



Guide to Engagement Methods



Community Places
2019



Introduction

This document signposts and provides an indication of the types of methods which may be most appropriate for achieving different levels of engagement. The methods are presented against the levels of engagement set out by the [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\)](#) which range from 'informing' to 'empowering'. Consideration has been given to the strengths, weaknesses and appropriateness of each method and includes useful tips to guide the practical application of each technique.

Method	 INFORM	 CONSULT	 INVOLVE	 COLLABORATE	 EMPOWER
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Information Sheet	● ● ●	● ○ ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○
Exhibitions	● ● ●	● ○ ○	● ○ ○	● ○ ○	○ ○ ○
Campaigns	● ● ●	● ○ ○	● ○ ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○
Social Media	● ● ○	● ● ○	● ○ ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○
Workshop Focus Group	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ○	● ● ○	○ ○ ○
Public Meetings	● ● ○	● ● ○	● ● ○	● ○ ○	○ ○ ○
Art and Creativity	● ● ○	● ● ○	● ● ○	● ○ ○	○ ○ ○
Community Surveys	● ● ○	● ● ●	● ● ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○
Web based Engagement	● ● ●	● ● ○	● ○ ○	● ○ ○	● ○ ○
Community Mapping	● ○ ○	● ● ●	● ● ○	● ● ○	● ○ ○
Citizen Forums	● ● ○	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ○
Citizen Panels	● ● ○	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ○
Citizens' Juries	● ● ○	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ○
Round table Consensus Building	● ● ○	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ○
Street Stalls	● ● ○	● ● ●	● ● ○	○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○
Place Standard	● ● ○	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ○	● ○ ○
Participatory Budgeting	● ● ○	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●
Participatory Card Game	● ● ○	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ○

Information Sheets and Newsletters

Information sheets and Newsletters are a good way of regularly sharing information with the public or for targeting particular interest groups. They can be used to inform people about an issue, forthcoming event, changes to a service or a new programme or activity. You should think about how you will distribute the information sheet or newsletter. For example, you could post it to each household, distribute it to community centres and venues, send it out via e-mail or place it on the Council or Partners' website.



Strengths

- Information can be distributed to a large number of people
- You can target particular groups or interests
- You can explore an issue in depth
- If used on a regular basis they can provide useful updates
- Tear-off slips can be included to gather feedback

Weaknesses

- You may exclude some groups e.g. non-English speakers, blind or partially sighted people
- Information Overload
- Communication is one way with limited feedback
- Can be costly to print and circulate
- Time consuming

Appropriateness

Information sheets and newsletters can be a useful tool to use when you need to let a large number of people know about something for example, a new or existing programme; changes or improvements to a service; an event or activity. They are less useful when you want to encourage discussion or collect people's views or opinions to influence how you plan or deliver a service. However, you can include a tear off reply or feedback slip.

Tips for effective Information Sheets and Newsletters

- Use plain, jargon free language
- Use creative designs to engage people
- Use a consistent layout and branding to enable people to become familiar with your communications
- Always include a name and contact information so that people can get in touch with you
- Ask network organisations in the area to signpost your information sheet or newsletter to their members or contacts

Exhibitions

Exhibitions are a great way of presenting information visually e.g. photographs, displaying art or poetry competition entries, maps, and interactive displays. One of the benefits of using exhibitions is that they can be moved from venue to venue so you can target particular areas and audiences. Citizens can contribute to the design and content of the information building ownership and developing relationships.



Strengths

- Visual displays are engaging and inclusive
- Exhibitions are portable and can be moved to specific venues or areas
- Useful for engaging with a broad variety of interests

Weaknesses

- Large exhibitions can be costly
- Time intensive for staff or volunteers
- Less useful for seeking views
- Need to get the right location

Appropriateness

Exhibitions can be a useful method for engaging with a broad range of people and interests. The use of photographs, pictures and images can help to reduce language barriers. They can be used to target large numbers of people particularly if you think carefully about where they are displayed and the amount of footfall using or passing by the location of the exhibition. Often you can ask local people, school children or visitors to get involved in preparing the content of the exhibition enabling them to develop ownership of the process and to raise awareness. It is important to staff the exhibition so that people can discuss content, give feedback and offer their own ideas and solutions to a particular issue.

Tips for effective Exhibitions

- Use colourful visuals and images
- Avoid large amounts of small text on information boards
- Choose locations and venues which will have a high footfall
- Provide information leaflets which people can take home with them
- Staff the exhibition so people can ask questions and interact more
- Include a comments box to gather feedback
- Consider a story-telling element around the theme of the exhibition

Campaigns

Campaigns use a range of complementary techniques to provide information to people about a particular issue, event, service or change. Often campaigns are promoted through local media including television, radio, newspapers and social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Campaigns are often planned to coincide with particular times of the year to deal with or raise awareness of topical or seasonal issues.



Strengths

- Can reach a large audience
- You can be creative
- High Impact – raising awareness and support
- Deliver a clear message

Weaknesses

- Difficult to know if you are reaching your target audience
- Limited feedback
- Can be costly

Appropriateness

Campaigns are most effective for raising the profile of a particular issue and for delivering a simple but effective message about an issue, activity or service. It is important to be clear about who your target audience is and to tailor your campaign to that audience through a variety of methods and techniques.

Tips for effective Campaigns

- Build relationships with local media including press, radio and television
- Develop a clear, simple and 'catchy' message
- Think about the most appropriate time and venue to launch your campaign
- Use a range of media forms e.g. radio, television, social media

Social Media

Social Media has become a very popular method to distribute information on-line to a large number of people. There are many different forms of social media including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, LinkedIn and Instagram to name a few. It is very important to have a clear and concise message and it is useful to use images along with text to draw people's attention and interest.



Strengths

- Can reach a large audience
- Relatively Inexpensive
- Can raise awareness or promote an issue or change to a service
- Good for engaging with younger people or those who are house bound
- Can generate on-line discussion and debate
- You can track how and when people are participating

Weaknesses

- Difficult to know if you are reaching your target audience
- Broadband can be slow in some areas or people may not have online access
- Difficult to measure outcomes
- Limited feedback
- You may need to consider moderating comments which are posted
- Some people may feel excluded or nervous about using online tools

Appropriateness

Social Media is often used to complement other engagement techniques; to raise the awareness of a particular issue or theme and to direct or signpost people to more detailed information. Social media can be used effectively as a lobbying tool and to develop networks and on-line or virtual communities of interest.

Tips for effective Social Media

- Agree a clear and concise message
- Use a range of social media formats
- Use free tools such as Hootsuite.com or Bufferapp.com to manage your social media accounts
- Always include details of your social media on relevant information leaflets, websites etc.
- Build and develop your social media networks and contacts

Workshops and Focus Groups

Workshops and Focus Groups allow people to discuss their ideas in an open and relaxed atmosphere. Workshops can take a variety of formats. They can be designed to exchange information; to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of an idea or project; to obtain ideas and innovative thinking for a way forward for a project; or they can be specifically geared towards prioritisation and the production of an action plan. Focus groups by contrast are designed to specifically concentrate on a single issue or a programme of topics.



Strengths

- Encourages active discussion and deliberation in a welcoming environment
- Time and resource efficient way of identifying and clarifying key issues
- Conflict can be more easily handled in a small group
- Can be designed for a specific purpose
- Can be directly targeted at excluded and 'hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore' groups

Weaknesses

- With small groups, it is difficult to be sure all stakeholders or interests are represented
- Workshops can be dominated by articulate and confident individuals if not carefully facilitated
- Requires experienced facilitators

Appropriateness

Workshops and Focus Groups are useful methods for encouraging discussion among those who may feel less confident in a larger group. The main benefit is that participants or certain interest groups can be targeted and therefore those often excluded from a wider engagement exercise can be identified and invited to attend this type of event.

Tips for effective Workshops and Focus Groups

- Ask people to introduce themselves
- Think about using an ice-breaker
- Encourage discussion in small groups
- Record what people say and the main issues discussed
- Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and encourage those who have been quiet to get involved

Public Meetings

Public meetings provide an opportunity to consult large numbers of people. Meetings can be organised to allow for small group discussions with oral feedback. There are often opportunities for participants to set or influence the agenda and to ask questions. From our experience small groups are an essential element of public meetings to engage people effectively.



Strengths

- Enables large numbers of people to have their say
- Provides an opportunity to explain processes, give information and gather feedback
- Demonstrates openness and transparency
- Can attract publicity or be used as a launch event
- Enables participants to develop networks

Weaknesses

- Unlikely to be representative - not everyone has the time or inclination to attend
- Attendance is often low unless people feel personally or deeply concerned
- Some people are likely to be inhibited from speaking in a large group
- Traditional formats can limit audience contribution and lead to conflict
- If confrontational it may lead to poor media publicity

Appropriateness

Participants may feel unable to get involved or be unwilling to attend. As part of a series of events they can be a valuable way of sharing information and demonstrating openness and transparency.

Tips for effective Public Meetings

- Choose a venue or location which is convenient and accessible for your target audience
- Think about the most appropriate time of day for the meeting
- Think about the number of meetings you should have
- Always encourage the audience to break into smaller groups to enable better discussion and exchange
- Consider the use of external facilitation

Art and Creativity

Some forms of community engagement are particularly good at encouraging participation and generating interest and ideas.



These include:

- **Photography:** disposable cameras can be given to people of all ages to capture their likes and dislikes in an area. The results can be exhibited to generate further discussion or to promote additional events.
- **Vox Pop or Citizen Reporting:** short, snappy interviews with people in different locations and at different times (radio, television, opinion booth, diary chair). The results can be displayed, viewed and discussed more widely.
- **Songs, poems, artwork:** invite people to submit (possibly for a prize) a song, poem or art piece which describes their area, changes they would like to see, their ideal neighbourhood or environment.
- **TV game shows:** adopt and adapt popular TV game or quiz shows to generate interest and ideas, test local knowledge and/or understanding of project plans and services.

Strengths

- Suitable for all age groups
- Interactive and engaging
- Enables participants to express creativity
- Can help develop a common vision
- Can be exhibited to generate further discussion

Weaknesses

- Participants confidence in their creative skills
- Often a large space is required to exhibit or display results
- It may be difficult to interpret participant's ideas

Appropriateness

Art and Creative methods are appropriate where you want to involve local people in expressing their views and generating ideas in a participative approach. They are a useful technique for engaging with people of all ages through education or school programmes, local community forums and resident or interest groups. They may be beneficial at the beginning of a process to generate interest and raise awareness of the process.

Tips for effective Art and Creative Techniques

- Encourage local groups, networks or schools to get involved
- Give people lots of time to take part especially in photographic or art competitions
- Display entries at workshops or exhibitions to encourage continued participation and interest

Community Surveys

Community surveys can be undertaken to identify the needs and views of a large number of people in a standard format. The main stages involved are: defining the sample size and the type of information required; deciding on the type of survey to be used (on-line, postal, drop and collect, telephone or interview); survey design; piloting the survey; undertaking the survey and post-completion analysis of the results. It is often best to use a short and concise questionnaire where people's views on an issue are being sought. There are a number of on-line survey tools to help you create, analyse and promote your survey for example, SurveyMonkey, Mail Chimp and Citizens Space.



Strengths

- Can gain the views of a large number of people
- Useful for obtaining quantitative data
- Gives people time to consider their response
- In principle data can be compared over time or with results from elsewhere
- Useful for identifying and evidencing need

Weaknesses

- Need to be well designed and coded to get 'usable' answers
- Large community surveys are time-consuming and labour intensive
- Information may be limited
- Do not offer any real sense of community engagement or provide an opportunity for people to exchange views
- Typical response rates are between 10-20%

Appropriateness

Surveys are best used as part of a programme of other methods- by themselves they can be limited in scope and provide little meaningful community engagement. Increasingly email and SMS (text) are being used to provide a variety of ways for people to engage. These work best when a small number of questions are used and when views on a specific proposal or issue are being sought.

Tips for effective Community Surveys

- Keep surveys short and concise
- Think about the survey layout and design
- Use plain language and avoid jargon or buzz words
- Avoid leading questions
- Use surveys along with other methods of engagement
- Utilise online survey tools to help you create, distribute and analyse your survey
- If required, ask for personal information at the end of the survey

Web-based Engagement

There are a variety of web-based engagement processes to choose from such as online discussion forums and blogs, online surveys, social networking, Citizens Space, Open Active Voting, Poll maker and digital interactive TV.



Web based activities enable people to choose where, when and for how long they want to participate.

Strengths

- People can choose a convenient time and place to participate
- Particularly useful for those who may be homebound e.g. carers, elderly people, parents with young children
- Can create debate and exchange of views
- Cost Effective
- Can reach large numbers of people
- People can vote and decide how resources are allocated

Weaknesses

- Some techniques may require a moderator to manage comments, this can be expensive and time consuming
- Excludes those without access to the internet
- Needs to be publicised to generate interest
- Some people may feel intimidated

Appropriateness

Web based processes work best as part of a package of methods. Web based techniques can be useful tools to raise awareness of your engagement process or campaign.

Tips for effective Web-based Engagement

- Keep questions short and focused
- Consider moderating comments
- Utilise your networks to raise awareness and sign post people to the website

Community Mapping

Maps, photographs or models of an area or specific location are used to illustrate how people view their area; what they like or dislike or improvements they would like to see. Ideas are generated in small group discussions and can be recorded on 'post-its' or pre-prepared cards. Discussions should be facilitated to help people explore issues, build consensus or identify areas of conflict.



Strengths

- Stimulates discussion
- Can identify priorities
- Can build a sense of community ownership
- Can help people see and understand their community in different ways

Weaknesses

- Can generate ideas which are not possible to implement
- It may be difficult to interpret participant's ideas
- Participants need to be familiar with the local area

Appropriateness

Community mapping is a useful way to engage people of all levels of capability. A variety of aspects can be mapped including, land use, community assets, facilities, and transport options to develop a snap shot of an area. Mapping can be carried out using a variety of materials from chalk to sand depending on the situation.

Tips for Effective Mapping

- Use picture cards
- Have blank cards for participants to write or draw their own issues and comments
- Include key landmarks so that people can familiarise or locate themselves
- Encourage small group discussion
- Facilitate discussion and mapping

Citizen Forums

A forum is a regular meeting of people who represent a group or organisation and may be issue or area based. Those involved typically comprise members of civic, political, professional, economic or social groups from a local area.



Strengths

- Regular events help to maintain momentum, commitment and enthusiasm and encourages wider participation as the activities of the forum develop
- Can be an effective way of involving excluded or hard to reach groups in decision-making by creating an arena directed towards the concerns of specific groups
- Can address specific local concerns and inform or direct decision-making and resource allocation

Weaknesses

- Often comprise representatives from existing groups rather than individuals from the community
- May become 'talking shops' rather than action-oriented
- Potential for them to become rule-bound and bureaucratic
- Potential for confusion or conflict over the respective roles and responsibilities of local representatives

Appropriateness

Forums can be a useful way of involving groups who are traditionally excluded from decision-making processes for example, young people. However, it is often the 'usual suspects' or those who are already involved in local groups who will come forward to participate.

Tips for effective Citizen Forums

- You can have thematic or issue-based Citizen Forums e.g. Gender, Youth, Health, Community Safety
- Meet at regular intervals and times to help maintain involvement
- Invite and encourage new members from a range of interests to participate in the forum(s)

Citizen Panels

Citizen Panels involve ongoing panels of around 1,000 to 2,000 people who are representative of the local community. The panel is surveyed several times a year by post, telephone or online.



Strengths

- Using the same panel a number of times reduces recruitment costs
- People agree to be on the panel thereby increasing response rates
- May allow for some measurement of change over time

Weaknesses

- People on the panel become more knowledgeable (and therefore less representative) than the general public over time
- A turnover of the panel (about one third per year) may reduce the validity of tracking over time

Appropriateness

A scaled down model of this consultation may be effective and attract those who traditionally avoid or cannot attend public meetings.

Tips for effective Citizen Panels

- Refresh the membership of your Panel annually
- Keep surveys short and focused
- Ensure that your panel is representative of different geographic, demographic and sectoral interests

Citizens' Juries

A group of citizens who are representative of the general public meet to consider a complex issue by gathering evidence, deliberating and then reaching a decision. Jurors can 'cross examine' expert 'witnesses' who may offer differing perspectives on the issue or topic at hand before reaching agreement or producing a short report of recommended actions. Normally an advisory panel with expertise in the area consider the jury's findings or report and determine what, if any, actions should be taken.



Strengths

- Organisers and jurors usually find the experience empowering and satisfying
- Large numbers of people can participate
- Power issues are reduced
- Process produces an informed and collective view, resulting from deliberation

Weaknesses

- Initial briefing, information and selection of witnesses could be open to bias
- Jury could be manipulated by the moderator or witnesses
- The sponsoring body has to be prepared to accept the results or else the process rapidly loses credibility

Appropriateness

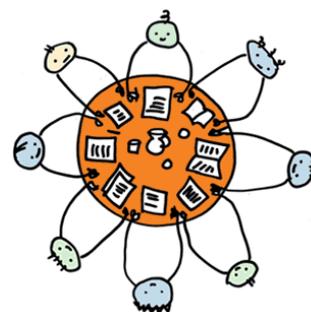
A high level of skill is required as participants (jurors) are often asked to analyse complex issues.

Tips for effective Citizens' Juries

- Ensure participants are well briefed and feel confident with the issue at hand
- Ensure you have adequate time for the process: from 1 – 3 days
- Requires highly skilled facilitators

Roundtable Consensus Building

Roundtable discussions can be used as a tool for consensus building. They have multi-stakeholder involvement, operate by consensus and can generate co-operation to promote the environmental, economic and social well-being of a community. The basic premise is that all participants, from business interests to the local community, are equal.



There is no leader but there may be a chair or facilitator. The key factors to consider are sectoral representation; selection and duties of members; size (usually between 16 to 24 members); facilitators; budget and the decision-making processes.

Strengths

- People are brought together as equals
- Encourages open discussion and helps break down barriers
- Confronts issues rather than people
- May produce innovative solutions
- Aims to create 'win-win' situations, rather than 'win-lose' scenarios

Weaknesses

- Their composition normally precludes wider participation e.g. local experts, academics and professionals
- Requires considerable preparation
- Requires highly-skilled facilitators
- Open to dominance by powerful elites or social groups

Appropriateness

Roundtables benefit from bringing people together as equals who engage in open discussions.

Useful Tips for effective Roundtables and Consensus Building

- Facilitate discussions
- Keep members to a manageable number
- Agree how decisions will be reached

Street Stalls

Street Stalls consist of outdoor displays such as idea, information or graffiti walls which can be used to capture the views and comments of large numbers of people. Maps and plans for an area, project or service can be displayed and passer-bys asked to comment on particular issues and themes, generate ideas or vote for activities, facilities or services.



Strengths

- Can collect the views of large numbers of people
- Interactive
- Engages and generates interest
- Can reach people who may not normally participate

Weaknesses

- Can generate a large amount of data
- Requires advance planning and preparation
- Requires several facilitators to engage with people
- Event may be affected by weather conditions

Appropriateness

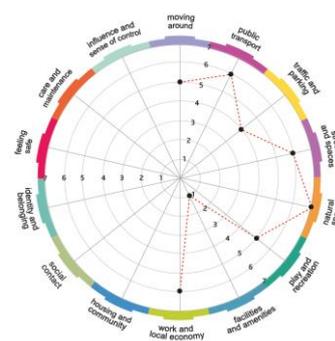
Choosing a busy public location can help to achieve high levels of participation and generate interest in the project from those who may not otherwise get involved. The approach can be organised to coincide with other events e.g. community festival.

Tips for effective Street Stalls

- Identify a public location for your stall which has a high footfall
- Think about incorporating your stall at a community event e.g. community festival or fair, local sports event, school open day or a community BBQ or fundraising event
- Staff the stall to encourage people to comment and get involved

Place Standard

Place Standard is a way of assessing places. The tool provides a simple framework to structure conversations about a place. It enables participants to think about the social and physical aspects of an area and to explore both the assets and areas where a place could improve. It can help to identify and prioritise needs. It consists of 14 questions with prompts to help you think about the place. You plot the results of each question on a diagram. The tool is simple and free to use.



Strengths

- Stimulates discussion
- Interactive and Visual
- Can help people see and understand their community in different ways
- Helps people to work together

Weaknesses

- Requires advance planning and preparation
- Requires several facilitators to engage with people
- Participants should be familiar with the area

Appropriateness

The tool is designed for everyone to use – communities, the public sector, the third sector and the private sector. The tool can be used for different purposes and it allows people to work together consistently across sectors. It is recommended that you refer to the National Standards for Community Engagement if you are applying the tool within a process of community engagement.

Tips for effective Place Standard processes

- Participants should be familiar with the place or have an opportunity to do a walk about
- Use can use the paper, online version of the tool or Place Standard app for Apple and android devices

Useful Links

- www.placestandard.scot
- www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards/

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory Budgeting (PB) can be described as 'Local people deciding how to allocate part of a public budget' It is a way for citizens to have a direct say in how public funds are used to address local needs. PB is much more than just deciding how resources are allocated. PB is recognised worldwide as an effective way for empowering local communities and a model of best practice in public and democratic engagement.



Strengths

- Can reach and empower new audiences
- Interactive
- Engages and generates interest
- Can be off and on-line

Weaknesses

- Requires advance planning and preparation
- Not all ideas can be successful
- Need a PB pot of money

Appropriateness

Participatory Budgeting (PB) provides opportunities to engage in non-traditional ways that reach out to people who don't often have a voice and it can become a celebration of positive action in the community. PB can improve trust and relationships between citizens, public sector officials, elected representatives and the private sector. There are a number of PB models the most common of which are small grants allocation and mainstream investment.

Tips for effective Participatory Budgeting processes

- Bring together a range of interests in a Steering Group to design and plan the process
- Think of a catchy name for your process – don't call it PB!
- Plan to repeat the PB process

Useful Links

- www.participatorybudgetingworks.org
- www.pbscotland.scot
- www.pbnetwork.org.uk

Participatory Card Game

Participatory Card Games enable a group of citizens to engage with a theme or issue. They can be played anywhere and by anyone. You can involve the people who will be playing the card game in the design and card content process to build ownership of the game. You can create your own rules, content and game play to suit the theme, issue or audience.



Strengths

- All age groups
- Interactive
- Engages and generates interest
- Stimulates discussion and ideas

Weaknesses

- Requires advance planning and preparation
- Design and printing costs
- Requires a facilitator

Appropriateness

Participatory Card Games are a fun way to encourage all ages groups to engage with an issue. They can provide information on an issue and help people to identify priorities and potential solutions or improvements.

Tips for effective Participatory Card Game processes

- Involve the people who are going to be playing the game in the design process
- Keep the rules relatively simple
- Teams of 6-8 players
- Use both picture and word cards
- Include Blank cards for participants to incorporate issues or views not already included
- Capture feedback from participants on their experience of playing the game

Useful Links

www.communityplanningishere.org – ‘Pathways to Achieve and Succeed’ and ‘My Place’ Participatory Card Games © Community Places

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