Government agencies need to build active and effective relationships with their key communities - via community, voluntary and iwi and Māori organisations and directly with citizens. Improving community engagement can strengthen public trust in government, improve government transparency, enhance civic capacity and create more sustainable policies.

Active and effective relationships between government and communities can:

**Improve the quality of policies and services**

When government agencies include diverse groups in decision-making and service delivery, the agency benefits from their first-hand understanding of the issues. The agency gains new perspectives that test their assumptions and serve as a reality check.

**Help solve complex problems**

Social, economic and environmental problems can be complex. By bringing different networks together, government agencies gain new sources of information, build a sense of joint purpose, and increase the possibility of finding sustainable solutions.

**Build trust and understanding**

By building active relationships, government agencies can reduce the sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’. People develop confidence in agencies that invite participation and genuinely listen. This can build a foundation of trust that is valuable when tough decisions need to be made.

**Support active citizenship**

By actively engaging citizens, agencies are honouring people’s right to participate in decisions that affect them. Agencies can encourage a participatory democracy in which everyone recognises that they have a stake and a part to play.

**Ensure Māori participation**

The Treaty of Waitangi places a responsibility on government to ensure Māori are involved in making decisions on matters that affect them, and to take positive steps to ensure that interests of Maori are protected.

**Help create an inclusive society**

People feel more powerful, more fairly treated and more valued when government acts in co-operation with diverse communities. Creating an environment where people can solve their own problems encourages self-reliance and innovation.
Measure progress more effectively

Collaboration with NGOs can improve monitoring and evaluation of community-delivered programmes. Active relationships can also enable constructive feedback on the agency’s performance.

Build staff skills

Relationship-building with community, voluntary and Māori organisations offers opportunities for government agencies to build a range of communication and cross-cultural skills that are applicable in many other settings.

Related resources

Open, inclusive policy making increases government accountability, broadens citizens’ influence on decisions and builds civic capacity. It also improves the evidence base for policy making, reduces implementation costs and taps wider networks for innovation in policy making and service delivery. These international resources explore these benefits in more detail.

International resources

The Benefits of Community Engagement: A Review of the Evidence

This report from the Civil Renewal Unit in the British Home Office explores and assesses evidence for the positive results of community engagement, and identifies further work needed to increase and promote understanding of what works. It looks at community engagement in the arrears of crime, housing, health, education, housing, regeneration and local government. It is an initial discussion document on the benefits of community involvement with a more detailed research project to be completed in the future. Rogers, B and E Robinson, Active Citizenship Centre, London, United Kingdom, 2004.

Code of Practice on Consultation

The code sets out the approach that the British Government will take when entering into a formal written, public consultation exercise. It recognises that effective consultation brings to light valuable information that allows governments to make informed decisions on matters of policy, to improve the delivery of public services, and the accountability of public bodies - ultimately resulting in the design of more effective solutions. HM Government, United Kingdom, 2008.

Engaging Citizens in Policy-making: Information, Consultation and Public Participation

This paper outlines reasons for governments to strengthen their relationships with citizens and gives 10 guiding principles for successful information delivery and consultation by government.

Focus on Citizens: Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services

Complex policy issues cannot be solved by government alone. People have a major role to play in ensuring high-quality public services economically and achieving shared public policy goals. This book explores how OECD governments are putting the principles of open and inclusive policy making into practice, and how they can ensure broader, more inclusive, participation?
The content is based on a survey of governments in 25 countries, 14 in-depth country case studies and 18 opinion pieces from leading civil society and government practitioners. It includes 10 guiding principles to support open and inclusive policy making and service delivery in practice. OECD - Organisation for Economic and Co-operative Development, 2009.

**Fostering Canadians’ Role in Public Policy: A Strategy for Institutionalizing Public Involvement in Policy**

This report discusses the benefits of public engagement along with the areas of concern commonly raised by politicians and policy makers.

It examines methods for overcoming this resistance and the benefits that arise as a result of meaningful public engagement. L. Turnbull and P Aucoin, Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. (CPRN), Ottawa, Canada, 2006.

**Happiness and Economics: How the Economy and Institutions Affect Well-being**


**Participation Nation: Reconnecting Citizens to the Public Realm**

This paper is divided into three parts and looks at how policy making can benefit from public engagement. The first part deals with the impacts public engagement can have on policy making and how it can be built into the policy-making process.

In particular it looks at the areas of social cohesion, educational attainment and climate change. The second section looks at how public servants are dealing with public engagement, while the third section looks at how public engagement is impacting on public service providers and public servants themselves. Creasy, S (Ed) (2007). United Kingdom: Involve

**Politics Is About Relationship: A Blueprint for the Citizens’ Century**

This book considers the role of citizens working with politicians to bring about change.


**Resource Guide on Public Engagement**

The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) is an active network and community of practice centred around conflict resolution and public engagement practices. The NCDD compiled this guide as a companion to a 2010 series of events designed to connect practitioners, public managers and community leaders to build local capacity in quality public engagement. Showcasing NCDD’s best work (like the Core Principles for Public Engagement and the Engagement Streams Framework), the guide also recognises a lot of the great work done by others in this field. The guide shares stories and resources with the dialogue and deliberation community, public managers, and anyone else with an interest in public engagement. USA, 2010.