COI

Effective public engagement

A guide for policy-makers and communications professionals





Reform of Care and Support reconvened Citizens' Forum (DH), Birmingham, November 2008

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Foreword



It is in the interest of government that the policies and services it creates are deemed to be relevant and successful by the very people they aim to serve. In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that the best way to ensure this is to include the public and stakeholders in the policy-making process, putting their opinions and experiences at the very heart of government decisions that affect them.

From gathering information on the attitudes and behaviour of citizens to creating strong partnerships in which the public or organisations have a direct influence on policy or service outcomes, public engagement now plays an important role as part of the democratic process. It increases public confidence in government activity, provides evidence on which to base decisions, helps give a voice to wide sections of society (including those that have previously been marginalised) and ensures that resources are targeted more effectively.

Yet for 'engagement' to be seen as more than the latest government buzzword, it must become an integral part of the policy cycle and be second nature to policy-makers and ministers alike. Although much has already been achieved (such as the publication by the Better Regulation Executive in 2008 of a new *Code of Practice on Consultation*[1]), we must all be confident that we know when to engage with the public and other interested parties, and which engagement technique is most appropriate for each stage of the policy cycle.

The publication of this guide is, therefore, a milestone. Together with establishing a dedicated Public Engagement Team at COI, it also brings together in one place the latest thinking on effective public engagement and provides a series of case studies that illustrate recent successes. Working with other engagement practitioners from across government, COI has created this guide and associated web resources to help share knowledge and best practice. I hope that policy-makers across government will make use of these resources to create more effective engagement programmes, and wish you well with your plans.



Matt Tee

Permanent Secretary for Government Communications

[1] For the Code, see www.berr.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf and for guidance supporting the Code, see www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/bre/consultation-guidance/page44420.html

Introduction

What is public engagement?

Public engagement uses structured communications or dialogue between government, the public and other interested parties to inform:

- specific policy development; or
- specific service implementation.

Public engagement is not to be confused with ongoing stakeholder communication which is part of everyday business for government departments. Public engagement is more specific, and is used when there is a policy or service development that will benefit from further insight from key audiences.

There are many forms of engagement – from more established information-sharing and consultation, to newer techniques such as joint production of policy outcomes and, in certain cases, joint decision-making. Many of the techniques used in public engagement are already in use in other areas of activity – such as in advertising, new service development and marketing communications in general. With public engagement, however, we are often using such approaches in a more integrated manner. As public engagement becomes more widespread, it is important for policy-makers to consider the full range of techniques that are available, and to make the most of the newer, more innovative approaches.

When carried out successfully, public engagement programmes provide genuine insight and creative thinking to improve policy outcomes – giving the public a real sense that they have been able to contribute to government's work. However, without careful thought and planning, engagement programmes can do more harm than good: if the public thinks that government is doing little more than paying lip service to engagement, it can lead to cynicism and greater levels of distrust.

About this guide

With extensive experience in helping to design and implement public engagement programmes across government, COI recognises that public engagement can be a challenging aspect of policy development.

We have produced this guide to help policy-makers who are involved in public engagement programmes, or who are called on to provide ministers with guidance on how best to proceed. The guide:

- provides both strategic guidance and practical tools for planning and executing public engagement programmes;
- sets out the guiding principles for delivering effective public engagement; and

- gives details on the range of engagement techniques available and when to use them.

It will help to ensure that you, the policy-maker, can consider the most important issues before creating your engagement plan or procuring an engagement expert.

Contact COI for further guidance

COI is the Government's centre of expertise for marketing communications and has established a dedicated Public Engagement Team. If you would like us to advise on or assist with your public engagement initiative, please contact us. See Section 5 of this guide for contact details.



Youth Taskforce roadshow (DCSF), September 2007

Is public engagement for you? 1

Public engagement often requires considerable investment – both of time and resources. It is therefore important to be clear from the outset whether public engagement is both appropriate and valuable in your circumstances.

Public engagement gets results

Despite the relative newness of many techniques, public engagement is already proving to be a very effective way of engaging the public and stakeholder groups, especially where there may have been a breakdown in communications and trust in the past.

"I very much enjoyed myself and learnt a lot listening to other people. I would definitely attend any other meetings like this, and for the first time in my life politics has taken my interest!"

Member of the public, COI engagement event, December 2008

What are the benefits of engagement?

- Public engagement can lead to new, more creative and often more cost-effective solutions to policy issues.
- Effective engagement can uncover evidence to inform policy-making and service design, as well as providing an insight into how things will work in practice and any unintended consequences.
- It can provide insight into which aspects of policy are most important to different audiences and therefore lead to vital refinements in service design.
- Using engagement to involve people in the policy-making process can increase the sense of civic influence and empowerment, helping to reduce the democratic deficit and giving citizens a meaningful opportunity to participate in the democratic process.
- Rather than diminishing the right of elected representatives, public engagement can provide greater insight that will help such representatives to take the best possible decisions when making policy.

Case study: Citizens' forum on crime

The Home Office wanted to rapidly gather insight on community views about neighbourhood policing and the ways in which information could be disseminated more effectively to the public at a local level. COI was commissioned to set up a one-day 'citizens' forum' event to provide insight from the public on this issue. The event took place in Leicester, involving 100 people in small groups of about 10, each recruited from a specific government region.

The groups discussed neighbourhood policing plans, including levels of crime data that should be released and how they would like this information to be communicated. Participants were asked to think about trade-offs between the need for transparency and concerns about how data could be used – for example, whether it might affect insurance premiums and house prices.

The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary attended the event – creating a unique opportunity for the Prime Minister and Home Secretary, government policy-makers and the public to collaborate in developing policy.

"Very good event. I enjoyed the round-the-table discussions and felt I was able to comment and express my opinions rather than just asking a panel questions."

Stakeholder, Safe Sensible Social regional stakeholder event, October 2008

Will it meet your policy goals?

A key consideration for policy-makers is whether or not a programme of public engagement will be both relevant to and useful for your policy goals.

At COI, we recognise that policy-makers are often required to provide guidance to ministers on whether a programme of engagement is necessary or appropriate, and to advise on the scale and type of engagement that is required.

To be effective, it is important that any public engagement programme is a genuine opportunity for those taking part to provide input to policy-makers, and to feel that they have had their views listened to as part of the engagement process.

We have designed a checklist (see Appendix A) to help you decide if public engagement is appropriate for your policy goals. The checklist will also help you in determining how extensive your engagement process should be, and to identify some of the key considerations that you as policy-makers, and your ministers, need to take into account as part of the planning process.

There are three broad areas to consider:

- How will public engagement help the policy-making process?
- Who needs to be involved to make the engagement process as effective as possible?
- What are the risks associated with engaging or not engaging on the policy area, and what strategies are needed to mitigate these risks?

Guiding principles 2

There is a range of techniques available for engaging relevant audiences. The diversity of techniques suggests that there is value in having a set of guiding principles to ensure that all public engagement programmes are built upon the same foundations.

Providing common purpose

In co-operation with colleagues from across central government, COI has developed five strategic principles for undertaking engagement programmes.

Each principle has an overarching definition, followed by a set of illustrative examples of how this principle might be applied in practice. As mentioned earlier, these principles are designed to work across the wide range of engagement approaches, and so a range of illustrative examples is given for each one.

At COI, we use these guiding principles to ensure that all our public engagement activity is undertaken with effectiveness and integrity. Please note that if you are conducting a formal consultation, there are further, more specific requirements set out in the Better Regulation Executive's *Code of Practice on Consultation* (2008)[2] – these must be adhered to when running a formal consultation and are in addition to COI's guiding principles.

The five principles

1. Strategy and planning

All engagement work should be based on an effective strategic plan.

- **Aim for a clearly defined plan that maps out the whole engagement exercise** (including pre- and post-implementation). Ideally, this plan will be in place before engagement begins. It should be developed in conversation with – and therefore with buy-in from – all relevant policy officials and ministers/special advisers.
- **Create your engagement plan only after you have decided who your audience will be**: stakeholders, the public or both. By conducting an analysis of target audiences and stating clearly who is and isn't being engaged, the reasons for this and what the limits of the engagement will be, you will be able to decide which of the various engagement techniques is most suitable for engaging them (see Section 3 of this guide). It may be helpful to consider having advisory groups for each audience you are trying to reach, and to ensure that you have considered how to reach seldom-heard or hard-to-reach audiences.

[2] A copy of the Code of Practice can be downloaded at www.berr.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf

- **Consider whether your engagement activity can build on existing day-to-day dialogue** or on activity being carried out by other government departments.
- **As with other programme areas, outlining a clear budget at the beginning of the process will ensure that your initiative is properly resourced** to achieve its stated objectives.

2. Clarity of framing

Effective engagement activity has clear framing throughout its planning and execution.

- **The most effective engagement programmes are framed in relation to a policy's wider cultural, social and media context**.
- **Have clear objectives and outcomes from the start**: be clear about the purpose of the engagement, who is being engaged, what you hope to achieve and what can change as a result. This will ensure that your target audience knows the role it is to play and what the engagement can expect to achieve.
- **Be aware of, and ensure that others are aware of, disclosure and confidentiality obligations**, in particular relevant parts of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- **Brief all relevant parties fully** on the issues that are under discussion, so that they can make a full and relevant contribution to discussions.

3. Transparency and responsiveness

Engagement projects should demonstrate transparency and responsiveness throughout.

- **Determine how you can most effectively raise awareness of, and give opportunities to respond to, your engagement activity**. Aim to provide appropriate response channels for your audience and also a timeframe in line with current practice. This period is unlikely to be less than 12 weeks, but should also be balanced against the need for policy decisions to be reached within a certain time period.
- **Wherever possible, acknowledge contributions and publish the findings of your engagement activity** (unless precluded by confidentiality requests from respondents) during the next steps in the engagement process.
- **It is advisable to manage participant and wider public expectations about outcomes**, and to provide appropriate levels of feedback on reasons for decisions and how engagement processes have contributed to the outcomes.
- **Position any conclusions or other outputs from an engagement appropriately** in terms of the audiences that have participated and the method of data collection used.
- **Consider whether there are opportunities for further dialogue**. Public engagement activity can be a source of information for future dialogue. It is important to consider whether it is appropriate to extend your current activity into a continued form of engagement.

4. Integrity of process

It is important that public engagement processes are seen to have integrity.

- **Produce materials in a manner that enables participants to respond easily** (including, where appropriate, mechanisms that will enable audiences to initiate discussion and response themselves).
- **It must be clear to your audience and the wider public how engagement will inform policy**. This could be expressed in the Invitation to Participate (see Section 3) and the stated objectives of the engagement.

5. Access to engagement principles

Engagement projects should be seen to have considered these principles as part of their design and delivery.

- **Include a copy of these engagement principles** at the back of any engagement documents, and have a named contact for engagement activity, whose details should also appear in all documents.
- **It is advisable to undertake evaluation of engagement activity to demonstrate transparency and accountability of outcomes acheved**. Any such evaluation should be in proportion to the scale of the engagement undertaken (see Section 4 for further detail).

Case study: DCSF Fair Play consultation

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) launched the Fair Play consultation, in April 2008, as part of the commitments made in *The Children's Plan* to invest £225 million to improve outdoor play facilities for children and young people in England. The aim of the consultation was to seek the views of key stakeholders – including children and young people, local authorities and children's interest groups – on the range of proposals to develop, support and promote children's play.

There were two strands to the consultation: one aimed directly at seeking the views of children and young people, the other aimed at other key stakeholders. A range of activities was used to gather their views, including a web-based interactive tool which gave children and young people the opportunity to design a play space, the publication of a consultation document (available in hard copy and via the department's e-consultation portal) and a series of stakeholder deliberative events.

COI was engaged to design and deliver these events. One was specifically aimed at Department for Culture, Media and Sport and DCSF Government Office regional staff to ensure that they had the knowledge to support local authorities in responding to the consultation. Three stakeholder events were held in locations across England involving a wide range of local authority practitioners, including those from transport, planning, children's services and parks. The aims were to raise awareness of the consultation and policy issues, to encourage debate around the key consultation questions and to generate ideas to help develop policy thinking for the implementation of the play strategy.

In recognition of the importance of planners in the development and maintenance of public places where children and young people can play, a fifth event was designed and delivered specifically for staff from local authority planning departments. The aims of this event were to gather their views on the provision of more outdoor play spaces in relation to their wider planning brief, and to determine what support they need to implement the policy of encouraging more public space to be designed for children and young people to use as places to play.

The insights from these events, along with the responses from the other consultation activities, have been used to develop *The Play Strategy*, launched in December 2008. This sets out the Government's commitment to put children and young people's views at the heart of the design and development of local neighbourhoods, therefore ensuring that the 3,500 new or refurbished play spaces to be delivered by local authorities fully reflect their needs.

3 Engagement options

The key to developing an effective public engagement programme is to be clear about your goals and target audiences. At COI, we summarise these in the Invitation to Participate, which we then use to frame crucial elements of the engagement programme.

The Invitation to Participate

Ultimately, good engagement starts with providing answers to several key questions which will help to shape your goals:

- What are your objectives and why are you carrying out public engagement?
- What is the role you want audiences to play in the process?
- What are you asking them to participate in?
- What will change as a result of the engagement?
- What are the benefits of participating in the engagement? Why should the participant get involved?

The answers to these questions can be summarised in your Invitation to Participate. Having a clear Invitation to Participate will play a vital role in creating an open and accountable exchange between government and your chosen target audiences. Indeed, programmes that are not clear about what they want to achieve with participants can lead to questions about the purpose, representativeness, inclusivity and cost-effectiveness of the engagement.

The remainder of this section offers guidance on the different stages of developing a meaningful and effective Invitation to Participate for an engagement programme.

Defining objectives and target audiences

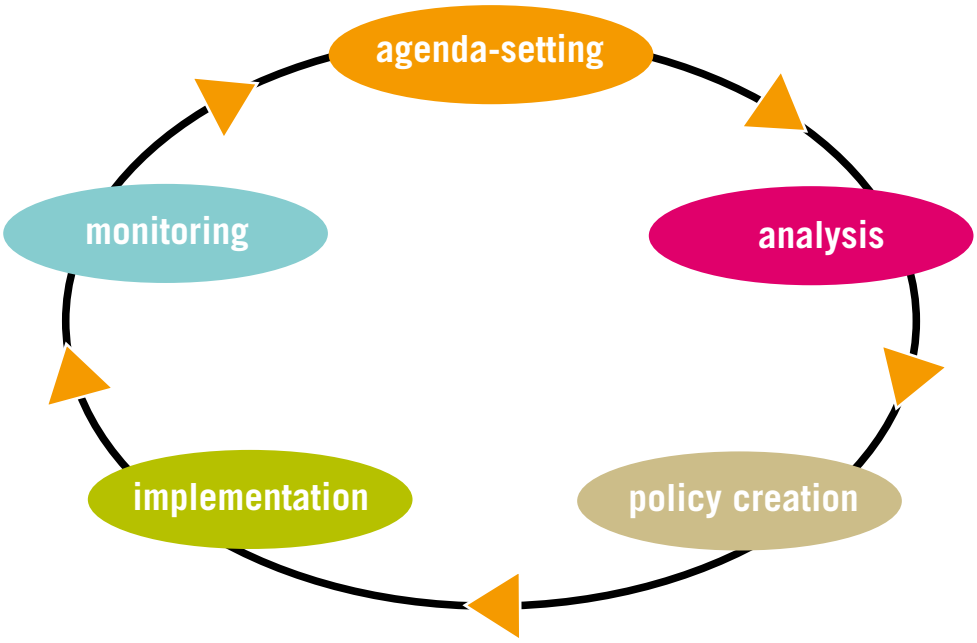
It is helpful to know where you are in the policy cycle before defining your objectives and target audiences.

Figure 1 is an adaptation of the Cabinet Office's *Viewfinder* guide to public involvement.[3] For each stage of the policy cycle, it sets out key objectives and explains how different audiences contribute.

We recommend that policy-makers use this model to ensure that they are engaging the right people at the right stage of the policy-making process. It might, for example, be more appropriate to engage only with stakeholders or the public alone.

[3] Cabinet Office (2002). p.12. *Viewfinder: A Policy Maker's Guide to Public Involvement*

Figure 1: The contribution of the public and/or stakeholders at each stage of the policy cycle



Policy cycle stages and objectives	Role of public/stakeholders
1. Agenda-setting • Establishing the need for new policy or changes to existing policy • Defining the issue(s) to be addressed • Identifying the range of people from within government, stakeholders and the public that should be involved	• Public/stakeholders involved in developing ideas and expressing their viewpoints to help set the agenda • Ideas become part of the public agenda and create political space for future discussion and debate
2. Analysis • Defining the challenges and opportunities associated with a particular issue more clearly • Producing draft policy documents for validation and development during any engagement process	• Public, stakeholders and decision-makers enabled to come together to shape possible policy options • Challenges and opportunities identified and explored

Policy cycle stages and objectives	Role of public/stakeholders
3. Policy creation • Ensuring a good, workable overall policy document • Producing this in appropriate forms for different target audiences	• Opportunities provided for public/ stakeholders to learn about and discuss the pros and cons of a range of policy options • Consultation and comment on the detail of the proposals and draft documents sought
4. Implementation • Developing legislation, regulation and guidance • Developing a policy delivery and implementation plan • Developing a service delivery plan	• Public and stakeholders informed of the preliminary results • Engagement used to refine the selected policy • Challenges and opportunity for implementation and service delivery debated. Revised issues/priorities may be addressed
5. Monitoring • Evaluating and reviewing the policy and service delivery in action	• Public and stakeholders provide feedback to refine implementation/ service delivery • Performance measured and any issues identified fed back into the policy cycle

Inevitably, your choice of target audience will be influenced by the degree of relevance for the topic under consideration. For example, if the subject matter is highly technical, you might consider limiting the target audience to more specialist stakeholder groups.

The complexity of an issue, however, should not be the sole reason for precluding engagement with the general public. There are many situations where the general public should be included in the engagement process, and the challenge is then to make the subject matter more accessible for a public audience. For instance, there have been many examples of successful practice engaging the public in complex areas of science and technology (see www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk for more information). There are many options available for this, such as creating summary documents and materials, and communicating via third-party representatives (such as trade unions or third sector organisations) or through parallel strands of engagement, where different but related questions are asked of each target audience.

Case study: Putting a value on art

In 2006, Arts Council England carried out a series of public engagement initiatives to measure its 'public value' and inform future policy, resource allocation and evaluation of its services. The Council complemented a public consultation with:

- workshops involving members of Arts Council staff;
- qualitative research with members of the public (who had differing levels of engagement with the arts);
- qualitative research with arts professionals (some of whom had received Arts Council grants and some had not); and
- deliberative research with members of the public and arts professionals.

The deliberative research was conducted in two stages. The first involved four workshops with members of the public (in Bristol, Leicester, London and Newcastle), designed to elicit participants' spontaneous views on the arts and arts funding.
The second stage involved a one-day deliberative forum, held in London and attended by members of the public who had participated in the workshops and arts professionals. Presentations and short talks were given by arts professionals and representatives from the Arts Council.
To stimulate discussion, participants were put in to groups of about 10 people, each group containing members of the public and arts professionals.

Although most participants were in favour of public funding of the arts, the engagement process brought a noticeable shift in public attitude towards the benefits of the arts. At workshop stage, the public defined the benefits of the arts in community-based terms (for example, strengthening community relations or helping regeneration). Over the course of the research process, however, benefits to the individual were increasingly considered to be important. Quality of experience was thought to be key and social benefits were thought to come spontaneously from good quality arts.

By the end of the deliberative process, the public and arts professionals had produced a definition of a successful arts project which could inform future policy development and delivery: successful art excites, enriches, stimulates and challenges as many people as possible.

The insight from this work has helped the Arts Council to refine its future strategy. It led to a new Arts Council mission statement: "Getting great art to everyone by championing, developing and investing in artistic experiences that enrich people's lives." It also helped the Arts Council to identify five key outcomes to support that mission: excellence, innovation, diversity, reach and engagement. These outcomes underpin the Arts Council's organisational plan for 2008–11.

Types and techniques of engagement

After developing objectives, identifying possible audiences and determining the role that they might play in an engagement, you will need to consider which public engagement techniques are most useful in meeting your objectives.

Types of engagement

To help with this process, we have produced a framework adapted from Sherry Arnstein's 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation' which shows the different levels of engagement.[4] Figure 2 outlines six levels of engagement, and gives examples of practical techniques that can be used for each.

The levels of engagement, some of which you may be familiar with, are based on increasing levels of participant involvement and responsibility for decision-making. Levels range from information-giving through to delegated authority; however, many of the practical techniques can be applied across more than one level.

Figure 2: Levels of engagement and typical techniques

Levels of engagement	Characteristics	Considerations	Typical techniques
1. Information-giving	Provides objective information to the public and other interested parties on relevant policy issues. Information flow is one way (from government to others).	Information should be honest, accurate and up to date, and present government's view with integrity. It should be clearly presented and in a format and structure that means it can be easily understood by the target audience.	• Blogs • Direct marketing (email and post) • Factsheets, newsletters and leaflets • Media advertising • Exhibitions and tradeshows • Legal notices • Public meetings • Websites

[4] Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*. 35(4): 216–24.

Levels of engagement	Characteristics	Considerations	Typical techniques
2. Information-gathering	Collecting detailed information on attitudes, opinions and preferences of target audiences. Assists understanding and decision-making by providing insight into the issues that the public and other interested parties have a stake in. Information flow tends to be one way (from others to government).	Information should be treated responsibly and reported objectively and transparently (subject to data protection and confidentiality requirements). For information gathered through use of research techniques, this should be treated in accordance with the Market Research Society *Code of Conduct.*[5]	• Blogs • Citizens' panels and user groups • Ethnography and immersion (e.g. immersion in life of audience/observation-based techniques in order to gain better insight) • Public (engagement) meetings • Qualitative research (e.g. depth interviews, focus groups, workshops) • Quantitative research (e.g. polling, omnibus surveys etc.) • Online forums • Petitions • Surgeries • Webchats
3. Consultation	Obtaining specific and detailed feedback on evidence presented, alternative policy options and/or decisions proposed. Responses are invited.	Need to publish formal response to feedback received. Policy decisions will be influenced and people taking part will be clearly informed of outcomes.	• Formal written consultation document and questions • Online consultation document and questions • Outreach; encouraging participation through use of third parties • Public meetings • Surgeries

[5] A copy of the *Code of Conduct* can be downloaded at www.mrs.org.uk/standards/codeconduct.htm

Levels of engagement	Characteristics	Considerations	Typical techniques
	The information flow should be two way. The engagement should be undertaken in line with the Better Regulation Executive *Code of Practice on Consultation*.	Requirement that participants are kept informed of the results, especially in regard to how the consultation exercise affected policy development.	
4. Involvement	Involvement of participants in the analytical process and development of potential policy/ service options. Provides deep insight into audience concerns and aspirations. The communication must be two way, to create a greater sense of participant empowerment.	There is a need to be clear about the role of participants and a clear invitation to participate. Ultimate policy-making responsibility should be made clear to participants. There should be some influence on the decisions, as participants may be part of the solution.	• Citizens' juries, forums and summits • Advisory panel/ committee • Community toolkits • Online forums • Webchats • Wikis • Workshops

Levels of engagement	Characteristics	Considerations	Typical techniques
5. Partnership	Direct involvement in decision-making, including the development of alternatives and choice of a preferred solution. Two-way communication is essential.	All parties should have clear roles and powers, usually for a shared purpose or goal. There will be some influence on final policy solutions.	• Citizens' juries, forums and summits • Advisory panel/ committee • Online forums • Workshops
6. Empowerment (delegated authority)	Decision-making, resources and control are eventually placed in the hands of participants. Engaged parties have a greater (or complete) influence on final policy solutions.	There must be clear lines of accountability, with two-way communication with those assigning the authority.	• Ballots • Grant-giving • Participatory budgeting • Tenants management associations

It is important to acknowledge that some of these techniques are already in use, and that new techniques are constantly being evolved. For further, more detailed information on the range of techniques and the issues associated with their use, please see our website (coi.gov.uk), or email the Public Engagement Team at COI (engagement@coi.gsi.gov.uk).

Case study: Creating engagement toolkits – Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills consultation on informal adult learning

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) wanted to run a major consultation to pave the way for a White Paper on informal adult learning (IAL) in the 21st century.

DIUS was keen to find out:

- what the public and key stakeholders felt could be done to support a better joined-up IAL strategy across government;
- how informal learning activity should be supported and funded in the future; and
- what role technology and broadcast media could play in stimulating demand and supporting learning activity.

In order to develop a high-quality evidence base to inform future policy, COI worked with DIUS to create a public consultation programme that was as wide-ranging and inclusive as possible.

COI organised a range of engagement activities, including qualitative research to explore the 'local landscape' of informal learning, a series of stakeholder engagement workshops, a deliberative event with 110 members of the public and two targeted consultation resources:

- a discussion guide which supported stakeholder organisations in running their own consultation meetings and
- a version of the consultation questionnaire which focused on the most relevant questions for members of the public.

The response was extremely positive. The discussion guide was particularly helpful in gathering the views of learner groups and community organisations who would otherwise have been unlikely to respond, and the self-completion questionnaire for members of the general public elicited an impressive 3,000 responses.

The two engagement resources helped gather a much wider range of views and a more robust evidence base for developing policy than would have been achieved through a traditional web-based consultation. Importantly, by using appealing and accessible tools, the resources enabled thousands of individuals to have their say. In turn, this raised the profile and legitimacy of the overall consultation which received almost 5,500 responses in total.

Which type of engagement for which policy stage?

It is important to consider which level of engagement (and associated techniques) is best applied at each stage of the policy cycle.

At COI, we have found that in the earlier stages of policy-making, significant care needs to be taken with those levels of engagement that are more involving or partnership based. These levels of engagement can create a greater sense of influence for participants than is actually the case when you are at an early stage of the policy development cycle. It is also important to remember that 'deeper' levels of engagement may not always mean 'better' engagement!

At the information-gathering stage of policy development, there is a wide variety of approaches that can be used to gain sufficient insight without undertaking large public events – these range from traditional research techniques through to informal meetings with stakeholders and members of the public.

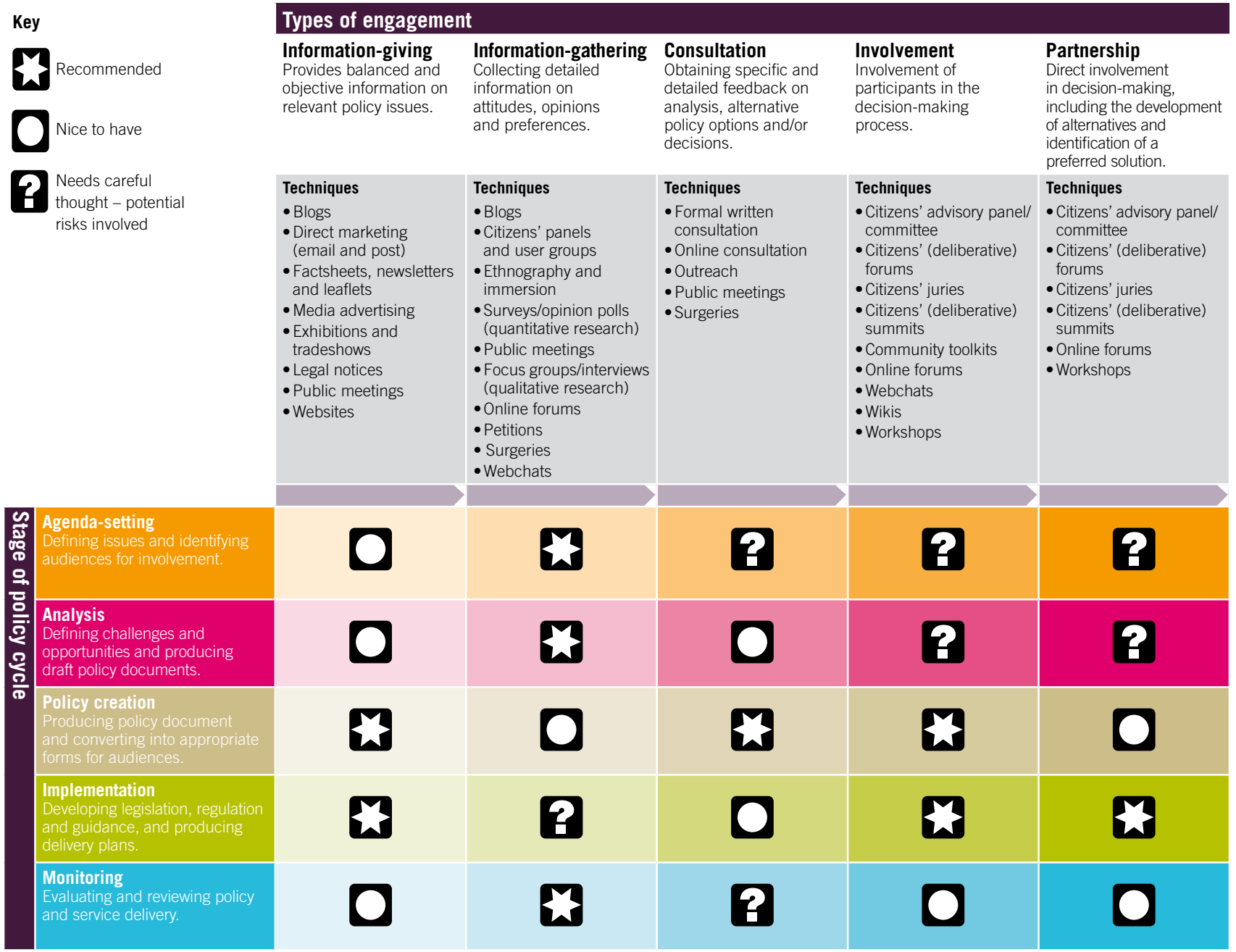
Figure 3 will help you decide the level of engagement and techniques best suited to your stage of policy development. It outlines those types of engagement that COI would classify as 'recommended', 'nice to have' or 'needs careful thought' by each stage of the policy-making process.

Use the table by pinpointing on the vertical axis your stage of the policy cycle. You will then be able to read across the table and determine which type of engagement and which techniques are most appropriate for you.



Informal Adult Learning Engagement Toolkit (DIUS), June 2008

Figure 3: Types of engagement to use at each stage of the policy cycle



Please note that we have not included empowerment techniques, as these are more appropriate for engagement at the local rather than national level of policy development.

Case study: E-engagement in support of the Renewable Energy Strategy

The Government wished to consult stakeholders and members of the public on the proposed Renewable Energy Strategy (RES), which is being developed in response to the European Union's 2020 renewable energy target.

Based on the wide-reaching and often technical nature of the issues contained within the RES, an engagement programme was designed which focused on encouraging responses through a web-based response mechanism. A dedicated website was created by a specialist digital agency procured through the COI Public Engagement Team, and this provided stakeholders and members of the public with an opportunity to view and download the consultation document by chapter, and to respond directly online to the consultation questions.

Key stakeholders were informed of the website via direct (electronic) mail, and the website was publicised via search engines and through Directgov and the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) website. Other methods of enquiry and response were also made available, including the opportunity to respond by post and email.

Following the closure of the consultation, COI commissioned a specialist consultation analysis agency to analyse the responses received and draft an independent report on behalf of DECC, the commissioning department. Some 750 responses were received (with 287 via the website), and the report is now being used by DECC to inform the development of the RES and the next stage of the public engagement programme, which will focus on renewable heat and energy efficiency.

The website has been updated to allow all responses received to be published (anonymously if requested) alongside the independent report. A further upgrade to the website is now being undertaken to support the next stage of the engagement programme.



Renewable Energy Strategy Consultation (DECC), September 2008

4 Evaluating public engagement

Wherever government invests significant levels of resource to achieve specific goals, transparency and accountability of outcomes achieved are of prime importance. Public engagement activity is no exception: its practitioners must demonstrate commitment to undertaking their work in a cost-effective manner and with integrity.

Evaluation demonstrates the benefits of engagement

COI has found that it is increasingly necessary to explain the benefits of public engagement against the costs it incurs. It is, therefore, important to evaluate engagement activity to provide robust evidence of the benefits it brings to the policy-making process. Evaluation costs should be proportionate to the scale of the engagement activity and the level of detail that is required.

Evaluation helps conquer cynicism

Of course, even the best planned and executed engagement strategies may not leave every participant feeling that they have been listened to, especially when the eventual policy decisions are not aligned to their personal views. It is, however, vital that participants are asked for their feedback, whether or not you choose to engage an independent evaluator.

Robust evaluation can be used to demonstrate how an engagement has achieved its objectives, and has been able to contribute to effective and transparent policy-making. As with any evaluation, negative findings can be as important as those that are positive, and provide important lessons for colleagues planning similar engagement activity in the future.

Independent evaluation sometimes has more of an impact

The question of whether your evaluation should be internal or independent is one that needs to be raised at the start of your initiative. If your activity has significantly raised public expectation (for example, if people expect a major shift in policy or your issue is divisive), independent evaluation can help ensure that outcomes are not considered to be a 'whitewash' – it will provide robust evidence of how the project has performed against its objectives.

Evaluation provides vital material for future planning

The findings of your evaluation will also become the raw material for future engagement activity, informing you, your colleagues and those you have involved in policy-making decisions about what has – and what hasn't – been successful.

It is also important as part of the evaluation process to consider what further engagement activities have been considered and are to be taken forward. A key criticism of many engagement projects is that they do not consider the ongoing dialogue with participants, preferring to make the process a one-off exercise. In many cases, this does not enhance trust in government and presents

a lost opportunity to continue the dialogue and generate further insight and trust as the development of policy progresses.

What should an evaluation include?

There is no one way of evaluating engagement – your approach will need to be shaped by the needs of your initiative. However, there are basic questions that your evaluation should answer:

- Did you undertake the process you originally planned to undertake?
- Did participants feel that they experienced a meaningful process?
- Did participants feel that your initiative conformed to the public engagement principles and the Invitation to Participate?
- What will be the impact of the engagement on longer-term policy-making?
- Was there anything that you could have done better?

Case study: Independent evaluation of Your Health, Your Care, Your Say

In 2005, the Department of Health undertook a comprehensive public engagement programme on the future of health services – known as Your Health, Your Care, Your Say.

The engagement programme included regional workshops and a large-scale deliberative event involving some 1,000 citizens, as well as online and media campaigns aimed at encouraging the public to provide their input into this policy area.

The Department of Health commissioned an independent evaluation of the public engagement activity for the consultation and this provides an example of how a comprehensive external evaluation can be conducted.

You can see a copy of the evaluation at www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4138622

Draw on COI's expertise

As the Government's centre of expertise for marketing communications, COI is building a bank of case studies to provide evidence of the positive impact of public engagement. You can contribute your success story or see how colleagues in other departments have worked by contacting us and including your experiences as part of this knowledge bank.

We can also advise you on how to undertake or commission evaluation for your initiative. See Section 5 of this guide for contact details. Other specialist organisations may be able to provide information and advice in this respect (see Appendix C for more details).

5 Next steps

The information set out in this guide provides an overview of how policy-makers and ministers can ensure that public engagement achieves its full potential at every stage of the policy-making process. We hope that it will be useful in highlighting those issues that are important to consider when planning an engagement initiative.

Before creating a plan

Appendix A provides a list of questions to help you decide whether public engagement is appropriate for your policy goals.

Appendix B is a planning template and will ask a series of questions that will help you to gather the information you need before moving forward with your initiative. This template will also help you to create a brief if you are seeking expert help on a public engagement matter.

Getting help or advice

Appendix C provides details on how to locate more information on the range of possible engagement techniques – either through the COI website or other useful sources of information on engagement.

As the Government's centre of expertise for public engagement, COI can advise on particular issues or help you develop and implement a public engagement strategy. Please contact us using the telephone number or email address shown opposite; you may find it useful to complete the list of briefing questions in Appendix A before contacting us.

Contact the COI Public Engagement Team

Tel: 020 7928 2345

Email: engagement@coi.gsi.gov.uk

Appendix A

Is public engagement appropriate?

The following checklist will help you decide whether public engagement is relevant and useful in your policy area. It will also help you decide how extensive your engagement process should be.

The checklist sets out three important questions for this decision-making process and some key considerations when answering each of them.

The answers to these questions will also help shape the subsequent briefing and planning of public engagement activity.

1. How will public engagement help the policy-making process?

Consideration	✓
It will increase the knowledge and evidence base by bringing people together to consider issues in a wider context and enabling informed feedback to be given.	
It will give a voice to those who have not already been heard.	
It will increase trust in government.	
It will allow exploration of complex and difficult trade-offs by government.	
It will increase the capacity of stakeholders and/or the public to contribute effectively to policy-making.	
The issue you are dealing with is likely to lead to significant public debate. For example: • it is likely to result in significant constitutional change; • government has several policy options; • policy has been agreed but no decision has been made on how it will be implemented; • it is likely to impact on the wider population or specific groups; • the policy context has changed since earlier commitments; or • the issues are complex and/or connected, with little sense of viable solutions.	

Consideration	✓
There are limits to government's freedom of movement. For example: • government has already committed to public engagement; or • there are treaties or agreements limiting government's ability to act unilaterally.	
There are longer-term implementation benefits to be realised by engaging the public or stakeholders and exploring how government can generate higher levels of personal commitment to action when taking a policy or service area forward.	

2. Who needs to be involved to make the engagement process as effective as possible?

Consideration	✓
You have a clear picture of your stakeholders and audiences.	
You already have an engagement strategy for these groups.	
You have considered all audiences, including hard-to-reach and seldom-heard groups, and the accessibility/useability issues associated with engaging such groups.	
You have considered how planned engagement activity will fit with this strategy.	
You have considered how this engagement might fit with longer-term dialogue (if appropriate) regarding the policy/service area.	

3. What are the risks associated with engagement or lack of engagement, and what strategies are needed to mitigate those risks?

Consideration	✓
You are able to be transparent and responsive to the wide range of participants' views that may be received.	
You have a clear idea of the level of evaluation you need to undertake (whether internal or external) – and why.	
You are prepared to publish the findings of your engagement activity and your evaluation.	
You can justify the cost of engagement, in terms of finance and other resources, and the cost is proportionate to the output and what you hope to gain.	

Appendix B

Creating an engagement brief

You can use the questions in this appendix to draw together information to help create your public engagement plan. Alternatively, the questions can form the basis of your brief when procuring experts such as COI to help with your initiative.

Background

Briefly describe your organisation/department/unit. What are its remit, aims and objectives?

Strategic objectives (the Invitation to Participate)

What are your objectives and why are you carrying out public engagement?

What is the role you want audiences to play in the process?

What are you asking them to participate in?

What will change as a result of the engagement?

What are the benefits of participating in the engagement? Why should the participant get involved?

Target audiences

Who are the target audiences?

Who is likely to respond?

Are there any audiences you would like to engage that are unlikely to automatically respond?

Are the target audiences aware of the subject?

What do they think/feel about the subject?

Do they understand the subject/policy area?

Do you need to reframe the subject matter so that the audience can understand it?

Are there any negative perceptions that you are aware of?

Do you need help in defining the target audience?

Questions/engagement topics

What questions/topics do you want to discuss as part of the engagement?

What aspects of the policy might you change as a result?

Which areas are up for genuine debate?

What can't be changed/which areas are non-negotiable? How will you communicate this to participants?

Do you need help in writing/refining the questions or topic areas?

Formal consultation document (if appropriate)

Do you need help in writing or editing a formal consultation document?
Do you need someone to design it?
Will the document be available online only or will you need to print and send out copies?
Do you need to write a version of a document specifically for a particular target audience?
Is your consultation exercise in line with the criteria of the Government's *Code of Practice on Consultation*?
Will your consultation document need clearance by Cabinet committee before publishing? (Check with the Cabinet Office.)

Engagement methodology

Do you know how you would like to engage with your audiences?

Are there any stakeholder organisations that have a close relationship with or channels to your target audiences?

Do you anticipate a need for stakeholder events or briefings?

Do you anticipate a need for events involving the public?

Would you like to create an opportunity for the public and stakeholders/policy-makers to discuss the issues? Will you get more out of the engagement by doing this?

Is there a need for qualitative research or deliberative events, such as citizens' forums, among some audiences in order to understand the issue from the target audience's perspective?

Is there a requirement to involve audiences at a regional or local level?

Do you want stakeholders or opinion-formers to encourage others to respond/ participate?

Publicity

Do you want to engage a wider audience?

Do you have any lists of audiences or stakeholders you would like to engage?

What types of methods might be appropriate (for example, consultation packs to opinion-formers, toolkits, mail-out of key questions, national media coverage, local media coverage, public notices in local or national media)?

Analysis

Would you like output analysed?

What detail of analysis is required? Are there any important sub-groups of interest?

Evaluation

How will engagement be evaluated? Is internal or external evaluation more appropriate?

What would be deemed a successful outcome?

What volume of response are you looking for?

Budget

What budget do you have available?

Timing

Are there any fixed milestones/deadlines to account for in the timeline?

If this is a formal consultation, when is the proposed launch date?

Do you need to extend the consultation beyond the 12-week requirement?

Is there a specific day or event with which the consultation launch needs to tie in?

Appendix C

Other sources of information

COI, Public Engagement Team

www.coi.gov.uk
Email: engagement@coi.gsi.gov.uk
Tel: 020 7928 2345

Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform

www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/bre/consultation-guidance/page48714.html
Tel: 020 7215 0352

Consultation Institute

Promotes public, stakeholder and employee consultation by initiating research, publications and events in order to disseminate best practice and improve decision-making.

www.consultationinstitute.org
Tel: 01767 689600 or 01414 160790

Digital Dialogues

Independent review, commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, of ways in which central government can use information and communication technology to enable and enhance public engagement.

www.digitaldialogues.org.uk/

Ministry of Justice, Democratic Engagement Team

Team in the Ministry of Justice leading on democratic engagement on a national level.

www.justice.gov.uk/whatwedo/democraticengagement.htm
Tel: 020 3334 3813

People and participation.net

Website providing practical information on participatory methods, building on work published by Involve in 2005.

www.peopleandparticipation.net

Involve

Public participation specialists, delivering public participation processes, as well as research and policy analysis into what works.

www.involve.org.uk
Email: info@involve.org.uk
Tel: 020 7632 0120

Sciencewise

The Sciencewise Expert Resource Centre for Public Dialogue In Science and Innovation aims to help policy-makers to commission and use public dialogue in order to inform policy decisions in emerging areas of science and technology.

www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk
Email: enquiries@science.wise-erc.org.uk
Tel: 0870 190 6324

Sustainable Development Commission

The Government's independent adviser on sustainable development. The Commission produces public reports; draws on expert opinion to advise key ministers, policy-makers and stakeholders; responds openly to government policy initiatives; and invites debates on controversial subjects.

www.sd-commission.org.uk
Email: enquiries@sd-commission.gsi.gov.uk
Tel: 020 7270 8498



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