Government agencies must take action both at the planning level and in their day-to-day activities to involve communities in policy-making and service delivery.

**Ready Reference Engagement Guide**

Supporting government agencies to engage effectively with citizens and communities.

This guide is for public servants at all levels who interact with communities. If you are new to working with communities, this guide will help you learn about organising consultation processes, working in partnership, and building trusting relationships.

**Planning actions**

Government agencies need to take a systematic approach in their relationships with the community and voluntary sector. This starts with planning processes and includes the sharing of information.

**Identify ‘champions’ for the sector**

Identify ‘champions’ for the community and voluntary sector within your agency. The role of the champion is to ensure the interests of sector organisations are represented in:

- policy planning and service delivery
- any agency activities in common areas of interest
- any reports provided on the quality of the agency’s community-government relationships.

An agency may consider setting up a stakeholder engagement unit to provide support to staff dealing with NGOs.

**Key questions in the planning cycle**

Consider the following key questions to help your agency determine the extent to which relationships with community and voluntary sector organisations have been incorporated in planning processes.

- How does a relationship with community and voluntary sector organisations contribute to your agency’s ‘vital few’ outcomes?
- What is the logic chain in your agency’s planning process that supports the need for a relationship with sector organisations?
- How has your agency assessed its capability and responsiveness to working with sector organisations?
- How does your agency know whether or not its relationship with community and voluntary sector stakeholders has been improved/strengthened?

You also need to ask:

- What joint initiatives has your agency undertaken with other government agencies to establish shared targets, such as more flexible use of funding for community and voluntary sector and Māori organisations?
- Has your agency addressed the need to share outcomes with other government agencies? What difference did that make to working with community and voluntary and Māori?

- What action plans have been developed by your agency to ensure you have department-wide access to good information about organisations in your sphere of interest?

Information in this section has come from the State Services Commission publication

**Managing for Outcomes: Guidance for Departments**

**Review your policy development guidelines**

Resources and manuals, such as policy handbooks, should be reviewed to ensure they cover effective participatory processes, taking into account the guidelines provided on this site.

If your agency’s guidelines for developing quality policy advice do not explicitly encourage the development of active relationships, consider revising them.

But don’t duplicate guidance already available - the Policy Development Toolkit on the Public Sector Intranet, the New Zealand Cabinet Manual and the CabGuide offer a wealth of advice and instruction.

Some departments have developed their own policy development guidelines (e.g. the Ministry of Social Development) or stakeholder engagement toolkits (e.g. Ministry for the Environment), so it can be useful to liaise with other agencies to benefit from their experience and resources, and save duplicating effort.

**Policy Development Toolkit**

**CabGuide**

**New Zealand Cabinet Manual**
Policy on volunteering by staff

Volunteering by staff builds goodwill between government and community, and strengthens communities. Staff also benefit, gaining experience that is valuable in their paid work.

Your agency may have a volunteering policy as part of a wider policy on work/life balance. Collective or individual employment agreements may include relevant provisions.

Keep in mind that potential conflicts of interest or compromising situations will need to be managed. (See your agency’s conflict of interest policy or refer to the State Services Commission’s resource kit, Walking the Line.)

Department of Labour on work/life balance
State Services Commission’s Walking the Line: Managing Conflicts of Interest

Basing policy staff in the community

Consider basing policy staff within the community, as opposed to centralised agency offices. This may be a way to improve communication with community, voluntary, iwi and Māori organisations.

For example, consider:

- placing policy staff in a regional office (short- or long-term) where they can work effectively with community groups
- secondments or short-term placements with community organisations
- allocating staff some time each week to work with a community organisation.

Staff secondments to community groups can be assisted by using the:

Department of Internal Affairs’ Community Internship Programme

Planning for a specific project or piece of policy development

The information regarding levels of participation, working with specific groups and techniques may be helpful in deciding the way forward for a particular project or policy development process.

However, if you are completely unsure where to start, try the interactive People and Participation Process Planner online. Developed by Involve UK, it will help you get to grips with all the factors you need to consider when planning your approach to engaging with your communities.

People and Participation.net Process Planner

Developing a strategy for participation

Good progress can be made if community-government relationships are addressed at the policy and planning level, and in practice.

Specific actions to achieve change

- Adopt a systematic approach to community-government relationship planning within the agency’s work to develop its Statement of Intent.
- Map the agency’s relationships with community and voluntary organisations.
- Integrate, as appropriate, the Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship into annual and strategic plans.
- Ensure that commitments contained within the Statement of Government Intentions and the Government Policy on Volunteering are communicated and supported throughout the agency from management through to community based service-delivery staff.
- Build strong internal communications systems so that lessons about successful participatory processes can be disseminated across the agency.
- Set up external communications systems that support active relationships with community, voluntary, iwi and Māori organisations.
- Build on other agencies’ experiences when working with community and voluntary sector organisations.
- Review HR strategies at regular intervals to ensure that they recognise and support the kinds of skills that enhance relationships with communities.

Human resources strategies to improve community relations

Staff working with NGOs need to understand the importance of public participation in government decision-making and have good relationship-management skills.

Competencies for staff who work with the public

In 2009, the Building Better Government Engagement project identified the characteristics of employees who engage effectively, and proposed these could guide agency recruitment, induction and staff development.

Individual strengths will vary, but teams who are involving community groups in their work will collectively need the following competencies.

Policy development skills

Staff need to be able to:

- identify key community, voluntary, iwi and Māori organisations relevant to their work area
- develop an ongoing relationship with key people in these groups to facilitate communication and cooperation
- identify mechanisms for successful collaboration with Māori, women, Pacific people, ethnic groups, children and young people, people with disabilities, and local authorities
• plan how to involve community, voluntary, iwi and Māori organisations in policy development and review, starting early in the process
• articulate and persuade others of the benefits of effective participation, and negotiate an agreed approach
• establish formal consultation processes
• identify and respond to opportunities to develop partnerships with community, voluntary, iwi and Māori organisations

Communication skills
Staff need to be able to:
• facilitate meetings with community, voluntary, iwi and Māori organisations, making sure the purpose of the meeting is clear, the agenda is agreeable to all parties, all views are aired, and clear conclusions are reached
• engage respectfully and constructively in dialogue so that community, voluntary, iwi and Māori organisations consider they have been heard and understood
• present information orally and in written form in a straightforward and clear manner
• take accurate notes at meetings and provide feedback to those who attend
• use conflict-resolution skills.

Service delivery skills
Staff need to be able to:
• establish and foster a client focus
• identify and communicate to government what clients need from their services
• recognise and optimise opportunities to engage with the public
• assist community-driven services where these services support public sector goals and objectives
• identify and negotiate resources needed for consultation, partnerships, and community-driven development to achieve effective service delivery
• identify situations that would benefit from the help of an external facilitator.

Relationships with Māori
Staff need to:
• demonstrate an understanding of tikanga and kaupapa Māori
• build active relationships with iwi and Māori organisations
• develop consultation processes appropriate for iwi and Māori organisations
• respond appropriately to opportunities to develop partnerships with iwi and Māori organisations.

Specific skills for management
In addition to the above skills, managers should:
• show leadership in developing relationships between the agency and key community representatives
• ensure sufficient resources are available to enable appropriate participatory processes
• support staff in establishing and developing participatory processes.

Recruitment and induction
When recruiting staff to work with community, voluntary, iwi and Māori organisations, advertise widely and think laterally. Consider using a community group newsletter or sending an email through community networks.
If you have not already done so, you might appoint a relationship specialist to advise staff and manage the agency’s community relationships.
As appropriate, include selection criteria in your advertising, such as:
• experience with community, voluntary, iwi and Māori organisations
• communication skills such as facilitation, mediation and conflict resolution
• experience in developing and facilitating active relationships with communities.

Developing and assessing staff skills
You may need to build the relationship-management or facilitation skills of staff who work with community, voluntary, iwi and Māori organisations.
Help is available from:
• your HR team
• the People and Organisation Development network on the Public Sector Intranet
• the Public Sector Training Organisation - The Skills Organisation (Formerly Learning State)
• training brokers such as The Training Network or The Training Line
The performance-appraisal process for staff working with community groups should include a focus on their public-participation skills.
This process may involve:
• asking policy and service-delivery staff to provide evidence of their competence in participatory processes
• taking into account skills that staff have acquired through work in the community or through specialist courses (e.g. in facilitation or conflict resolution) in performance assessments

Good Practice Participate
• seeking feedback from community representatives about the quality of relationships built with staff.

The Skills Organisation (Formerly Learning State)

People and Organisation Development Network

Communicating within your agency

A government agency needs to signal, throughout the agency, its intentions to establish good relationships with the community and voluntary sector.

Commitment at senior management level is critical to maintaining momentum in the work to improve community-government relationships. Part of this involves good internal communications.

To ensure your agency really supports public participation:

• Model appropriate participatory approaches within your agency, for instance, by involving staff in the development of human resources policies.

• Create opportunities for staff to discuss their work informally, eg, at tea breaks or other informal meetings.

• Use agency intranet for bulletins and exchanges of information between staff.

• Develop strategic planning processes that involve interested parties, both internal and external.

• Introduce internal reporting systems whereby service delivery staff, policy staff and management routinely communicate with one another about issues identified through community relationships.

• Develop reporting systems to feed information gained through active relationships with communities through to senior staff and government ministers.

• Provide media training for key staff involved in community initiatives.

• Provide ‘plain English’ courses for staff writing proposals, reports and evaluations.

• Respond to community enquiries promptly and courteously.

• Ensure effective links between communications and policy staff to allow prompt responses to media enquiries.

Related resources for building government capability

This is a list of additional reading and resources for those who are starting to plan their participation processes.

Global trends in public participation

The United States' Open Government Directive

In 2009, the White House’s Office of Management and Budget sent a directive to the head of every federal department and agency instructing them to take specific actions to open their operations to the public. The three principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration are at the heart of this directive.

• Transparency promotes accountability.

• Participation allows members of the public to contribute ideas and expertise to government initiatives.

• Collaboration improves the effectiveness of government by encouraging partnerships and co-operation.

The directive includes deadlines for action (some within 45 days), and is part of the US Open Government Initiative, which started as a result of President Obama’s Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government.

Government Actions to Build Strong Community Relationships

In August 2009, Cabinet agreed to a work programme of activities to strengthen community-government relationships, in response to the paper Government Commitment to Building Strong Community Relationships [SOC Min (09) 31/5A refers].

The paper was a response to reports by the Association of Non-Governmental Organisations of Aotearoa (ANGOA) and the Building Better Government Engagement reference group. The table outlines progress with actions outlined in SOC Min (09) 31/5A. This was circulated to Cabinet Social Policy Committee members by the Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector in January 2011.

Public services and civil society working together: Promising ideas for effective local partnerships

This report gives anecdotal and empirical evidence to suggest outcomes are improved when public services and civil society work hand in hand. It develops five new ways to do just that - from community entrepreneurs to asset sharing, new performance measures to community dividends. Young Foundation, United Kingdom, 2010.

Resource Guide on Public Engagement

The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCD) is an active network and community of practice centred around conflict resolution and public engagement practices. Its more than 1,300 members help people work together across partisan, ethnic and other divides to address today’s toughest problems. NCD provides much-needed support, connections, and resources. This guide features some of the best resources developed collaboratively by the NCDD community, and guides you to many others. USA, 2010.
Planning for participation resources

Active Learning to Improve Public Participation

The aim of this project was to help the Department of Conservation improve the way in which it plans for and seeks public input into the review of statutory management plans, by modelling best professional practice and using critical reflection. This included a cycle of action, reflection and assessment of the way in which the Department plans for and enables public involvement in the statutory review of Conservation Management Strategies. New Zealand, 2010.

Community Participation Toolkit: A Resource for Primary Health Organisations

This toolkit is designed to assist primary health organisation boards, staff, member organisations and communities to review their levels of participation and record their progress. It is intended to be of practical use to people at all levels of the health sector. The toolkit is available for $25 from the Department of Public Health, University of Otago Wellington, PO Box 7343, Wellington South. By P Neuwell, Steele Roberts Ltd, Wellington, New Zealand, 2007.

Engage for Change: The Role of Public Engagement in Climate Change Policy

This document is made up of two papers – Engagement and the Policy-making Process and Engagement and the Civil Service. The first paper looks at how engagement with the public has impacted on the policy process while the second paper looks at the willingness of those working in central and local government to engage with the public. There is general discussion on how public engagement activities can be built into the policy process and suggests some methods for doing this. While this report focuses on climate change the ideology can be adapted to all types of policy making and public engagement. S Creasy, K Gavelin, H Fisher, L Holmes, and M Desai. Involve, United Kingdom, 2007.

Factors for Successful Coordination - A Framework to Help State Agencies Coordinate Effectively

This State Services Commission framework helps agencies plan co-ordinated activities. It groups nine success factors according to three dimensions: Mandate, Systems and Behaviours. Ensuring these factors are in place over time will help agencies co-ordinate more effectively and achieve success together. Many of the principles are applicable to any co-ordinated or collaborative activity, including those with the community and voluntary sector. SSC, New Zealand.

Government-Community Engagement: Key Learning and Emerging Principles

This paper from the Community Economic Development Action Research (CEDAR) Project covers processes for engaging with communities, key challenges in building a meaningful relationship with communities/community groups and emergent principles of engagement that can be considered in future work. Produced by the Department of Labour, New Zealand, 2002-03.

Interactive Process Planner - People and Participation

The People and Participation Process Planner is an interactive tool to help those seeking to engage with the public. The Process Planner can help you select participatory methods based on your specific circumstances (e.g. objectives, budget, timeframes, etc). The interactive tool is supported by the broader website, which provides a comprehensive methods database, covering traditional and innovative approaches to public participation from around the world and a selection of case studies, enabling site users to post their own stories to inspire others.

Managing for Outcomes: Guidance for Departments

This State Services Commission guidance outlines the expectations of departments in adopting a more strategic and outcomes-focused approach to management and reporting.

Nelson Marlborough DHB community involvement policies

A suite of policies outlines the various ways in which the Board and the community work together. An overarching Community Involvement policy outlines how NMDHB keeps the community informed, facilitates participation in planning and funding decisions.

Public Deliberation: A Manager’s Public Officials and Community Involvement in Local Services


Turning Principles into Action: A Guide for Local Authorities on Decision-making and Consultation


Developing a strategy

Conservation with Communities Strategy: Working Together for Conservation

This strategy was developed to improve the ability of the Department of Conservation to work with communities to achieve conservation outcomes. New Zealand.

Mosaics – Whakaahua Papariki: Key Findings and Good Practice Guide for Regional Co-ordination and Integrated Service Delivery

Mosaics is a Ministry of Social Development resource to help improve the delivery of public services by offering practical advice on how multiple government and community agencies can better work together. It is a toolkit for central government, local authorities, businesses and communities on
the best ways of working together to achieve common goals. New Zealand, 2004.

Putting citizens at the centre - a short guide for policy-makers

This short summary from the UK Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability links to contemporary policy debates on how citizen participation and engagement can contribute to development, strengthen democratic and responsive states, and help to realise human rights. This policy-makers' guide pulls together key findings from research on participation carried out over the last 10 years.

Strengthening participation: Learning from participants

Understanding the motivations, triggers, barriers and impacts of participation is critical to designing appropriate policies and mechanisms to encourage and sustain citizen involvement. This UK Pathways through Participation project report outlines some of the emerging issues to contribute to current policy debates, and raises a number of questions that will be further explored in the next stages of the project. It highlights 10 key features of participation from the perspective of the individuals participating, and is intended to give plenty of food for thought to current UK debates on the Big Society.

Human resources strategies

Engaging Queenslanders: Managing Community Engagement

This website contains on-line information regarding the Managing Community Engagement programme, which supports the professional development of Queensland public sector managers and others in the field of Community Engagement. It is a useful reference tool when comparing similar programmes available in New Zealand. Department of Communities, Queensland Government, Australia, 2004.

From Seed to Success training manual

Produced to support the Department of Conservation’s volunteer programme, this manual covers planning a project, working well as a group, checking progress and taking stock. You can access the manual from the DOC case study on this website. New Zealand, 2008.

Communicating - overseas resources

Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together: A Pioneering Approach to Communicating in Business and in Life


In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life

This discussion on ways to improve civic communication is based on the author’s view that modern life (in North America) is more complex and requires a different set of skills than more traditional societies. He suggests an approach that is based on recognising the other person’s view of the world as a way to transform the relationship. R Kegan, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, USA, 1994.

International Association for Public Participation

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an association of members who seek to promote and improve the practice of public participation in relation to individuals, governments, institutions, and other entities that affect the public interest. An Australasian chapter exists, with a New Zealand branch now emerging. IAP2 runs a number of courses and events that can help people to upskill in this area.

Other overseas resources

A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue: Building on An Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector

This Code was developed by the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector as a tool for deepening the dialogue between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector at the various stages of the public policy process in order to achieve better policies for Canadians.

Argentine Network for International Cooperation (RACI)

RACI consists of non-governmental, non-partisan, and non-profit organisations that seek to transform the social reality of Argentina through collective action.

It is a group of Argentine civil society organisations (CSOs) that promotes and encourages international co-operation in its three levels: state to state, foreign state to local CSOs, and foreign CSOs to local CSOs. The objective is to promote human, economic, social, and political development and the environmental care of the country.

The Consultation Institute

This organisation seeks to promote the highest standards of public, stakeholder and employee consultation by initiating research, publications and specialist events in order to disseminate best practice and improve subsequent decision making. The website contains a number of useful resources and it is also possible to sign up for an e-letter. USA.

Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook for Practitioners

This handbook is intended for people who are involved in organising, facilitating or promoting dialogue work. It is designed to inform thinking about how to address particular problems and/or when dialogue might be needed. It documents participatory processes that have produced results.
It is written in such a way that it can be used by experienced practitioners and those new to participatory democracy. B Pruitt and P Thomas, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), International Idea, the Organisation of American States (OAS), the General Secretariat of the OAS (GS/OAS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2004.

Effective Engagement

This Victorian Government web resource is for facilitators of projects involving community and other stakeholders. It is aimed at better project outcomes, improved community relationships and better understanding of community issues. There is an Effective Engagement Toolkit and Planning Tool to download. Australia.

Engaging Queenslanders: A Guide to Community Engagement Methods and Techniques

This publication is an introduction to the various traditional and innovative techniques that can be employed when planning citizen engagement. It has been designed as a guide for decision makers at all levels who want to choose the most appropriate community engagement process. Department of Communities, State of Queensland, Australia, 2005.

Joint Targets

Joint working can help to improve the delivery of public services, many of which require Departments to work across organisational boundaries. This report assesses how five government departments in Britain sought to work together to deliver one or more joint targets. It looks at the extent to which they developed shared objectives, planned their approach, determined resource allocations and worked together to implement, monitor and report progress. United Kingdom.

Millions of Voices: A Blueprint for Engaging the American Public in National Policy-Making

This article outlines the steps necessary for a nationwide discussion on a topic of substantial interest to a large number of citizens such as inadequate housing or climate change. It covers the three critical stages of framing the issue, convening the national discussion and presenting the findings to the decision-makers. J Goldman, United States of America, 2004.


This report documents a spectrum of tools and techniques developed largely in the non-profit world in recent years to increase citizens’ involvement in their communities and government. It also highlights ways in which public managers can develop an active approach to increasing citizens’ involvement in government at all levels.