

Appendix 2b: Community Engagement planning checklist

The below checklist provides a list of things to consider when planning engagement activity. It is not comprehensive as each situation will vary but should provide a basic guide to help shape plans and delivery.

1. Planning Stage

- Why are you engaging? What is your objective? What is the benefit to you and to your customer in working together? What is the question you want answering?
- Who are you engaging? This needs to be specific. Consider location, demographics (age, gender etc.) There might be an ethical consideration to make here also, i.e. if service users need support of an advocate to get involved.
- Where are your target customer? I.e. if you're looking to engage with a dog walking community, look at popular dog walking locations. Consider both physical location and digital. i.e. are they the main demographic for Facebook or tiktok?
- How are you going to engage? Which of the 5 levels of engagement are you aiming for? And what engagement are you going to do to meet that level? I.e. focus groups, surveys, public meeting, workshops, citizens juries and citizens panels.
- What barriers might your customer face when engaging? This could be things such as understanding of language, confidence, access to the engagement if across town or online.
- How can you mitigate the barriers to engagement? I.e. can you cover transport costs? Offer residents some training to build confidence? Ensure face to face activity is spread across the town?
- What is within and outside of scope? If there are aspects of the design/planning process that have to stay in place what are they and why? This needs to be made clear to customers to manage expectations.
- What is your timeframe?
- How are you going to feedback the outcome for those interested? (consider GDPR)
- Can you ask someone from your target group to help shape the engagement activity to ensure it is at the right level for your customer? i.e. proof read any text or documentation.
- How're you going to promote the activity? This should be relevant to your audience – if digitally savvy use the website, email, video calls and socials, if not look at advertising, Your Blackpool, posters, bin tags etc.
- What does good look like to you? Consider how many responses or what level of feedback you'd like and how you plan to reach that level.
- Consider collaboration – are there other departments or local stakeholders that might be interested in supporting your activity.
- Develop an Action Plan

2. Delivery Stage

- Ensure you've risk assessed the activity
- If collecting data ensure it complies with the necessary and relevant data protection rules.
- Consider personal safety i.e. can the engagement be in a public place? Do you need a second staff member with you?

- What to do with irrelevant feedback – in many cases residents will bring up issues and concerns that fall outside of your area of responsibility but as a Council employee it's expected that you would go away and try to find the answer where possible. Residents don't care if that's 'not your area' – you're a representative of the council and a public servant.
- Consider how you will engage as an individual. i.e. in many cases when engaging with residents for feedback formal clothing itself can be a barrier. Consider what you're going to wear, what language you're going to use and how you're going to build rapport with residents.

3. Feedback and Evaluation

- Report feedback in a method that is relevant to your audience. This could include a 'You said, we did', a report, a visual comparison/graphs etc. This could be feedback via email, phone call, newsletter, posted letter, added to the website etc. but it should be relevant to your audience and consider their individual barriers.
- Feedback should be provided in a timely manner (within 4 weeks). Where there are delays this should also be communicated with an expected completion date and reasons why.
- In some cases it might be relevant to have an independent party review the feedback and report recommendations.
- Where relevant it should include next steps for the project and how people can keep informed.
- There may be occasions where feedback provided is negative. It's important to remember that this feedback isn't intended personally. Try not to respond defensively.

HELPFUL HINTS

Build engagement in: don't bolt it on

Effective community engagement should be thought about at the beginning of a project, not at the end. Engaging with people at every stage of the process will improve the quality of your work and create a sense of ownership amongst the people you have included.

Start early

Engagement takes time. It cannot be arranged, carried out, or used if you hurry. The most common outcome of rushed engagement is a poor one. It will make you feel that you wasted your time, and the public will feel the same.

Don't rely on apathy

Despite a widespread belief that people aren't interested, the reality is that they do care about the issues that affect them.

Be clear about the constraints

Don't promise things you can't deliver. This is a common failure of community engagement. Be clear where the boundaries are, who makes the final decisions and what resources are available.

Engagement is a marathon not a sprint

Delivering change can take a long time. Be prepared for the long haul; everyone gets disheartened if things take forever to happen, so be realistic about timescales

Communicate, communicate, and communicate

Keep people informed. Everyone you involve needs to receive feedback so they know what is being done as a result of their involvement, especially if you eventually chose to do something differently. Show what has been achieved. It builds ownership and enhances reputation.

Have a champion

The most successful strategies have someone – or often lots of people at different levels – who really believes in the cause pushing them forward. If community engagement is important, make sure it's included as part of people's roles.

Make it meaningful

Remember that any plans you make should lead to action. Everyone gets bored of taking part when nothing actually happens.

Assess your goals at every stage

Keep asking "is what we are trying to do realistic?" Targets should be clear and achievable. Have milestones along the way. If the direction of your project does change, make sure you tell everyone why.

Use what already exists

Don't reinvent the wheel. Find out what groups, research or ideas already exist and use them.

Good practice

Look at what other people are doing to build on good practice.