preferences.

Helpful advice for engaging specific groups can be found in the Toolkit. This includes:

- Children and young people
- Disabled Children
- Older people
- Disabled People
- Black and Minority ethnic groups
- Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community
- Gender Equality
- Gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender
- Faith Groups
- Elected Members including Parish Councils

8. Identify the time required to properly conduct the exercise

It is important to allow enough time when planning an engagement exercise. This should not only take into account the wishes of organisations, but also the frequency of meetings of any organisations being asked to take part. A well planned consultation will be more successful and it is important to avoid certain times of year e.g. holidays, religious celebrations.

If your end date (the date by which results must be available) is fixed, you must work backwards and if there is insufficient time to properly carry out your engagement using the preferred methods, you must make a judgement about whether using 'quicker' methods would compromise the exercise. If this is the case you should consider whether to continue with the engagement.

It is important to inform, consult and involve people as early as possible to ensure services are shaped around the needs and aspirations of community, to make sure they can influence decisions and show that decisions haven't already been made.

Current best practice says that 2 to 12 weeks should be allowed depending on the complexity of the issue. It is not good practice to ask people for their opinions and then provide them with insufficient time in which to debate the issue amongst members and feed back a considered, representative response.

Our research has shown that timing can have both a positive and negative impact on people's engagement experiences.

9. It is good practice to include time to pilot any engagement questions

Organisations should consider piloting their consultations to help to check that respondents will understand the questions and do not interpret them in different ways. This will help organisations to improve a survey to make sure they get meaningful and useful information which they can use to improve their services.

10. Identify the resources you will need

Consideration needs to be given to the cost. Organisations should ensure that approaches to consultation/engagement and resources are proportionate to the issue and likely benefits.

It is important not only to identify the true cost of any exercise but also to make comparisons between exercises in order to identify good practice and to ensure that the team undertaking the exercise is sufficiently resourced in order to carry it out successfully.

Cost considerations could include:

- Staff time to manage and deliver exercise
- Staff travel
- Printing
- Postage out and return
- Venue
- Incentive
- Analysis
- Any out of pocket expenses reimbursed
- Promotion/Communication
- Feedback
- Consultant (if used)

11. Identify how you will evaluate the exercise

Evaluation is vital; not only to know whether you are spending scarce resources wisely, but also to find out if organisations have genuinely listened and responded to needs. Evaluation is not a procedure that takes place at the end of engagement, but is a process that should take place throughout. It will be much easier to do if you have included it in your initial planning.

Engagement needs to be evaluated to help to learn from our experiences and share these lessons with other services. This will assist organisations to carry out future high quality consultations. It is also important to evaluate commissioned research and share experiences.

There are a number of models of evaluation, but try to keep it simple. If you have planned properly, identified what your success and failure criteria are and how you are going to measure them, then the evaluation process will be more straightforward.

There will always be unforeseen factors that influence results and your evaluation should be flexible enough to take account of these.

Effective evaluation tells you what worked and what didn't (and why). It helps make sure that you get the best value for money from your efforts and time. If one particular method doesn't work, you can at least gain some valuable information from it by trying to work out why. Problems are always much clearer with hindsight, and help you avoid pitfalls next time. Equally, if something works well, try to assess why it was successful, so that you can build on it.

Your evaluation should consider:

Who you consulted

Set specific targets for the levels of response you want from different groups. Information about which engagement methods worked for which groups will be very useful for the future. At the end, you want to be able to measure whether:-

- You got views from those you wanted
- You were successful in engaging with minority, disadvantaged or under represented groups
- Different groups responded to different methods
- You gave feedback to those you consulted
- The people contacted felt that the engagement was worthwhile

Methods

Identifying which methods to use for engagement is clearly crucial. You need to consider a number of issues, including who you want to engage with, what sort of information you want, and how much money, time and experience you have. At the end, you want to be able to measure whether:

- The methods used were right for your objectives
- If you used more than one method, which worked best and why
- Were they suitable for reaching your identified target groups
- You got the right information in terms of quantitative and/or qualitative information, response rate and representative sample

Timescale

The length of time engagement takes is often underestimated. You give a deadline for responses, but what will you do if people ask for extensions? At the end you will want to be able to measure whether:

- The timescale was clear and kept. If not, why not?
- Enough time was allowed for responses

Information provided

Remember to evaluate the effectiveness of any material you produced as part of the engagement process. Did the posters used to advertise your open meeting attract the right audience? Was putting material on the internet an effective way of encouraging views? Did you succeed in making information available to the right people? At the end you want to be able to measure whether the information was:

- Easy to access
- Tailored to relevant communities
- Produced in plain language and easy to understand
- Available in other languages and in other formats (e.g. Braille, audio cassette) where necessary

Costs

You need to be able to show that you got value for money from your engagement work. Some methods are much cheaper than others, but the information you get may not be of any use. Include staff time and training in your budgets and evaluation – this can be the most expensive element, particularly if you are running the exercise in house. At the end you will need to be able to measure whether:

- You budgeted adequately
- You made savings in particular areas or overspent in others – and why
- There were unforeseen costs – and what they were
- Effect of the engagement
- The key question is ‘did anything change as a result of the engagement exercise?’
- At the end you will need to be able to measure whether:
- You got the views that you could use
- You have actually used those views
- The engagement has led to some identifiable change in your service or policy
- The engagement has changed the relationship between you and your users

12. Identify where and when the results will be reported

You must decide at the outset what will happen to the results and how they will be fed into your decision making process.

In all cases, action should be drawn up giving details of what is happening as a result of the engagement exercise, the time by which the actions have to be carried out and the officer responsible for ensuring that this happens.

The main way we can use the results of engagement is to take ‘consultees’ views into account when making decisions. These decisions might be one-off decisions, or they might concern the shape of policies, the detail of service delivery or the targets set for the services.

13. Plan your feedback exercise and be sure to include how and when this will happen in your engagement activity.

It is crucial that everyone involved in engagement exercises and the general public are fully informed of what happened to the results of their engagement, and the impact that they had. It is important to feedback whatever the result, even if nothing happens. If people feel listened to or understand why something has not/could not happen they will be more likely to take part in future engagement. Consider how much to feed back to participants at an early stage. You may have to identify the cost of this in order to ensure it is included in the costing of the exercise.

Our research has shown that people who felt they had a positive engagement experience were happy with the feedback, whereas those who had a negative experience were unhappy with the feedback provided. Our research has also shown that organisations are not always good at feeding back.

How are you going to feed back information should be considered before completing the design of the engagement exercise. This will enable you to build in mechanisms for ensuring feedback takes place. This can include:

- Ensuring you have requested sufficient contact information to enable you to write back at a later date
- Ensuring that you get an attendance list of focus groups and forums etc. addresses/telephone numbers will enable you to feed back to participants at a later date
- For larger group meetings or less formal settings for engagement – e.g. a stand at an event – a large poster can be displayed stating where participants can obtain the results and details of any actions resulting from the engagement process. This information can also be included on any leaflets handed out, people could also be given the opportunity to leave their details for a personal copy of the information to be forwarded to them

It will be useful to refer to your stakeholder map of who to engage to ensure appropriate feedback methods are used to suit your targeted group's preferences.

Our research has shown that people felt they had a positive engagement experience when they were listened to. The research also showed that this was one of the reasons why so many people didn't get involved.

14. Identify how you plan to promote your engagement

Well carried out engagement that results in a change in service delivery is interesting news to the local media and it is always worth letting them know. Although this is not a preferred method of communication for some groups (refer to the Toolkit for information on engaging with specific groups). Alternatively, you may need to raise awareness or incorporate information giving into the start of your campaign.

There are a number of ways in which publicity can aid an engagement exercise:

- By telling stakeholder groups about a forthcoming engagement, interest can be generated that will contribute to a higher response rate.
- By providing information to stakeholder groups in advance of an exercise, they have the opportunity to discuss it amongst themselves. This is particularly useful if the topic is one of which they have little prior knowledge or if it is complicated. This often helps to increase the rate of return, particularly if people are given the opportunity to contact a named person with any questions they may have.
- For smaller exercises it may be possible to contact people on an individual basis in order to ensure as high a response rate as possible. However this is not possible with larger examples of engagement, well timed publicity may remind potential participants that their response is valuable.

The results of most engagement exercises will be of interest to one or more groups of people. For large-scale exercises, it may be appropriate to involve local press and media in the findings and what will happen as a result. For smaller groups, it may be worthwhile referring back to your stakeholder groups. Many of them will be represented by community newsletters and/or news bulletins distributed by their organisation. They may also have a representative organisation to which you could write asking them to pass on the information at their next meeting or offering to attend and speak briefly on the findings.

Our research has shown that people felt that they had a positive engagement experience when they were kept informed. The research also showed that this was one of the reasons why people didn't get involved – they felt they were not provided with information or made aware of opportunities to get involved.

Starting your engagement checklist

Use this checklist to help you to encourage participation.

Ensure that people know:

- Who is being involved and why
- What decisions will be influenced
- Who will take these decisions
- When the decisions will be taken
- How can they have their say or get involved
- How long people have to respond
- How the results will be fed back to people
- That anonymity will be respected if requested
- Who they can contact if they are unhappy about the exercise
- If information can be made available in other formats

Ensure that you have:

- Let people know well in advance using a range of communication methods
- Used plain English and no jargon
- Avoided any leading or ambiguous questions
- Thought about different people's preferences in terms of methods
- Considered taking your consultation to communities. Use community venues and events and go to communities rather than expecting them to come to us.
- Considered working outside office hours to make engagement opportunities more accessible
- Offered a choice of engagement methods to suit preferences
- Consider using creative and interactive engagement methods
- Considered running a number of events to reach different groups of people
- Thought about involving 'seldom heard' people
- Planned for how the views of different stakeholder groups will be balanced against each other
- Provide information in advance (where possible)
- Provide benefits for taking part e.g. refreshments, crèche facilities, transport or reimburse expenses – make it free for people to get involved
- Consider providing incentives e.g. offering prizes or gifts
- Given people plenty of time to respond
- Decided who will do the consultation, in-house or agency
- Successfully built consultation into your service review and planning process.

Engaging with specific communities – a representative view

It is important that organisations aim to gain a representative view from the community. To do this (in addition to consulting the wider community) organisations will need to consider targeting and tailoring their consultations at specific groups which may be considered as 'seldom heard' or 'hard to reach'.

A key message from our research was that 'one size does not fit all'. Something that has worked well in one community/area will not necessarily work as well with other groups. Every community is unique and we therefore need to take into account of the needs, skills and expertise of who we are working with.

The Lancaster District Community Engagement Toolkit provides guidance and advice on how to engage with specific groups within the community. Where possible, research has been carried out with these groups to gain details and advice on the best ways of communicating and engaging with them. As I am sure you all can appreciate there are a large number of communities that exist in the district and although we have endeavoured to capture a significant number of our known communities, this list is not exhausted.

Focus groups were carried out with a number of community groups to inform this guidance. Nearly all the groups said that schools were the best at communicating and engaging with their communities.

The Toolkit (engaging with specific groups) provides guidance on engaging with:

- Children and young people
- Student community
- Children with disabilities
- Older people
- People with disabilities
- Black and minority ethnic including faith communities
- Chinese community
- Muslim community
- Hindu community
- Gypsy Roma and traveller community
- Eastern Europeans – Polish community
- Gender equality
- Lesbian gay, bi-sexual and trans people
- Local business community
- Elected members (Lancaster City Council, Lancashire County Council and Parish and Town Councils)

Quick reference on engaging on some specific groups in our Lancaster District

It is important that you also refer to the **Toolkit (engaging with specific groups)** as this provides more detail and key issues for each group below and guidance on engaging with many other groups.

Please note that only one focus group took place with each community and therefore is not fully representative.

✓ = Good method/works well

X = Non effective/won't work

	Chinese community	Muslim community	Hindu community	Gypsy, Roma and traveller community	Polish community	Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans people
Newsletters (targeted)	✓			✓	✓	
Texting	x	x	x			✓
Leaflets (targeted)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Posters	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Local press	x	✓	✓	✓	x	
Social networking			x	x	x	✓
Citizen's panel	x	x	✓	✓		
Written comments	✓	x	✓			
Interviews in home	x			x	✓	
On street interviews	x	x	x	x	x	x
Telephone interviews	x	x	✓	x	x	x

	Chinese community	Muslim community	Hindu community	Gypsy, Roma and traveller community	Polish community	Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans people
Postal survey		x	✓	x	✓	
Web based	x	✓	x	x	x	x
Focus/discussion groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mystery shopping			✓			✓
Open days/road shows/exhibitions			✓		✓	✓
Local public meetings			x	✓		x
User panels					✓	
Local/area forums	✓	✓	✓	✓		x
Community kitty	✓		✓		✓	✓
Voting in referenda		✓	✓	✓	x	x
Local councillor	x	x			x	x
Community group/Parish council		✓		✓	x	x
Television/teletext		x	x	✓	x	
Board/committee meetings			x	x	x	

Engagement Methods

The **Toolkit (engagement methods)** provides guidance on all the methods below plus piloting and evaluation and some useful websites. The 'people and participation' web site provides practical information on methods, case studies and the opportunity to 'ask an expert'. You could use their process planner to identify appropriate methods - www.peopleandparticipation.net

Engagement method	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Newsletters/magazines	x				
Leaflets	x				
Posters	x				
Sign up emails	x				
Notice boards	x				
Texting	x				
Social Networking	x				
Blogs	x				
Websites	x				
Press and media	x				
Citizen's panel		x			
Consultation documents/ inviting written comments		x			
Face to face/in depth interviews/ interviews		x			
Focus groups		x			
Feedback from staff suggestion schemes		x			
Web based/online		x			
Mystery shopping		x			
Open days/road shows/ exhibitions		x			
Open/public meetings		x			
Questionnaires – postal, telephone and face to face		x			
Video (participatory)		x	x		
Discussion packs			x		
User comments and complaints			x		
User panels			x		
Using representative groups			x		
Workshops/conference			x		
Area forums			x		
World café			x	x	
Planning for real				x	
Visioning and voting				x	
Citizen advisory committees				x	
Citizens' juries					x
Ballots/referenda					x
Participatory budgeting/ Community Kitty					x

Customer Insight/Intelligence

Understanding customers and citizens should be at the centre of all public organisations. Customer insight is one of the key tools available to enable us to redesign our services in ways that save money and improve customer satisfaction. The engagement methods (Toolkit) will help to provide organisations with customer insight/intelligence.

For further copies and information please contact:

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