

A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making

February 2023



Co-produced by the Department of Rural and Community Development with Pobal, Community Work Ireland (CWI), and the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)

Supported by the Dormant Accounts Fund



An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and Community Development



We developed this guide as part of a Dormant Accounts-funded project. The purpose of the project is to enhance the capacity of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) to engage marginalised groups in Local Economic and Community Planning (LECP) processes.

This project fulfils an important objective in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*, the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. It also supports Ireland's commitment to Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the principle of 'Leave no one behind'.

The Department of Rural and Community Development initiated this project in collaboration with Pobal.



The Guide has been written using plain English.

Acknowledgements

The Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal would like to thank all those who collaborated in the development of this resource guide, including Community Work Ireland and the Irish Local Development Network. Sincere thanks also to the several organisations that generously contributed their time, providing input and useful feedback to the document, including the following:

Ballyhoura Development

Clare Engagement pilot project team: Clare LCDC, Clare PPN, Clare LDC
Clare and Limerick ETB

The Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI)

Fingal Engagement pilot project team: Fingal LCDC, LGBT Ireland

Galway City Engagement pilot project team: Galway City LCDC,
Galway City Community Network

The Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI)

The Independent Living Movement of Ireland (ILMI)

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC)

Pavee Point

Sligo Public Participation Network (PPN)

South Tipperary Local Development Company (STLDC)

Wicklow Engagement pilot project team: Wicklow LCDC, Wicklow PPN

As part of the Dormant Accounts-funded project to enhance Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) capacity to engage marginalised groups in Local Economic and Community Planning (LECP) processes, four LCDCs are currently undertaking pilot projects to achieve meaningful participation of marginalised groups in their LECP processes. After these pilot projects end, we will update this guide to include further case studies and to share learning. Version 2 of the Resource Guide will be released in mid-2023.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AIEB	The All-Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training
CRF	Community Response Forum
DAFEP	Dormant Accounts Fund Engagement Project
DPER	The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
ETB	Education and Training Board
HPSC	Health Protection Surveillance Centre
IHREC	The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
ILMI	Independent Living Movement of Ireland
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LDC	Local Development Company
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
NDA	National Disability Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPN	Public Participation Network
SICAP	The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
STDC	South Tipperary Development Company
TRTP	Tipperary Rural Traveller Project

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About this guide

This guide is designed to support local consultation and engagement processes, including: planning, implementation (putting processes in place) and review. It focuses on engaging marginalised communities and the organisations that represent them. The engagement processes we are talking about in this guide can be about a policy, strategy or plan, an evaluation or decision.



Who is this guide for?

This guide is for any organisation that is committed to inclusive local decision-making and service provision. This includes:

- local authorities
- public sector bodies
- any organisation or community group



You can use the guide to identify who should be involved in local consultation and engagement processes; and to make sure that the community engagement process is meaningful and effective.

Nine main principles

This guide provides the nine principles you should use to include the community during engagement. This will make sure the process is:

1. Genuine
2. Purposeful
3. Planned
4. Clear
5. Inclusive
6. Collaborative
7. Accountable
8. Accessible
9. Fit for purpose



Case studies

We have included case studies in this guide and they show how to put these principles into practice.

Three core phases

The guide tells you about the core principles that should guide any engagement process. It provides practical advice for the three phases of engagement:

- **planning** (see page 18)
- **implementation (putting the process in place)** (see page 36)
- **review** (see page 42)

It also includes handy checklists you can use for each phase (see Appendix 2 on page 59).

Why have community engagement when making decisions?

Public participation is vital for decision-making

Public participation can:

- produce better policies
- strengthen democracy
- build trust.¹

Encouraging and fostering public participation can help people who find it difficult to get involved due to things like language barriers, literacy challenges, disability, poverty or discrimination. By doing so, they can contribute to and influence the decisions that affect their lives.²

Engagement fosters long-term trusting relationships between communities and any local statutory or non-statutory people or groups that serve them.³



Community engagement is efficient and effective

Avoids waste

When communities take part in decision-making, community engagement can prevent waste of resources or efforts due to mistaken assumptions when making decisions.

It also means that projects and initiatives are more likely to work as everyone affected is involved at all stages.

Keeps the community involved

If you involve the community from the beginning, they are more likely to become engaged with the process as it progresses.

Reduces conflict

When people are engaged in planning and decision making it can increase their ownership of the outcomes. This also helps to reduce the likelihood of conflict about decisions made.

Is open, honest and accountable

The decision is more likely to be implemented effectively and efficiently if the decision-making process is open, honest and accountable.⁴



1 OECD Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions, 2020 / : <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/innovative-citizen-participation-new-democratic-institutions-catching-the-deliberative-wave-highlights.pdf>

2 Scottish National Standards for Community Engagement

3 www.commonplace.is

4 Working Group Report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government February 2014



Public bodies should engage with community

All public bodies in Ireland have a legal responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans.

This is known as the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.⁵ IHREC recommends that a consultative approach helps to deepen the evidence base available to the public body, for effectively putting the Public Sector Duty in place.



Most important to include those most marginalised.

Effective and meaningful participatory planning depends on the involvement of those whose voices are most marginalised. These are the people who experience a severe impact from decisions that fail to consider their experiences and concerns. Therefore, it is critical that policy and planning processes are systematically inclusive and participative. This will make sure that marginalised and disadvantaged communities and their representative organisations have a strong and equal voice.

Inclusive community engagement results in far better outcomes for the process, agencies concerned and the community.

Ideally, this requires dedicated time, funding and skilled staff. Even if you have limited resources, we hope this guide can serve as a useful starting point.

⁵ The Public Sector Duty is contained in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. For more information, go to [IHREC-Tool-for-a-Consultative-Approach.pdf](#)

How to create an inclusive environment for disabled people

From the Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI)

Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2018. Ireland's obligations under the UNCRPD are to make sure that the State invests in policies, practices and supports to include disabled people in society as equals. In practice, this means full and effective participation of disabled people in the design, delivering and monitoring of policy at a local, regional and national level.

Our perspective on disability will influence how we approach it in planning and decision-making processes.

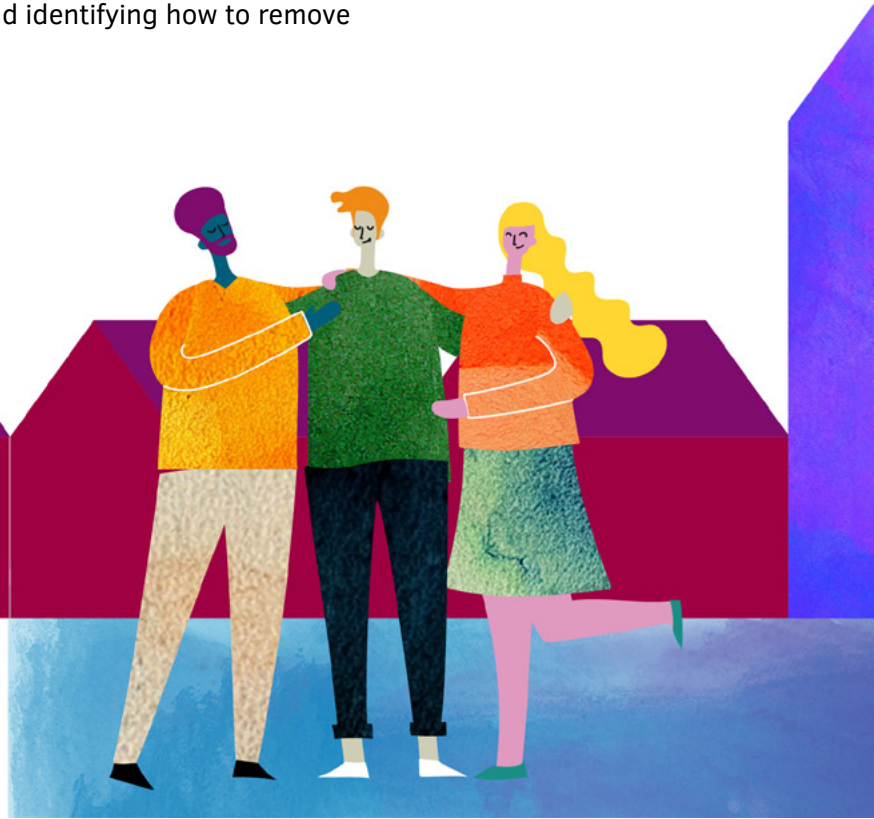
The dominant medical model of disability tends to focus on people's impairments from a medical perspective. It may look at what is wrong with the person and not what the disabled person needs to take part in society.

The social model of disability flips that perspective, looking at how society is organised and how it disables people. It is not based on a person's impairment, but it focuses on the barriers that exist like:

- attitudes
- policy development processes
- access or lack of supports.

These barriers prevent people from taking part in society as equals, with choice and control over their own lives.

Social model language uses the term 'disabled people' as opposed to 'people with disabilities' recognising that it is societal barriers that disables people (see the **NDA Advice paper on Disability Language and Terminology**). At its core, the social model is about social change and identifying how to remove the barriers that disable people.



LCDCs, local authorities and indeed any organisation can contribute to developing policies and structures that promote inclusion based on social model thinking. To engage disabled people in planning and decision making on issues that affect their lives:

Support spaces

Recognise the need for and support spaces for disabled people to work collectively together. These spaces help analyse the issues that we face and strategise on how we want to address these.

Support developing local Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs)

DPOs are led by and for disabled people. They work on a cross-impairment basis with disabled adults. They bring disabled people together to create a more inclusive, and equal society. DPOs should be the go-to body that statutory and non-statutory organisations engage with, as the voice of the lived experiences of disabled people.

How people think about disability

We need to explore how everyone taking part in a planning, evaluating or decision-making process thinks about disability. This might be done through disability equality training delivered by local or national DPOs.

For more details email: info@ilmi.ie





Nine principles for inclusive community engagement

There are nine main principles to use when carrying out local planning and making decisions. We show how to put those principles into practice through the three phases of engagement and consultation. We also use three case studies as examples.



Nothing About Us Without Us

'Nothing About Us Without Us' is a powerful phrase originally coined by the Disability Rights Movement. It is a helpful watchword for any decision maker, reminding them that the key principle is that no policy or decision should be made by any representative without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy.

The following are the principles on which you should plan, put in place and review community engagement processes. The focus of the engagement can be a policy, strategy or plan, an evaluation or decision.



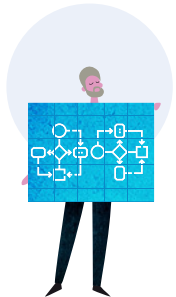
Genuine

A genuine process is respectful and open. This requires commitment and an understanding of the value of community engagement from those leading the process. It avoids a 'tick-box exercise' or a foregone conclusion.



Purposeful

A purposeful process is one that matters. A process that matters is one that is connected to decision making that is informed by what the people you are engaging with said.



Planned

A process should be comprehensively planned. You should use a transparent approach and make sure all stakeholders are engaged in ways that make it possible for them to take part. For example, use plain English in your communications and share the same information.



Clear

You should be committed to making the purpose, scope and possible results of an engagement process clear to everyone involved. This will mean that people are engaging in an informed way.



Inclusive

You should make sure the process includes everyone who is affected by the outcome of the engagement process. You may need to introduce specific interventions and arrangements to make sure you include a diversity of voices.



Collaborative

You should collaborate with other stakeholders when designing the process and putting it in place. This is essential for inclusive community engagement. It enables those taking part to share power.



Accountable

For the process to be accountable, you must be committed to reporting back to stakeholders on what was and was not included in the process as a result of them taking part.



Accessible

To make the process accessible, you need to identify and overcome barriers to engagement.



Fit for purpose

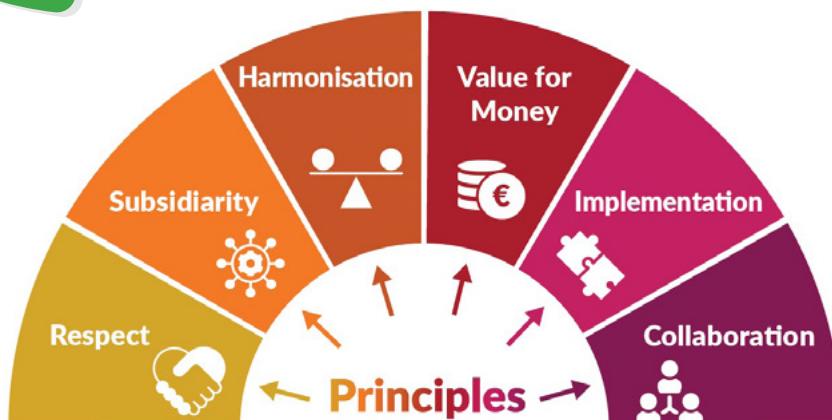
You need to make sure that the scope, approach and methodologies of an engagement process are designed to enable those engaging with the process.

Note:

We have drawn the principles for inclusive community engagement in this guide from several sources, including the *Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector*.⁶

These values include a commitment to participation, inclusion, social justice and empowerment. They provide a foundation for collaboration by:

- local authorities
- public sector bodies
- any organisation or community group
- Government departments and agencies.



6 Department of Rural and Community Development, Government of Ireland, <https://assets.gov.ie/225876/9732c425-65df-4e92-b154-a51ca518b233.pdf>

Putting the principles into practice

This section advises you on how to put the principles of inclusive engagement into practice. It is not a roadmap and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to consultation. You can find your own way of planning and putting in place community engagement in a decision-making process as long as you keep the principles at the heart of your process.

Your engagement process must respond to the context, the participants and the requirements of the proposed policy, strategy, plan, evaluation and decision. It will make it easier for a variety of people to engage if you use a range of processes or ways to get involved. You also need to provide opportunities for people to engage at different times in the day and evening, in different locations and with the option of on-line engagement.

We present the engagement process in three phases.



Three core phases



Remember:

This engagement process may not be a linear process. You may need to go back and forth between phases while you engage with communities. You may need to repeat certain steps, adjusting and adapting engagement plans as you go.



Phase 1:

Planning



- Secure commitment
- Building relationships
- Identify stakeholders and reach out
- Clarify purpose
- Find out what has been asked before, and progress from there
- Co-design an engagement plan
- Engagement plan
- Identify and address barriers to participation
- Common barriers and possible solutions
- Develop information materials

Secure commitment

For a successful consultation process that is connected to decision making, leadership and stakeholders must commit to the process and treat it with respect. You should not assume that this is so.

A genuine engagement

When local outcomes or services are improved as a result of the engagement process, this enhances faith in the process. However, when consultation exercises are poorly focused, rushed or superficial, they may create mistrust, waste people's time and money and undermine future attempts at public engagement.

Involve: People and Participation, How to Put Citizens at the Heart of Decision Making.
(www.involve.org.uk)

Understanding and commitment

Make sure that leadership and everyone concerned understand what is involved in the engagement process. Make sure there is a clear commitment from all.

Involve everyone in design

Aim to co-design initiatives with target groups as far as possible. This may include setting up a project advisory group, with a panel that includes representation from the target community.

Take care to support relationship building and ensure transparency when setting up any advisory or working group or committee. (For example, share the terms of work with all.)

Assess purpose and reach out

Assess the purpose of engagement and those that will be affected. Reach out to relevant local specific-interest groups, in particular organisations representing marginalised groups. Your local PPN, LDC and other community organisations can advise you about the relevant groups in your area.

Consider independent facilitation

Where necessary, consider an independent facilitator for an engagement process to make sure everyone taking part is treated fairly.

Provide training where needed

If necessary, provide training in community engagement to those responsible for the process.

Building relationships

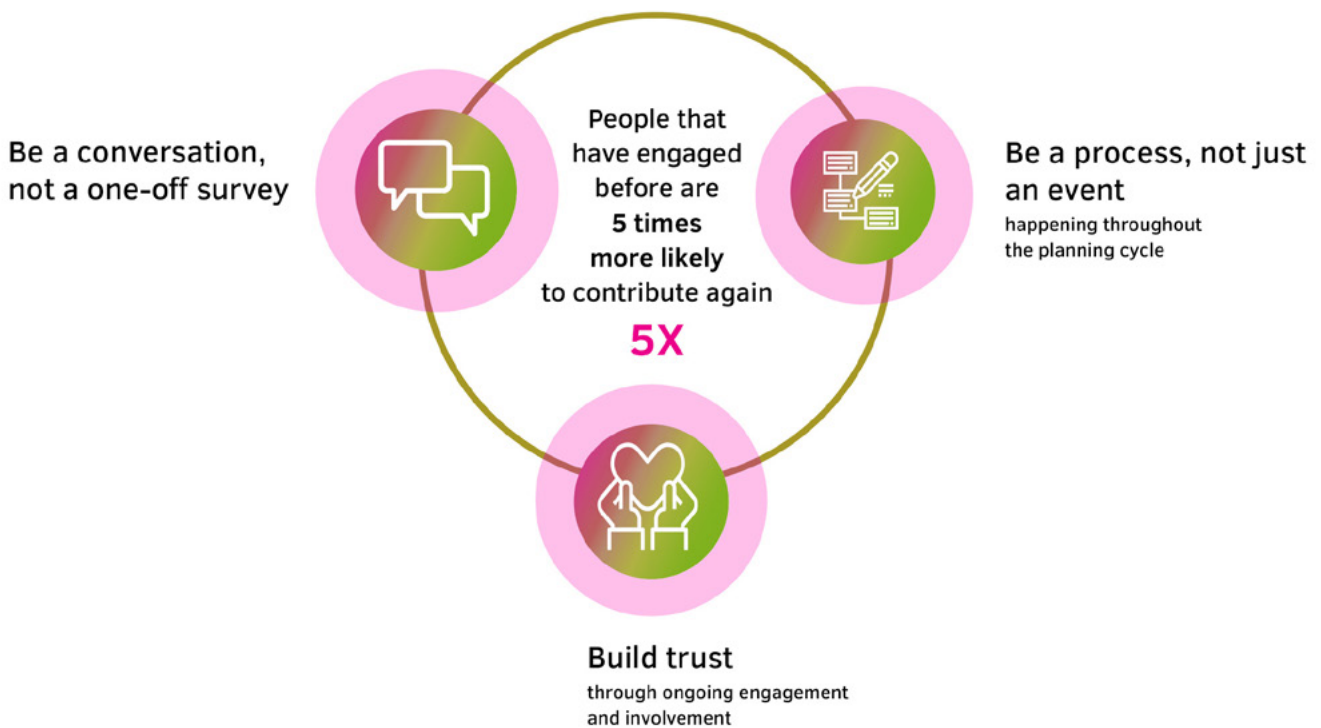
Invest in relationships with the community organisations that represent the target community you wish to engage with. Community and representative organisations are well placed to advise on what type of engagement will work with the communities they represent. This means they should be effective at engaging the community base. They can advise and facilitate engagement but should not be seen as a substitute for engaging the people themselves.

If there has been a history of discord or conflict between the target community and the entity undertaking the engagement, acknowledge that this could be the reason for poor engagement of that community.

Invest time to build good relationships with communities and the organisations that represent them.

Relationships and trust are built over time and longer involvement usually leads to more constructive engagement and more strategically planned projects.

Engagement should be a lasting conversation, not just a one-off survey.



Identify stakeholders and reach out

Involve people from the beginning



Involve the people and groups who are affected by the process from the outset of any planning or decision-making process.

Make sure that a wide range of opinions and perspectives are included and valued in the engagement process.

Find out who needs to be involved



Identify the individuals, communities and representative organisations that need to be involved. Do not rely on existing organised groups only as some marginalised individuals may not be represented by existing organisations.

Make sure relevant people are not left out



Identify those who are under-represented or not represented at all in existing structures and take steps to engage those that are missing. Consider the nine grounds of equality legislation⁷ as well as:

- locality
- socio-economic circumstance
- people at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Make sure to include a diversity of voices.

Use local resources



Use local resources, for example: the PPN, LDC, Family Resource Centre. They can help you to identify stakeholders and to understand any local issues relevant to the engagement at the earliest opportunity.

Prioritise marginal groups



Prioritise targeted consultation of marginalised groups. You need to make particular effort to engage those not included in existing structures.

Enable stakeholders to take part in all areas



Do not restrict stakeholder definition to policies that directly affect them. Ensure the inclusion of marginalised groups in all policy and programme areas. For example, Travellers should not be consulted only on direct Traveller-related issues like Traveller accommodation.

Include other ways of targeting your audience



In addition to the points above, consider other ways to indirectly reach your target audience. For example, advertise through their children's school or sporting activities.

⁷ The nine grounds under equality legislation are gender (including a transgender person or a person who is transitioning to another gender), civil status, family status (including lone parents, carers), age, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community

Public Participation Networks (PPNs)

Public Participation Networks are networks of community, voluntary and environmental organisations and groups. They are established in every local authority catchment area. Most PPNs have linkage groups for key areas like social inclusion, planning and environment. They are sub-groups of PPNs where members focus on a single key area.

The local PPN is an important starting point when you need to engage stakeholders and their representative groups, particularly when you are looking for a broader community engagement process. If the engagement is with a specific target group, for example, Travellers, disabled people or migrants, then their representative organisation should be the first point of call. The PPNs should also be involved.

Engage with the PPN and other existing groupings or support infrastructures. They may also act as a project advisory group that includes representatives of the target communities.



Clarify purpose

Clarify the purpose, scope⁸ and framework of the consultation and communicate it to those engaging with the process. A clear purpose with transparent and realistic expectations for the engagement process is important for everyone involved. It will also be useful for communicating the process as it progresses and as people become involved. Bear the following in mind.

Explain what can be changed



Clarify what can be changed as a result of the process and what cannot.

Specify expected outcomes



Specify what the expected outputs and outcomes of the process are and ask for input into these.

Consider the scope



Consider and specify the scope of the exercise. Will it do the following?

Inform	Is it an information exercise only to inform those affected? (with no influence on the decision)
Consult	Will you engage with those affected, listen to concerns and offer feedback on how their input affected the decision?
Involve	Will people's involvement influence the decision?
Collaborate	Will those affected jointly make the decision with other decision makers?
Empower	Will the exercise enable others to make decisions or take action or both?

Find out what has been asked before, and progress from there

It is important for engagement processes to be well informed and to avoid repetition.

Check with other organisations



When sourcing existing information, check with other relevant people like the PPN, Local Development Companies and representative organisations. This can give you an insight into the needs of the local community across a wide range of sectors and avoid repetition.

Make the most of consultations



Build on consultations that have already taken place. Find out what people have already expressed as priorities or concerns. Make sure consultations are progressing the conversation, rather than going over old ground.

⁸ A useful guide to the different levels of participation is provided at Appendix 3

Co-design an Engagement Plan

Co-design an engagement plan for any planning or decision-making process. This should be done in collaboration with organisations that represent the target communities and with networks like the PPNs.

The engagement plan should take account of the time, skilled staff and resources necessary for meaningful engagement and to build relationships.

It should be fit for purpose and respond to the needs of those involved.

The Engagement Plan should include the following:

- The objective
- Values and outcome
- Names of communities who will be consulted
- Barriers to participation
- The different ways you will communicate with people
- Timeline
- How information will be used
- How you will facilitate feedback
- The budget



An engagement plan should be a living document with built-in flexibility for unforeseen circumstances, for example, adapting engagement to a virtual format during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Engagement Plan

The objective

The plan should include the objective of the engagement and background information. For example, for a process to develop a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), outline:

- the objective of the LECP
- the general framework
- what it can and cannot address.

Values and outcome

The plan should include the:

- values that will inform the process
- intended outcomes of the process.

Names of communities who will be consulted

The plan should identify the communities that will be consulted.

Engagement **with both** organisations that represent or involve marginalised groups **and** the marginalised people themselves is essential.

Engagement should reach representative organisations and beyond them. Any representative organisation involved should make sure that communities are reached directly.

Barriers to participation

The plan should identify the potential barriers to taking part and plan to address these barriers – see the section below for more on this.

How information will be used

The plan should include an outline of how the information gathered will be used.

The different ways you will communicate with people

The plan should include multiple forms and channels for input, including the opportunity for:

- written submissions
- surveys
- in-person and online opportunities to engage in focus groups, roundtables and workshops.

For example, the process might start with a survey to generally assess the issues involved and follow up with interviews and a range of targeted focus groups to explore issues in more depth.

Timeline

The plan should include a clear timeline, with enough time and opportunities for the planned engagements. These should be enough to enable meaningful engagement, but also administratively efficient to make sure that the outcome is delivered on time.

How you will facilitate feedback

The plan should include an outline of opportunities to provide feedback and verifications. This will allow you to share progress and receive community guidance on how to improve outreach efforts.

The budget

The plan should include a budget that will cover the costs involved in ensuring full accessibility.



Identify and address barriers to participation

When developing an Engagement Plan, make sure you identify the potential barriers to people taking part and ways to address these barriers. Consult communities and local representative organisations to identify these barriers and to develop mitigation strategies.



Common barriers to participation

Inconvenient meeting times for your target audience

For example, a meeting that takes place during business hours does not suit many community people who work standard hours. Evenings may be difficult for some people because of work or caring obligations, and early morning meetings may not accommodate people with additional support needs. You might also need to avoid holiday times.

Inaccessible meeting locations

Consider issues like physical accessibility and a welcoming environment where people will feel at ease.

Communication

Consider language barriers and literacy issues. Consider if there is sign language interpretation or a hearing-loop system for members of the deaf community.

Care responsibilities

People may not be able to take part because they have childcare or other care responsibilities.

Transportation

People may have no access to transport.

Inadequate notice

Ideally, you should give people two weeks' notice with reminders.

Costs

The cost and time it may take participants to attend meetings is a factor. Where possible, volunteers should not be out of pocket for making these critical contributions.

Lack of confidence or capacity

People may lack the confidence or capacity to take part in an engagement process. Traditional public meetings can be intimidating for some.

Cultural or social norms (customs and rules)

In some situations, cultural or social norms may mean that certain groups such as young people or women are not encouraged to speak or may not be listened to as equals.

Technology skills

People may lack the access or know-how to use the technology required to engage in online consultations.

Social isolation

People who are socially isolated may be left out or unsure how to get involved.

Past disappointments

People may have experienced poor outcomes and lack of action from previous engagement processes.

Relationship history

Past conflict between the entity organising the engagement and the target community may account for poor engagement.

Help to overcome barriers

Provide support to overcome barriers to participation.



The following are some ways to do this.

Hold meetings and consultation events at different times – morning, afternoon and evening – and in a variety of locations.

Advertise the consultation in a variety of ways – depending on the target groups, consider:

- local newspapers
- local radio
- social media
- school or church newsletters.

Make sure that all venues are fully accessible and there are transport options including public transport.

Provide in-person and online opportunities for engagement.

When undertaking online consultation meetings, let people know they may contribute both by chat and by speaking, and that video is optional.

Make sign language interpretation available, where appropriate.

Make language interpretation available for non-English speakers, where appropriate.

Where possible, cover costs and offer some form of recompense for people's time.

Address Power Imbalances

Consciously reflect on the power dynamics in any engagement process. Who makes decisions or controls resources?

Who has information?

Who has local connections, social networks or knowledge of local culture? These may be sources of power imbalance in any interaction.

Ask and address the question: "What can we do to mitigate power imbalances in our engagement processes?"

Make it easy to contribute

Simplify how people can contribute – Remember:

People may be nervous or reluctant to take part if they do not have experience or they cannot make official submissions.

Those leading engagement processes can take steps to make the process as user-friendly and accessible as possible. Use both formal and informal consultation methods to simplify how people can contribute their views. Meetings can be held in different spaces (not always formal meeting rooms) and do not have to have a traditional formal approach to be effective.

Develop information materials

Develop information materials for the engagement process. These include briefing documents, mapping exercises and an outline of the proposals for discussion.

Make sure your information is –

Easy to read



Make information available in easy-to-read, **plain English** and accessible formats. Reduce technical language in documents – professional jargon and acronyms create a barrier for the community and hinders engagement.

Available in relevant languages



Make materials available in the languages of the communities to be consulted.

Communicated in more than one way



Use different ways to communicate information. Consider using audio and video recordings, visuals and other ways to complement written or online materials.

User friendly

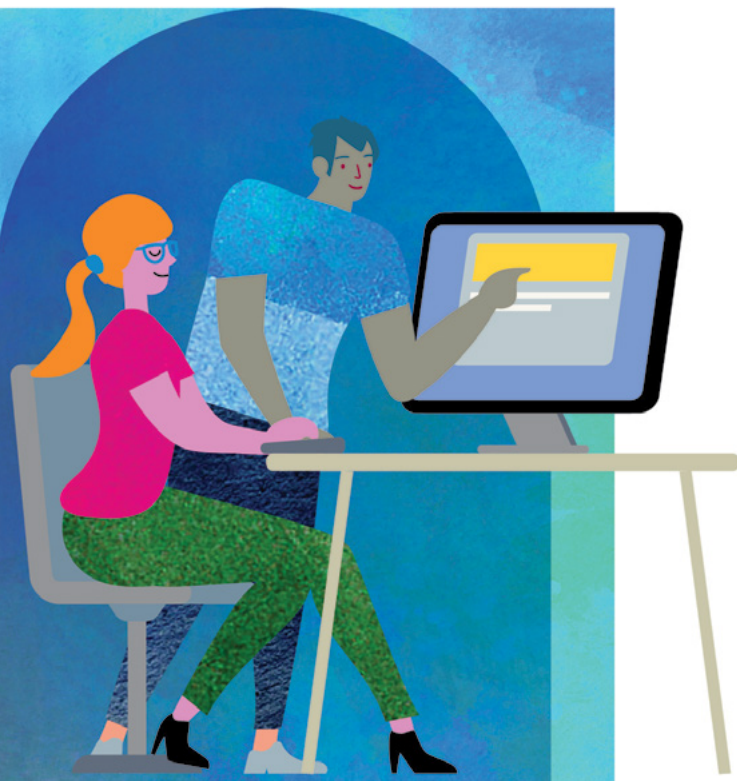


Make meeting materials and content user-friendly – check this with representative organisations.

Referring to a contact person



Identify and communicate details of a contact person. This means people will know who to contact with questions or concerns.







Case study 1:

Wallers Lot Working Group and the Traveller Community

From South Tipperary Development Company

Wallers Lot Working Group is a multi-agency group established by South Tipperary Development Company's (STDC) Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). It was set up to respond to issues affecting the lives of the Traveller community living at Wallers Lot Halting Site in Cashel, Co Tipperary.

Wallers Lot was identified by Tipperary LCDC as a situation where a formal group was needed to facilitate meaningful engagement between the Traveller community living there and the agencies that provide services to the community.

SICAP, as 'an honest broker' was given responsibility by the LCDC for the important task of establishing the group.



Planning was essential

The process for setting up the group was critical to its future working. The SICAP Programme Manager contacted senior decision makers within each agency to explain the scope and purpose of the group. They also wanted to secure commitment from each person to work with the group in an open and agenda-free way.

This one-to-one engagement at senior level proved to be critical in terms of having the right people around the table. Members of the working group include:

- the housing section of Tipperary Local Authority
- Tipperary Rural Traveller Project
- Department of Social Protection
- Gardaí
- Tusla
- HSE
- Tipperary Education and Training Board
- STDC
- Youth Work Ireland

The key to this working group model is the inclusion of the Traveller community as an equal member of the group from the outset. The Traveller community is represented by a Traveller led programme – Tipperary Rural Traveller Project (TRTP). Up to three members of TRTP take part at Working Group meetings.

At the outset, it was decided to appoint an independent facilitator to chair the working group meetings (funded through SICAP). At quarterly informal meetings, the independent facilitator manages what are sometimes difficult and uncomfortable discussions that challenge members.

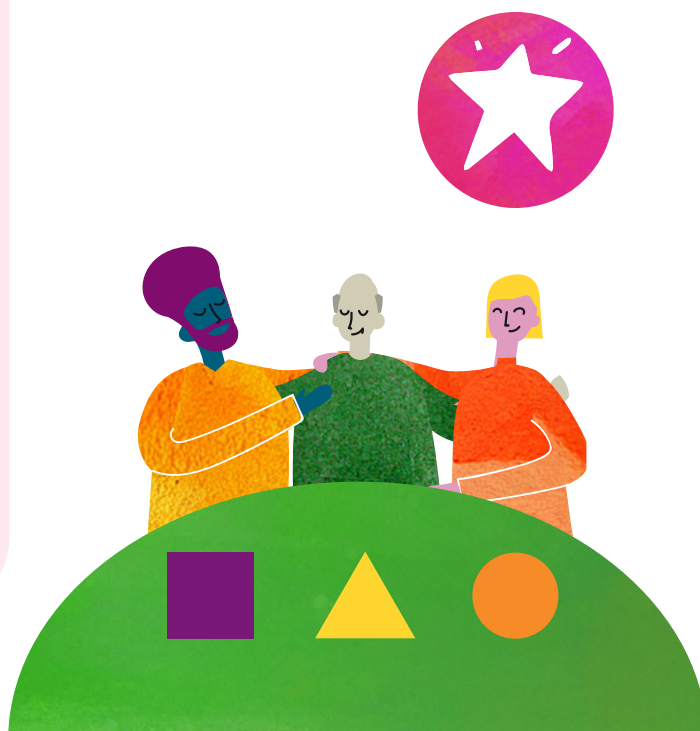
The benefits of planning

These open and often robust discussions have facilitated an understanding and a respect by the agencies and the Traveller community of each other's points of view. They help people to understand the limitations in terms of addressing issues from a human and financial resource perspective.

Over time, formal and informal working relationships have evolved between members of the group. This has made them more able to work together to address the needs of the Traveller community in Wallers Lot.

Lessons from the Wallers Lot Working Group experience emphasise the value of:

- a multi-agency approach with community inclusion from the outset
- a carefully thought-out communication process
- securing buy-in from all stakeholders
- independent facilitation and willingness to confront difficult discussions
- enough time and resources to establish relationships and build trust.





Case study 2:

An Interagency Approach to COVID-19 Healthcare for Travellers and Roma

From Pavee Point

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Pavee Point worked collaboratively with the HSE, Traveller Health Units (THUs) and Traveller organisations and several government departments. The work was done to make sure Travellers and Roma were prioritised in the COVID-19 response. This interagency approach made sure Traveller organisations and organisations working with Roma were involved in the response. It meant that there were changes to policy and service provision which had tangible outcomes.

These included the following:

Testing and vaccination

Travellers and Roma were identified as priority groups for COVID-19 testing and vaccinations. Mainstream and targeted measures were put in place to support access.

Government direction

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage issued a national circular to all local authorities to make sure that emergency facilities and Traveller accommodation were provided so people could self-isolate where necessary.

Eviction ban

There was a national ban on Traveller evictions during the COVID-19 crisis.

Crisis assessment

An ethnic identifier was included in the HPSC database to assess the impact of the crisis on Travellers, Roma and other minority ethnic groups.

Phone hotlines

Dedicated Traveller and Roma COVID-19 phone hotlines were provided.

Traveller representation

There was Traveller representation on local Community Call and Community Response Forums (CRFs).





Lessons Learned:

For effective engagement of Travellers and Roma in planning and decision-making, do the following:

Take a partnership approach

Engage Travellers and Roma early in any process to set the agenda and identify key issues, priorities and solutions.

Understand racism and discrimination

Understand and acknowledge the impacts of racism and discrimination on Travellers and Roma. Incorporate anti-racist approaches into policy, practice and staff training.

Put in place ethnic equality monitoring

This includes collecting ethnic data. Use a human rights framework to:

- identify if there is discrimination
- combat racism
- promote equality.

Analyse data with Traveller organisations and groups working with Roma to monitor progress and provide evidence that shows the need for further action or policy making, or both.

Make sure policies are inclusive

Make sure mainstream policies, processes and services and programmes include the needs of minority groups. Undertake special measures where necessary to address inequality and offset the negative impacts of discrimination.

Ensure adequate resources for effective participation

Effective participation of Travellers and Roma in planning and decision-making needs to be adequately resourced. Make sure that all stakeholders have parity of esteem (are treated equally) and that there is space for capacity building and shared learning for all involved.

Phase 2:

Implementation

(putting the process in place)



Proactive Engagement:

You must take extra steps to encourage people to take part in consultation mechanisms if you want to overcome barriers.

Communicate in a way that attracts participation

Communicate news of an upcoming community engagement process in a way that actively encourages all stakeholders to take part. If you want to remove barriers to people taking part, make it clear to them how they can get involved.



Tell people in advance



Communicate widely that the engagement process is to start. Let people know in plenty of time about the different ways they can take part.

Use lots of different ways to communicate



Use a wide variety of ways to communicate. Tell local organisations, LDCs, PPNs and community hubs about the process so they can let people know how to get involved.

Make sure everyone has the information



Circulate all information materials. Make sure that those who need the information can access it in ways that make it easy for them to take part. Make sure everyone is equally well informed.

Be clear about advantages



Be clear about why potential participants should get involved in consultations.

Make information accessible to all



- Simplify language, or
- produce materials in several languages, or
- make sure they are accessible to those with disabilities, or
- do all of these.

Most effective ways to get people involved

While you may use a variety of approaches, in-person workshops, roundtables and focus groups are the most effective way to build relationships and achieve active engagement and participation.

For specific issues, consider organising a roundtable discussion with organisations representing identified groups and with members of the target community.

Agendas

Discuss and agree agendas with stakeholders before meetings.

Make sure meetings are representative

Make sure that diverse groups are drawn in. This may take some preparatory work before the event.

Accommodate diverse cultures

Be prepared to accommodate diverse cultures in engagement events.

Be fair to everyone

Make sure everyone taking part in the process is:

- treated equally
- being heard
- able to influence in the consultation process and its outcomes.

Be flexible

Make sure that flexibility is built in. You need to do this so that you can respond to new and emerging issues and give those taking part the chance to highlight and prioritise these where appropriate.

Allow enough time

Plan for enough time to avoid rushed events.

Organise multiple ways to engage

To make the process accessible and inclusive, be prepared to organise multiple opportunities for engagement.

Be informed and competent

Make sure that people assigned to facilitate engagement events are fully informed and have the skills and competencies to do this effectively.

Organise feedback

Decide how the feedback and other inputs are to be recorded and collated.

Formal submissions

Formal ways to gather input to a policy, plan or decision, like a written submissions process, may be off-putting for some people. Where possible, combine formal processes with less formal ways of gathering input to encourage people to take part.

Help people with formal processes

Take action to help, encourage and enable people to take part with formal processes – see the previous section on how to address barriers to participation.

Include marginalised groups in networking

Network with organisations and people that are working directly with marginalised communities. They can encourage and enable people to take part in the process.





Case study 3:

Meath Local Economic and Community Planning

From Meath Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)

In 2016, the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) was a new concept for most. The purpose of the LECP is to set out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of a Local Authority area.

Meath County Council and the Meath LCDC developed a process to raise awareness of the LECP, engage stakeholders in identifying local needs and developing an LECP to address them. The development of the LECP was a collaboration between the LECP Advisory Committee, key civil society organisations and the consultants engaged to develop the plan.



Key steps in the process

- A.** Production and wide dissemination of a briefing paper so that all stakeholders could begin to have internal discussions before the official consultation process began. An emphasis was placed on ensuring organisations representing marginalised communities were fully aware of the process.
- B.** Production and agreement of a Socio-Economic Statement developed in collaboration with key stakeholders to be included in the LECP.
- C.** Organisation of consultation workshops on:
 - The main themes of the LECP
 - Area-based workshops
 - Development of an Equality and Human Rights Statement
 - Issues for equality, environmental and youth networks.

Workshop reports were circulated to all participants with an opportunity to clarify or amend. Written submissions were also accepted.

The LECP was drafted based on this wide consultation process. A draft plan was considered by the LECP Advisory Committee, the LCDC, the Economic Strategic Policy Committee and the County Meath PPN.



Lessons Learned:

The following were key to the success of the consultation process

Collaboration:

It was collaboratively designed, drawing on the experience of organisations in the area.

Communication:

It was widely publicised, with significant emphasis on actively encouraging engagement by organisations representing a diversity of communities including Travellers, migrants, women, older people, people in rural areas and young people.

Information:

Engagement was informed by the briefing paper, so participants were aware of the context and purpose of engagement.

Variety of ways to engage:

There were a variety of ways to engage, including making written submissions and participation in a variety of workshops held at different times of the day and in different locations.

Feedback:

Feedback was provided to participants with the opportunity to make changes to plans.



Phase 3:

Review



Verification – check with those taking part

Check back with those taking part in the project about what they heard during the process. A ‘you said-we heard’ exercise is a way for decision makers to verify their interpretation and build a shared understanding of the key issues. Do this in follow-up workshops, or by sending a draft report for comment, or both. Tell people how long they have to respond and the different ways they can use to respond.



Taken from National Disability Insurance Agency, Australia – example from their Consultation Summary Report for development of a home and living policy: [Home and living consultation summary report | NDIS](#)

Feedback is essential

You must make sure any consultation is followed by a feedback process to explain what is happening as a result of the consultation. In subsequent processes, lack of feedback can contribute to frustration, consultation fatigue and poor engagement among communities.

To prevent that, follow up with communities to manage expectations and avoid disillusionment.

Feedback on what was included and why, and what was not included and why is essential to make sure that people remain engaged and feel that their contribution was valued.

If decision-makers are limited about the information they can share, they should try to communicate how much they can and cannot respond to issues raised by communities.

Where a public body is involved, explain the body's role as a decision maker, in terms of final responsibility for the decision. However, you should follow the principles set out here, particularly around feedback.

Be accurate with feedback

Make sure feedback truly represents the range of views expressed during the engagement process.

Manage expectations

Be clear if and when issues raised will not be addressed, and the reasons why.

Use multiple ways to communicate

Use a variety of communication channels to provide feedback, for example, give feedback:

- in a report
- using social media
- through a meeting.

Include enough time and ways for people to respond.

Share with the community how plans are going

As a process progresses, reflect with stakeholders and community members on how planned engagement is working and how it may be improved, and adapted.⁹

In review workshops or meetings, ask those taking part if there was anything that could have been done better. Plan to address any suggestions at future events.

9 Civicwell

How do you know you have put the principles into action?

To find out whether a planning or decision-making process has been inclusive of marginalised and disadvantaged groups or not, consider the following questions.

Was there leadership commitment?



Was the leadership committed to proactively involving marginalised communities and representative organisations in the engagement process?

Were stakeholders included?



Were stakeholders included from the start of the process and informed about the plan?

Was there clear communication?



Was the process clearly planned and communicated to all concerned?

Was there co-design?



Was a comprehensive engagement plan co-designed?

Was there a variety of ways to engage?



Did the process include a variety of ways for people to engage?

Were barriers dealt with?



Were barriers to taking part identified and efforts made to address them?

Were all parts of the community included?



Did marginalised and disadvantaged communities actively contribute to planning and decision making?

Was feedback provided?



Was feedback provided to communities on the findings from the engagement process and information on what would happen next?

Can participants see the results of their engagement?



Can participants see the result of their engagement in the final product?

Were participants valued and heard?



Did feedback from participants show that they felt valued and heard?

Are ongoing mechanisms of engagement in place?



Is there an agreed system in place for ongoing engagement and input into monitoring how the plan is being put in place?



To check if principles of inclusive engagement are being put into action as intended, consider piloting engagement processes to test how they are working in practice before launching. Decision-makers should do ongoing reviews to reflect on how engagement processes are working and whether or not all voices are being heard, as intended.

Resources

Tools for consultation and engagement

Focus groups or themed workshops

Focus groups and themed workshops for stakeholders (people or groups) engage them on a theme or themes. They allow for the in-depth exploration of an issue or issues, identifying problems and engaging participants in suggesting solutions.

Focus groups can encourage different perspectives and are very important in consultation and engagement. Consider targeted workshops, for example with disabled people in their own offices or centre where they feel comfortable, confident and have a sense of ownership.

Interviews

These are useful when a stakeholder is considered to be 'information rich' (knows a lot about the topic in question).

Planning workshops

Planning workshops are useful when the issues have been identified. They also help when the engagement strategy is at the point of finding out what needs to be done to address the issues.

Civil Society Panels

These are useful to bring together representatives of marginalised groups to:

- engage in an ongoing and consistent way with the process
- provide feedback to communities
- ensure cohesiveness and effective engagement in the planning process.

Civil Society Panels can also take part in ongoing engagement and input into monitoring how plans are being put in place.

Surveys

Surveys are used to collect qualitative information (opinion-based information) or quantitative (number-based information).

A survey may focus on opinions, factual information or involve asking individuals questions. Survey questions are usually structured and standardised and are an efficient way of collecting information from a large number of respondents. Though surveys are **not** the same as consultation, they may be useful at the start of the engagement process to help to identify issues and priorities.

Data Collection

Primary data

Primary data is collected by a researcher directly from respondents or participants. It can be customised to the needs of the research and analysed and cross-referenced in different ways. It is generally more up to date than secondary data (sources of information), but can be costly to collect, and it can take time.

Examples of primary data could be from interviews, surveys and so on. Thus, you might gather primary data using different methods (see quantitative and qualitative data examples below).

Secondary data

Secondary data is data that someone else has collected and it is available to the researcher. It is useful as it is readily available at little or no cost. However, it may not be exactly what is required. In addition, the raw (initial) data is generally not available, and this limits analysis. Examples of secondary data include census statistics, research reports and books or other print media.

Quantitative data

Quantitative data is information based on numbers. It is fairly easy to collect and analyse. However, it is restricted to numbers and so it lacks detail and depth.

Examples of quantitative data are population statistics.

Qualitative data

Qualitative data is information from interviews, questionnaires, focus groups and observation. It lends depth as it allows for description and elaboration. However, it can be costly to collect, challenging to analyse and difficult to generalise from the information gathered.

Locally developed resources:

Example 1

100 Ideas to Help Make Sligo More Inclusive



In 2019, Sligo PPN developed a booklet called **100 Ideas to Help Make Sligo More Inclusive**. The resource is aimed at any organisation who wants to improve the way they engage with harder-to-reach sectors of society. It has specific guidance on how to include:

- disabled people
- older people
- the bereaved
- new communities
- homeless people
- people living with dementia
- the LGBTQ+ community
- Travellers
- children
- young people.

The guide encourages actors to recognise that common methods used in consultation processes may serve to exclude certain groups from becoming engaged. It proposes ways to diversify consultation methodologies to give these communities an equal chance to participate. The following is an excerpt from the guide.

OLDER PEOPLE

Sligo is one of the oldest counties in Ireland with 29.5% of the population over the age of 55. This compares to the state average of 24%.

Sligo has a 30% higher proportion of older people living alone than would be expected for its share of the population. 1.79% versus 1.38%.

- 1** Make older people aware that their input and ideas are valued and recognise that their contribution is just as important as everyone else.
- 2** Older people can be busy and members of a range of groups or clubs. Before duplicating engagement, you should first contact key networks such as Active Retirement Ireland, Sligo PPN, Sligo Leader Partnership and Go For Life clubs who offer a great mechanism to tap into a captive audience.
- 3** Send older people a letter inviting them to participate, a personal invitation always works best.
- 4** Consider organising your engagement exercise in partnership with local clubs or organisations, but make sure not to ask too much of people, resources can be limited.
- 5** Provide refreshments at your event, meeting or discussion. Sharing a chat over tea or coffee and food can be a great way to engage older people and create a relaxed environment.
- 6** Some older people may have great stories and experiences, take the time to listen. One-on-one engagement may be the best way to make sure you have the time to hear these stories.
- 7** Choose an appropriate venue for your consultation including one that is located in a familiar, safe setting and that is close to public transport. Always consult with groups such as LocalLink about existing transport routes and make sure the venue has good access and is comfortable.
- 8** Consider the time of day of your event. Evening events may not be appropriate, as some older people may not feel comfortable or safe going out at night.
- 9** Recognise that similar engagement may have happened in the past. There is no point starting from scratch if there have been numerous conversations about the same issue over the years there is a risk of consultation fatigue – this group have heard it all before. Recognise this and explain why this engagement is different and how the outcomes will be used.
- 10** Most likely, language that uses jargon won't be well received by older people. Refer to the "Sligo Making our Written Publications Socially Inclusive Guide" on the internet <http://www.sligoppn.com/useful-information/>

Excerpt from Sligo PPN 100 Ideas to Make Sligo More Inclusive. The guide contains 10 simple engagement tips for a range of target groups as identified under the country LECP.

You can download the guide from [sligoppn.com](http://www.sligoppn.com):
[Sligo-PPN-Booklet-A5-V3.pdf \(sligoppn.com\)](http://www.sligoppn.com)

Locally developed resources:



Example 2

The Ballyhoura Community Inclusion Toolkit (Limerick)

The Ballyhoura Community Inclusion Toolkit is a practical aid for community groups who want to engage people from the widest possible range of backgrounds and circumstances. The guide was developed in 2018-19 by Ballyhoura Development, together with three community organisations:

- Ahane, Castleconnell and Montpelier Community,
- Kilmallock and District Community Council
- Mitchelstown Community Council.

The guide addresses key challenges faced by many community groups.

The toolkit has been developed by communities for communities, and provides useful advice on:

- keeping people informed
- gathering their views
- helping them to be more involved
- relationships and collaboration with other organisations
- measuring success.

It also includes a community health check, draft inclusion policy and community charter template. Since the guide was developed, more than 40 community groups have used the resource and signed up to the community charter.



The need was coming through strongly from community groups that had issues around new volunteers, issues around succession, issues around people not getting involved. And we could see that there was something we needed to do there. On the other side of that, we have a lot of target groups within communities, a lot of people who don't typically engage. And we wanted to bridge that gap. We want to make sure that our community groups can be open and representative of everyone in their communities.

– Amanda Slattery, Ballyhoura Development CLG

Download the guide from

<https://www.ballyhouradevelopment.com/community-inclusion-toolkit>



BALLYHOURA
DEVELOPMENT CLUB

**A PRACTICAL
GUIDE FOR
COMMUNITY
GROUPS**

THE BALLYHOURA COMMUNITY INCLUSION TOOLKIT
A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS TO INCREASE
VOLUNTEERISM, PROMOTE EQUALITY AND SUPPORT LONG TERM WELL BEING

Community inclusion is about giving people equal opportunity and encouragement to be involved in community activities. There are several ways in which people may be involved, from attending an event or making use of a service provided, through helping out on the day of a particular activity, to planning, organising and taking responsibility for the overall work of a community organisation.

COMMUNITY INCLUSION CHARTER

We, _____

believe that the more people who take part in our activities in any way, and the more diverse are their circumstances and backgrounds, the better we will be able to respond to the differing experiences and needs of different groups in the community.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Chairperson

Therefore, we affirm our commitment, and strive, to

- respect and welcome the involvement in our activities, in any way, of all people who live locally
- be fair to all, and encourage the participation of individuals and groups of people who have tended not to take part in community activities and decision-making in the past
- act as a resource for the whole community and foster and support the development of new groups in our area
- co-operate with other organisations working for the good of our community, especially with those which share our commitment to community inclusion.

List of resources

- All Ireland Standards for Community Work: <http://www.communityworkireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/All-Ireland-Standards-for-Community-Work.pdf>
- Civicwell in California: [Guiding Principles for Equitable Engagement \(civicwell.org\)](http://civicwell.org)
- Carlow PPN Toolkit for Consultation: [Consultation-Toolkit-2019-Booklet.pdf \(carlowppn.ie\)](http://carlowppn.ie)
- DPER Consultation Principles: <https://assets.gov.ie/5579/140119163201-9e43dea3f4b14d56a705960cb9354c8b.pdf>
- DRCD Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership: <http://assets.gov.ie/237588/dadc85ce-5dce-49f1-a6fa-4c28d4f1ae31.pdf>
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, The 10 common basic principles on Roma inclusion: 2010, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/22771>
- Galway City Community Network (GCCN) Guidelines for Successful Community Engagement <https://galwaycitycommunitynetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/GCCN-Guidelines-for-Successful-Community-Engagement.pdf>
- IHREC Tool for a consultative approach: [IHREC-Tool-for-a-Consultative-Approach.pdf](http://ihrec.org)
- Immigrant Council of Ireland – Keeping it Local: <http://immigrantcouncil.ie/sites/default/files/2018-07/Keeping%20it%20local%20Report%20WEB%20version.pdf>
- Involve: How Do I plan a Participatory Process? [How do I plan a participatory process? | involve.org.uk](http://involve.org.uk)
- Involve: people and participation: how to put citizens at the heart of decision-making: <https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/People-and-Participation.pdf>
- MaREI, the SFI Research Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine: Recommendations for policy and practice on community engagement concerning energy and climate related infrastructure: [MaREI-Practice-and-Policy-BriefPDF.pdf](http://mairei.ie)
- OECD: Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions CATCHING THE DELIBERATIVE WAVE: [innovative-citizen-participation-new-democratic-institutions-catching-the-deliberative-wave-highlights.pdf \(oecd.org\)](http://oecd.org)
- Scottish National Standards for Community Engagement: [Support materials — VOICE \(voicescotland.org.uk\) / NSfCE+online_October.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](http://voicescotland.org.uk) –
- University College Cork Environmental Research Institute: Imagining 2050 Deliberative Futures Toolkit [Imagining2050Toolkit.pdf \(ucc.ie\)](http://ucc.ie)

Sources

This resource guide draws from several sources on good community engagement including:

- AIEB: The All-Ireland Standards for Community Work Education and Training
- Civicwell – a non-profit organisation from California that provides policy guidance and support for civic engagement in public sustainability initiatives
- Commonplace – a civic engagement platform resource used by a variety of international actors
- International Association for Public Participation (www.iap2.org): The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world
- Involve: A UK public participation organisation that offers resources on ways to involve people in decisions that affect their lives
- OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making
- The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DEPR): Consultation Principles and Guidance
- The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the National Disability Authority: Communications Toolkit 2023
- The Department of Rural and Community Development: Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities – a five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019–2024
- The Department of Rural and Community Development: Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector 2022
- The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC): Assisting the Effective Implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty – Tool for a Consultative Approach
- The Scottish National Standards for Community Engagement
- Sligo PPN



Appendices

Appendix 1: **Engagement checklist**

Appendix 2: **Policy context**

Appendix 3: **International Spectrum of public participation**









Appendix 1:
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Engagement checklist

The following is a checklist for consultation and engagement processes that you can use as is or change to better suit your needs.





Prepare an engagement plan at the outset of any new planning or decision-making process, covering all points listed here.

Planning phase checklist

Purpose	Purpose of any meetings is defined and communicated clearly.	
Affected people informed	Stakeholders and affected communities are identified and informed in advance.	
Contacts made	Organisations representing the target communities and/or PPNs have been contacted to discuss suitable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engagement strategies • methods • communication channels • accessibility support needs. 	
Engagement plan developed	An Engagement Plan is developed in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.	
Communications organised	Channels to disseminate (share) information, tailored to the needs and preferences of marginalised or disadvantaged groups have been identified. User friendly communication materials (easy to comprehend and accessible) are prepared, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.	
Barriers identified	Barriers to participation and support needs for accessibility are identified.	
Budget secured	Where possible, a budget for consultation actions is secured, including funds for any supports necessary to ensure accessibility.	
Timeline shared	A timeline of key dates is defined and shared with relevant stakeholders.	

Implementation (putting the process in place)		
Advance information	Agendas and arrangements for meetings or other engagement events are discussed with stakeholders in advance.	✓
Accessibility support	Support needs to support accessibility have been addressed on the following.	
	Travel Transport support is provided where necessary.	✓
	Meeting times Target group needs and constraints have been accommodated when setting meeting times.	✓
	Meeting locations Meeting locations are physically accessible and welcoming.	✓
	Language or interpretation Need for translators or sign language interpreters has been assessed and secured where necessary for meetings.	✓
	Information materials Consultation materials have been adapted to support accessibility, including use of plain English and translation of materials where necessary.	✓
	Other Consider any other need specific to target groups and the context.	✓
Good communication material	User friendly communication materials are widely distributed.	✓
Material distributed in time	Consultees have adequate time to examine documentation before meetings or deadlines.	✓
Competent facilitators	Facilitators are well informed and competent in managing consultation processes.	✓
Feedback recorded	All feedback is appropriately recorded.	✓

Review phase checklist

<p>Verification</p>	<p>Interpretation of stakeholders input is verified with them before consultation findings are finalised.</p>	
<p>Feedback</p>	<p>Arrangements are in place to provide feedback to contributors on what is happening as a result of any consultation.</p>	
<p>Next steps</p>	<p>Plans are in place for use of the consultation findings in terms of informing decisions, strategies or plans.</p>	
<p>Reflection</p>	<p>Review the consultation process, considering the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • were the objectives of the consultation met? • will another consultation round be required? • were the methods used appropriate to the objectives? • what lessons were learned and how will they inform future processes? 	

Appendix 2:

Policy context

Ireland's national and international commitments

National and international policies and systems support the importance of consultation and engagement and the right to take part. We explain the main national and international initiatives below.

National

Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities

In its five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019–2024, the Department of Rural and Community Development outlines a commitment to involve communities in decision making, developing processes for meaningful consultation, inclusion and participation of all communities in decisions that affect them. The strategy aims to support participative and local democracy that gives community members the opportunity to participate in, and influence, the decisions that affect their communities.

Consultation Principles & Guidance

As part of the Open Government Partnership initiative, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform produced a set of consultation principles and guidance. These state that meaningful participation [in policy development] increases the legitimacy of decision-making, improves the public's knowledge and awareness of complex policy challenges, helps decision-makers to make better decisions and can lead to improvements in the quality-of-service provision.¹⁰ It outlines a number of principles on which engagement should be based:

Consultation must be:

- genuine
- meaningful
- timely
- balanced.

Better outcomes for all

Consultation must have the ultimate objective of leading to better outcomes and greater understanding for all involved, of the benefits and consequences of proceeding with particular policy or legislation proposals.

Real engagement

Consultation should aim to achieve real engagement and 'real listening' rather than just being done as an exercise for bureaucratic purposes. A genuine consultation process ensures that the real-world impact of policy options is considered.

Targeted and accessible

Consultation should be targeted at and easily accessible to those with a clear interest in the policy in question. There should not be any one-size-fits-all approach to consultation.

The size, type and scope of the consultative process depends on:

- the proposed policy
- the type and scale of the potential impacts of the proposal or decision being taken
- the number of people or groups affected by them
- where relevant, particular requirements of the child and young people and those who may be marginalised or vulnerable.

¹⁰ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2016). Consultation Principles and Guidance

Affected people must be able to take part

Government departments and agencies should make systematic efforts to ensure that interested and affected parties can take part in open consultations at all stages of the policy process on significant policy, services and legislative matters. These stages include: development; putting the process in place; evaluation and review.

New Open Government Action Plan

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have facilitated the co-design with civil society organisations of a new action plan for the Open Government Partnership initiative that will build on the commitments outlined.

Legal obligations: The Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 requires public bodies, in the performance of their functions, to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of staff and service users.

Section 42 requires public bodies to implement the Duty through a three step process in the context of strategic planning and reporting: **Assess, Address, Report**;

- **Assess:** to carry out an assessment of the equality and human rights issues relevant to their functions and purpose;
- **Address:** develop policies, plans and actions to address issues raised in the assessment;
- **Report:** report annually on progress and achievements in relation to identified policies, plans and actions.

Consultation benefits outcomes

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) states that a consultative approach helps to deepen the evidence base available to the public body, for effectively putting the Public Sector Duty in place. A consultative approach provides access to the knowledge, experience and perspectives of those affected by:

- discrimination
- inequality
- human rights abuses
- social exclusion.

A consultative approach makes sure that the policies plans and services of public bodies responds to the needs of both service users and staff.

In this context, the participation of people from the target population who experience inequality or who have human rights concerns is an important part of putting in place a positive duty by statutory bodies.

International

All human rights treaties highlight that public participation is central to inclusive democracy and the advancement of human rights:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

It states that the right to take part on a basis of equality in public and political life is a central feature of the concept of inclusive democracy.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

It states that political and public participation rights play a crucial role in the promotion of democratic governance, the rule of law, social inclusion and economic development, as well as in the advancement of all human rights. The right to take part in political and public life is important in empowering individuals and groups. It is essential to eliminate marginalisation and discrimination. Participation rights are linked to other human rights like the rights to peaceful assembly and association, freedom of opinion and expression and the rights to education and to information.

The OECD

OECD evidence¹¹ shows that when people take part in decision-making this can deliver better policies, strengthen democracy and build trust.

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In order for Ireland to successfully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and adhere to the principle of *Leave No One Behind*, inclusive and meaningful participation must be ensured for marginalised groups and those in vulnerable situations. The actions and objectives set out in this Guide contribute to the progression of Ireland's commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

In addition to contributing to the principles of inclusion and empowerment which run throughout the 2030 Agenda, this Guide also contributes specifically to a number of SDGs and SDG targets, particularly around ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels (SDG target 16.7).

It also contributes to increasing participation of women from marginalised communities which supports the achievement of SDG 5.5¹² and to reducing inequalities in terms of social and political inclusion and inequalities of outcome in support of SDGs 10.2¹³ and 10.3¹⁴.

If used for the purposes of local planning, this Guide will also enhance achievement of SDG targets 6.b¹⁵ and 11.3¹⁶.

11 OECD: Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: CATCHING THE DELIBERATIVE WAVE [innovative-citizen-participation-new-democratic-institutions-catching-the-deliberative-wave-highlights.pdf \(oecd.org\)](#)

12 **SDG target 5.5:** "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life"

13 **SDG target 10.2:** "By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status."

14 **SDG target 10.3:** "Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard."

15 **SDG target 6.b:** "Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management"

16 **SDG target 11.3:** "By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries."

Appendix 3:

International Spectrum of public participation



IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Co-produced by the Department of Rural and Community Development with Pobal, Community Work Ireland (CWI), and the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)

Supported by the Dormant Accounts Fund



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