A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making [Second Edition]

October 2023

Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann
Local Government Ireland

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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

ciste na gcuntas díomhaoin
the dormant accounts fund

Community Work Ireland

ILDN
IRISH LOCAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

pobal
government supporting communities

Plain English
Approved by NALA

The guide has been written using plain English.

Acknowledgements

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, a number of LCDCs were funded to undertake pilot projects. The aim of the pilots was to achieve meaningful participation of marginalised groups in their LECP processes. This second edition of the guide includes case studies and learning from these pilot projects and other local authority areas. This edition also includes more resources and guidance for planning and undertaking meaningful, inclusive engagement processes which could be of benefit to all public authorities and organisations engaged in local planning and development processes.

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
DPENDPR	The Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
ETB	Education and Training Board
GCCN	Galway City Community Network
IHREC	The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
ILMI	Independent Living Movement of Ireland
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
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
TASC	Think Tank for Action on Social Change
TRTP	Tipperary Rural Traveller Project
VCW	Vision for Community Wellbeing

PART 1

PART 2

PART 1

About this guide

This guide is designed to support local consultation and engagement processes, including:

- planning
- implementation (putting processes in place)
- 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 16)
- **implementation (putting the process in place)** (see page 34)
- **review** (see page 40)

It includes handy checklists you can use for each phase (see Appendix 2). Part Two of the guide also includes additional case studies and resources to inspire and support anyone looking to undertake a meaningful, inclusive engagement process.

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.

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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

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]

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] The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) have the responsibility for the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. 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.

Examples of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty in action are included in Part Two of this guide.

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.

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

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.

9 principles for inclusive community engagement

Genuine · Purposeful · Planned · Clear · Inclusive · Collaborative · Accountable · Accessible · Fit for purpose

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.
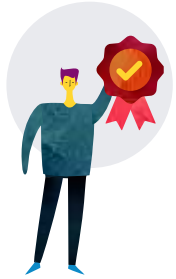
Genuine

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.
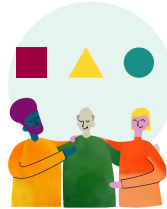
Inclusive

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.

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.

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.
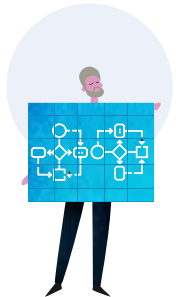
Planned

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.

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 overcomes barriers to engagement.

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.

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] and Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform (DPENDPR) Consultation Principles[7].

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 voluntary organisation or community group
- Government departments and agencies.

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6   Department of Rural and Community Development, Government of Ireland, https://assets.gov.ie/225876/9732c425-65df-4e92-b154-a51ca518b233.pdf
7   Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform Consultation Principles: https://assets.gov.ie/5579/140119163201-9e43dea3f4b14d56a705960cb9354c8b.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

Planning

Implementation

Review

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.

Planning
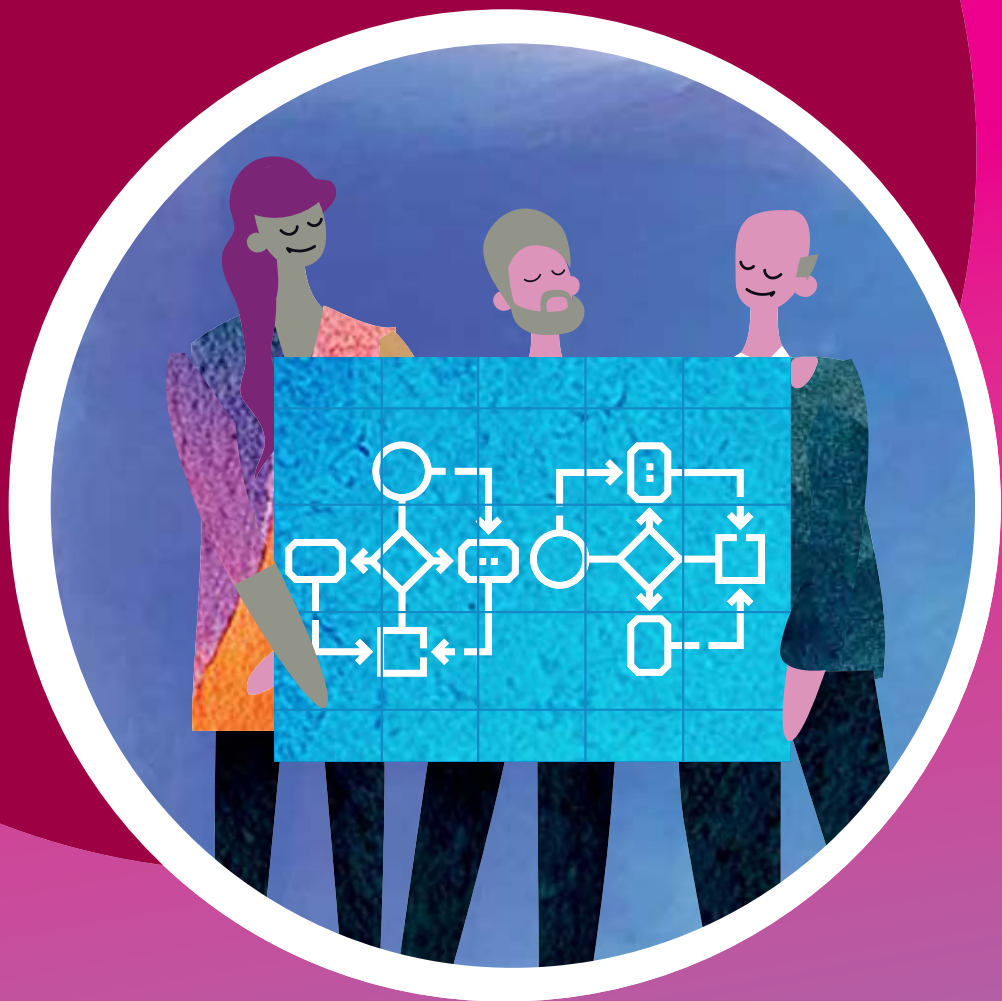
➡ Secure commitment

➡ 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.

Taken from **Commonplace | Citizen Engagement**

Be a conversation, not a one-off survey

People that have engaged before are **5 times** more likely to contribute again

5X

Be a process, not just an event
happening throughout the planning cycle

Build trust
through ongoing engagement and involvement
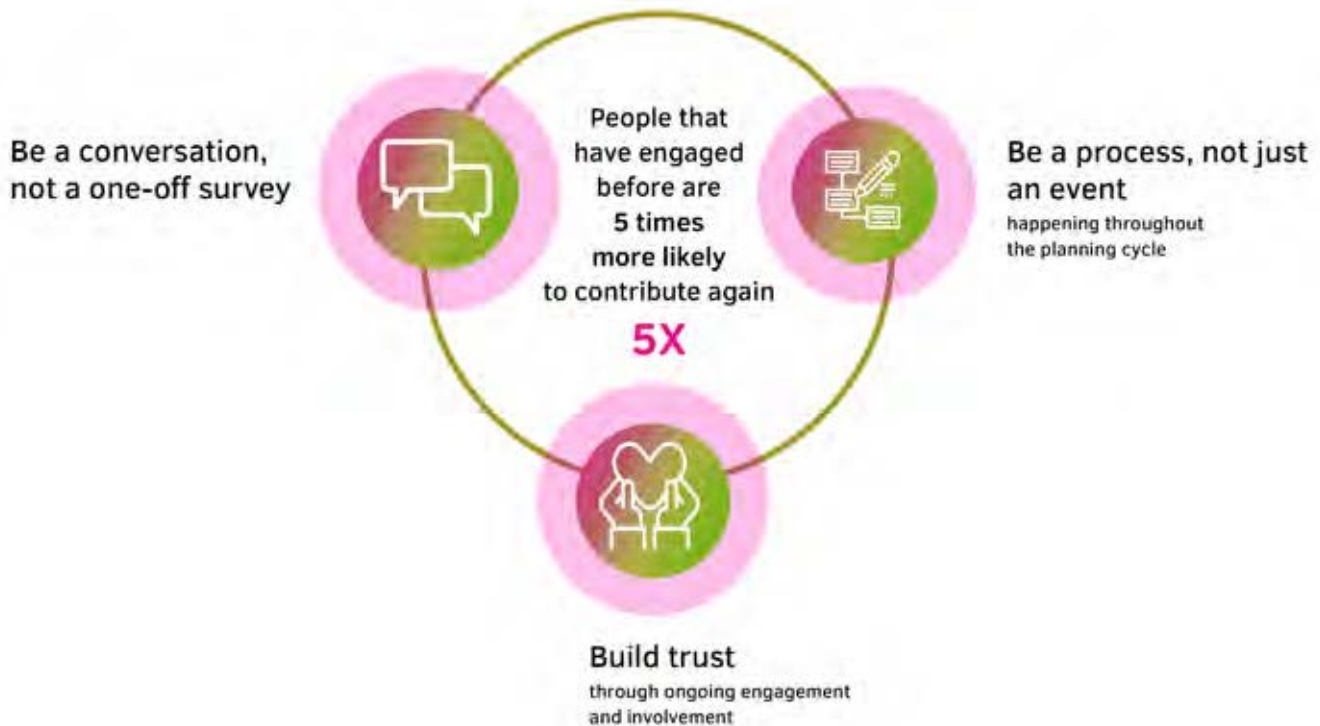
Identify stakeholders and reach out

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 legislation[8] 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 efforts 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.

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8 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. There 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

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

Clarify the purpose, scope[9] 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?

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.

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9   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.

Please see the resources section for tools and approaches that you could include in your plan and inspiration from the examples included in the case studies throughout this guide.

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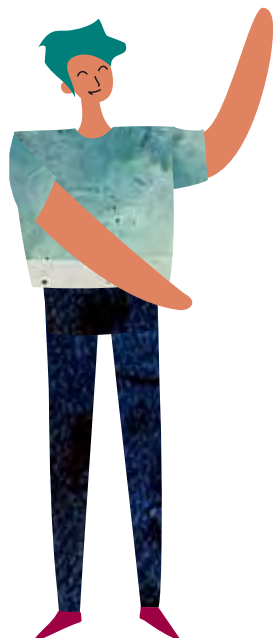
An engagement plan should be a living document with built-in flexibility for unforeseen circumstances, for example, adapting engagement to a virtual format during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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.
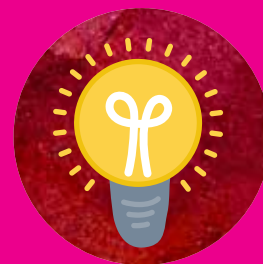
The following are some ways to do this.

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
- through networks such as PPNs.

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.
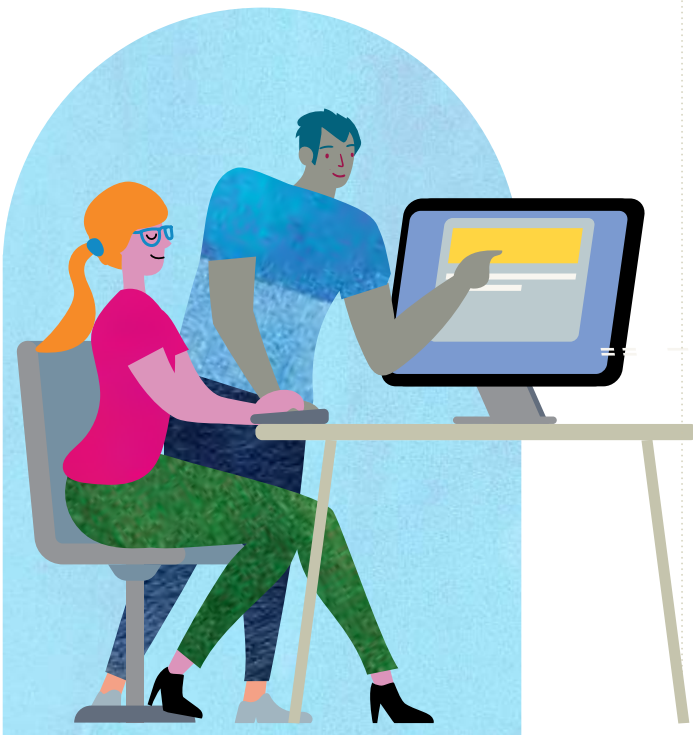
Case study 1:

Wallers Lot Working Group and the Traveller Community

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.

STDC, 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.
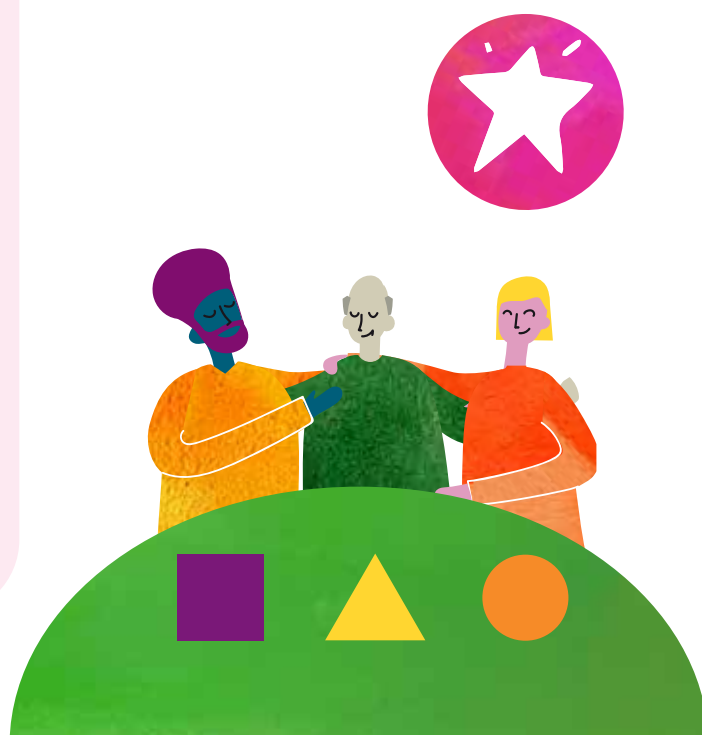
Case study 2:

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

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.

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.

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.

Consultation paper	Public consultation period	Consultation feedback report	Draft policy and test	Home and Living Policy

We are here

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.[10]

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.

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10 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 the 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.

Creating inclusive environments

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 (UNCPRD) 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**

How to create an inclusive environment for people from the LGBTQI+ community

LGBT Ireland

The LGBTQI+ community includes people of all ages, creeds, nationalities, backgrounds and abilities. Their lived experiences are different to that of their heterosexual and/or cisgender[11] peers. Members of the community are much more likely to actively engage with developments when there is an inclusive space. Below are some things that help to make a space more inclusive for LGBTQI+ people.

Avail of LGBTQI+ training for your staff

Training helps staff to:

- increase their understanding of the challenges facing LGBTQI+ people
- feel more confident when working with members of the community.

Training is also a good way to support your LGBTQI+ staff members.

Check your language!

If your organisation requires clients to complete a form, make sure that those forms reflect LGBTQI+ lives. For example:

- don't assume that every family has a mother and a father
- provide alternative options to male and female.

Include your pronouns

Use your pronouns in email signatures and when using online meeting platforms. For example: 'Yours sincerely, Jo Smith (pronouns, they/them)'.

Make notices about resources easy to see in public spaces

Have visible resources in public spaces including information on:

- helplines
- local support groups
- relevant LGBTQI+ social events.

Hold year-round events

Remember that LGBTQI+ people are here all year around – not just for Pride Month in June. It is wonderful to see events and supports in June but this inclusivity should be reflected throughout the year.

Include LGBTQI+ community in all areas

Include members of the LGBTQI+ community in all conversations affecting the greater community, and not just in those that are relevant to them. Issues that affect everyone in the wider community also affect LGBTQI+ people.

Amplify LGBTQI+ people's voices

While members of the community are best placed to understand and speak about their own experiences, we rely on our allies to help us to be heard.

Link with national groups

Link in with national organisations, like LGBT Ireland, to access resources, supports and information to help you make your space more LGBTQI+ inclusive.

Further information:

National LGBT Helpline: 1800 929 539

LGBT Ireland: www.lgbt.ie

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11 Cisgender is the term used to refer to individuals who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth (in other words, non-transgender). For more information visit: **www.lgbt.ie/get-information/trans-and-gender-expression/**

How to create an inclusive environment for young people

Comhairle na nÓg

Comhairle na nÓg is the permanent structure representing young voices in decision making at local and national level in Ireland. It was established in response to Ireland's commitment to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child[12].

Since 2002, in each of the 31 Local Authorities, Comhairle na nÓg (local youth councils) have given young people a voice on the development of local policies and services.

Young people aged 12–18 become members of their local Comhairle na nÓg through their:

- schools
- youth organisations
- community groups.

Comhairle na nÓg also provide young people with a voice in decision-making nationally through:

- Dáil na nÓg (National Youth Parliament)
- the National Youth Assembly of Ireland
- Government consultations on national policy.

The Comhairle na nÓg network of youth councils, on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) is supported by the:

- Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund
- National Participation Office's team of Participation Officers.

Why consult young people?

- Children have a right to take part in things that affect their lives. These are protected under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

- Evidence has shown the positive impact of involving young people, for example, services improve as do policies and society as a whole.
- Involving young people makes adult decision-makers more accountable – this can lead to better, more transparent governance.

When young people take part, it builds their capacity to:

- exercise personal independence
- take part in democratic processes into the future.

Tools and advice for including young people

The framework below provides guidance for decision-makers on how to give children and young people a meaningful voice in decision making.

- The National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making

The National Participation Office published this useful guide for:

- Including Young People on Committees – A brief guide for government departments and agencies

Your local Comhairle na nÓg can help

- Contact your Local Authority and request Local Authority Contact for Comhairle na nÓg.
- Visit Comhairle na nÓg website on **www.comhairlenanog.ie**

Other useful links

Comhairle na nÓg Toolkit
Hub na nÓg
Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan

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12 Ireland signed up to the United Nations (UN) Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1992. The Convention demonstrates Ireland's commitment to making sure that the voices of children and young people are heard and given due weight in matters affecting them.

Part 2

The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

What is the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty?

We call the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty 'the Duty'. Both the Duty and the law require all public bodies in Ireland to strive to:

- eliminate discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity
- protect human rights.

Public bodies must do this when working with their:

- staff
- customers
- service users
- everyone affected by their policies and plans.

This Duty is detailed in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 ('IHREC Act'). It applies to everything a public body does.

Why is the Duty important?

Public services are important to everyone in our communities and they should be fully accessible to everyone. When we put the Duty in place, it can improve public services, especially for people who often experience:

- inequality
- discrimination
- human rights violations.

What must a public body do about the Duty?

There are three steps to putting the Public Sector Duty in place. A public body must:

- **Assess**
- **Address**
- **Report.**

In the organisation's company report, they must say how they will manage these three requirements. The report must be easily understood by and accessible to the public.

Assess

A public body needs to assess the equality and human rights issues relevant to everything they do. They must publish their assessment in their strategic plan.

Address issues raised

The public body must address the issues raised in the assessment by developing policies, plans and actions to deal with them. They must publish these in their strategic plan.

Report annually

A public body needs to report annually on progress and achievements in relation to identified:

- policies
- plans
- actions.

One way to do this is in an annual report.

Working with voluntary organisations

The Duty is an opportunity for civil society organisations to inform and shape policy and practice in the public service. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are organised, voluntary, non-state institutions that mostly operate on a non-profit basis.

When public bodies are open to the insights and experience of civil society organisations and people generally, it helps them to put the Duty in place and leads to better outcomes.

The template below can help your public body complete the Assess and Address steps so that you comply with the Duty.

Step 1: Assess

What will human rights and equality issues have you identified relevant to the Public body?

(Explain: **who** is impacted and **how** they are impacted.)

Issue or issues identified

Step 2: Address

How would you address the human rights and equality issues identified?

(To improve services, describe what is needed in terms of:

- actions
- plan
- policy.

These should focus on improving services and outcomes for the people identified in the Duty.)

Actions/Policies identified

Step 3: Report

What would progress look like on this issue for people identified?

(Explain the outcome and impact your actions would have for the people identified in the Duty.)

Department of the Taoiseach assessment

As part of its legal obligations to put the Duty in place, the Department of the Taoiseach carried out an assessment of equality and human rights issues in their department. They aimed to address the issues that arose in their assessment.

The table below highlights some issues identified. The full equality and human rights assessment and action plan is available under Department of the Taoiseach Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty on **www.gov.ie**

Step 1: Assess

What human rights and equality issues were identified relevant to the functions of the Department of the Taoiseach?

1. Government Information Service (gov.ie)
- Improve contact information.
- Provide more help for customer service issues on **www.gov.ie**.
- Make information clearer.

2. State events and invitation list
- Attendance can be limited by venue capacity or location.
- It is up to people invited to event to provide details of special requirements.

3. Citizens' Assembly[13]: make sure there is diverse representation
- Recruitment is currently a random selection.
- Members can only attend if they are on electoral register and entitled to vote at a referendum.

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13 The Citizens' Assembly brings together 99 randomly selected members of the public from all walks of life to discuss and debate a specific issue. Members of the assembly are asked to carefully consider a range of views, examine reports and studies, consider experiences in other countries, hear from experts in their fields, as well as hearing the lived experiences of ordinary people affected by the subject matter. Assembly members discuss the topic and make recommendations for the Government and the Oireachtas to consider. **https://citizensassembly.ie/about/**

Step 2: Address

What actions were identified by the Department of the Taoiseach to address human rights and equality?

1. Government Information Service (gov.ie)
- Review information on website to make it easier to understand what extra supports are available.

2. State events and invitation list
- Make sure that guest lists are fully inclusive and venues fully accessible.
- Be more proactive about getting relevant information from those being invited about their special requirements.

3. Citizens' Assembly: make sure there is diverse representation
- In future, recruit people in a way that makes sure there is increased ethnic diversity and more disabled people hired.

Step 3: Report

What would progress look like on this issue for people identified in the Duty when the actions are put in place?

1. Government Information Service (gov.ie):
- The updated website would provide clear, easy-to-read and accessible information about the variety of supports available to service users.

2. State events and invitation list
- There would be a revised policy for agreeing invitation lists and venues. These would make sure that state events were inclusive and that there was equal opportunity for all those invited to attend.

3. Citizens' Assembly: make sure there is diverse representation
- There would be a revised policy on recruiting for and enabling people to take part in any Citizen's Assembly. This would make sure there was equal opportunity for all citizens to take part.

Learning from the Local Economic and Community Planning process (LECP)

A Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is a six-year plan. It sets out the objectives and actions a local authority area needs to fulfil to develop the local economy and community.

When developing their Local Economic and Community Plans (2023–2029), four Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) undertook additional activities to involve groups whose voices are usually seldom heard in the process. This was funded by the Dormant Accounts Fund Engagement Project. They used multiple ways to work with the groups and these are described in the following case studies.

One of the four selected projects was unable to proceed due to circumstances beyond the LCDC's control. Three of the pilot projects were successful in achieving meaningful engagement of marginalised groups in their LECP processes.

The following section includes case studies from each of these areas:

- Co Clare
- Galway City
- Co Wicklow.

Two additional case studies are also included from local authority areas where good examples and learning emerged from their LECP planning processes:

- Cork City
- Co Roscommon.

Case study 1:

County Clare Pilot

Project team:

Clare Local Community Development Committee (project lead)

Clare Public Participation Network and Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC)

in collaboration with the following organisations:

- Clare County Council
- Clare Local Development Company
- Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board

For this case study 'we' means the project team named above.

Aim

The project aimed to contribute to policymaking in Co Clare, in particular to the Local Economic Community Plan (LECP). We want these policies to be informed by an understanding of socio-economic rights and 'Just Transition'.

Just Transition means making sure that the changes we need to make to reduce the negative impacts of climate change are fair and don't make people who are already struggling worse off.

We want to make sure the policies reflect the lives of the diverse communities in Clare who experience poverty and other forms of discrimination.

We also want to make sure that the actions included in the LECP and other policies are ones that can tackle the way issues can overlap, with people often experiencing several at once. We call this intersectionality. These issues include:

- poverty
- addiction
- discrimination
- disability
- mental health
- residency status
- parenthood.

Approach

We set up a steering group of people from, or working directly with, communities who experience:

- poverty
- exclusion
- deprivation.

With this group we identified communities to be specifically engaged in focus groups. We prioritised groups whose voices were not sufficiently included in policymaking in Clare. We focused specifically on those not involved in recent consultations.

We also collaborated with five family resource centres to reach wider groups of people from:

- a variety of low income or marginalised communities
- a range of geographical areas.

Examples of communities engaged include:

- Travellers
- low-income farmers
- migrants including,
  - International Protection Applicants
  - Ukrainians as part of the Temporary Protection Directive
  - other working migrants.
- disabled people
- older people
- single parents
- LGBTQI+ people
- people who have experienced poor mental health
- people who have experienced class-based discrimination.

The activities began with an introductory workshop on:

- Just Transition
- socio-economic rights.

This was followed by focus groups or round-table style consultations. People spoke about what needed to happen in their lives and what they wanted included in the LECP.

We held a further focus group for elected representatives. We also held four workshops and focus groups for the general public in various locations.

Managed expectations

The Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) acted as hosts for the engagement activities. We explained to those taking part that even though we might need to ask about housing or transport, we would not be able to provide these services.

We explained that when they told us their experiences or views it would not directly result in a change. However, it would allow us to make sure that their needs were reflected in our submissions. We aimed to bring their experiences to the attention of the public agencies. Being this direct was useful, respectful and helped to build trust.

Strong existing relationships

Clare PPN has strong, existing relationships with statutory and community-based partner organisations that represent and support people experiencing marginalisation. These organisations greatly helped us to access often hard-to-reach communities.

We collaborated with these organisations to co-design and run the engagement activities. This meant that those taking part were being invited, welcomed and facilitated by people they already knew and trusted.

We tailored activities to suit each group of people, for example, in terms of location or format.

We paid particular attention to those who experienced marginalisation or poverty based on social class. Family resource centres were a great partner and helped us to access people with these life experiences.

Focus on lived experience

The discussions in our targeted focus groups provided us with input which was not available elsewhere. The input revealed the effects of policies and resource provision on the daily lives of the people who took part. Many of those taking part knew the changes they needed but would be less likely to attend a general, publicly advertised public consultation on the LECP.

Valuing time: Participants in our targeted focus groups received a small expenses payment. We also provided quality refreshments. We created welcoming spaces with a friendly, informal atmosphere in the consultation locations.

Where possible, we used venues already familiar to those taking part.

These simple measures helped prevent those taking part from feeling that the process was all take and no give from our side.

Accessibility fund

We included an accessibility fund in our budget to overcome barriers to participation as they arose. This fund covered things like:

- transport
- childcare
- translation and sign language interpretation
- expenses for a peer facilitator
- additional publicity requirements.

Peer facilitators are either from a community or understand the life experiences that are being discussed. Examples could include:

- a disabled person
- someone seeking international protection
- someone experiencing mental health issues.

They help researchers get the best out of focus groups by building trust with those taking part. They act as a kind of 'interpreter' between life experiences.

Challenge of project boundaries

Three other, separate, public consultation processes involving similar topics took place at the same time in Co Clare. It was challenging to explain to those taking part what were the differences and boundaries between the various projects.

Influence on the LECP

This project focused on emphasising the voices of those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation in Clare. It sought to build on a shared vision for a rights-based approach to Just Transition. This will be a framework for the LECP to ensure that the distribution of services and funding will actively aim to improve and sustain the lives and wellbeing of all people living in county Clare.

At the time of publication, the Clare LECP was still at draft stage but with the key themes emerging from community engagement activities reflected in the six High Level Goals and 36 Objectives.

In addition to the LECP, project findings will inform the delivery of the next Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in Clare. Those delivering the programme will support the development of sustainable actions within disadvantaged communities and have a positive environmental impact. These actions will build on collaborative approaches concerning:

- Just Transition
- social enterprises
- circular economy
- other best practice approaches.

Considerations for future engagement

Resources needed for those taking part

Participation, in particular from hard-to-reach groups needs to be resourced properly and consistently. This should consider associated costs like physical access or linguistic access.

Our plan was flexible. This allowed us to develop and improve our project as we went along. This was particularly relevant in relation to timing and availability of various groups taking part.

It takes skill to get relevant people involved

Engaging groups of people who are normally excluded by the way things are set up is skilled work. It requires people trained in skills like facilitation and community development. For example, the recently established, pilot Traveller Community Development Project made it possible for members of the Traveller community to take part in a meaningful way with the consultation processes.

Make the most use possible of consultations and focus groups

If appropriate, use contributions to one consultation process for multiple submissions, plans and decisions. However, you must tell those taking part about this when you first contact them and they must agree for you to use their input.

Follow up with participants

Follow up with those taking part about what has happened following the engagement process. Tell them when you have highlighted the needs they expressed to partner agencies. For example, issues around:

- essential services
- training
- specialist support needs.

Consult with elected representatives

Include consultation with groups of elected representatives. Local councillors responded favourably to this in our project. They said they did not often get the chance to discuss and think collectively about issues together on a cross-party basis.

Strengthen community infrastructure

Community infrastructure needs to be strengthened to turn plans into action. To get certain community funding, applicant organisations or social enterprises need legal status and a skilled voluntary board. This kind of social capital is not as strong in some areas as others.

Case study 2:

Galway City Pilot

Project team:

Galway City Local Community Development Committee (project lead)

Galway City Community Network (PPN for Galway City)

With collaboration from the following organisations:
- Galway City Council
- Galway Traveller Movement
- Galway City Partnership
- AMACH LGBT Galway
- Galway Deaf Centre

The project was also supported by organisations including No. 4 Youth Services, shOUT! and CHIME to make sure that target groups could participate.

For this case study 'we' means the project team named above.

Aim

The project worked with groups most at risk of being marginalised in our city. It supported them so that they would be represented and could take part in a meaningful way in the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) consultation process. The project also worked to address their interests and make sure the new LECP met its obligations under the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

Approach

Involved stakeholders

From the beginning of the project, we involved the agencies who worked with groups at risk of marginalisation. They helped with planning and gave feedback on the learning. We did this so we could really understand what issues the communities they supported faced. This showed us the best things we could do to engage the community and what questions we should ask them.

Relationships matter

By getting these community agencies involved we benefited from the relationships they had with the groups we wanted to engage. This helped build trust and made sure that the people who took part in our project had the support that they needed.

Communities were key collaborators

We worked with communities engaged in this project as key collaborators. We drew on their knowledge and experience to make sure that LECP actions would be relevant to their needs.

Helped groups to make decisions

We gave the different groups the information and support that they needed to identify actions they would like to see in the new Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP).

We presented simplified information about the:
- LECP
- kind of actions that the LECP can include
- main LECP themes.

This information allowed groups to plan how to take part in the project. It enabled them to consider:

- their priorities for action
- what kind of social and economic programmes could support them.

We asked groups how they would like to take part

We asked people how they would like to take part and gave them a range of ways to do so.

Most groups chose focused discussions on issues important to them. They asked us to support them when they were making a submission to the Local Economic Community Plan (LECP). Youth workers decided how best to work with young people.

Deaf and LGBTQI+

The Deaf and LGBTQI+ participants worked to build awareness of issues facing their communities. They showed how these issues were connected to the LECP themes.

Traveller women

Traveller women led the conversation at an introductory meeting with their group. This set the agenda for the following discussions. The worker listened to their conversation and made a map of the topics. The women decided what was important to include in the LECP.

Young participants

We engaged young participants through focus groups co-designed with youth workers. Youth workers made sure that their list of actions was correct.

Migrant women

Migrant women decided that they wanted to write their own submission. The project worker gave them information and support to do this. They asked their peers what actions they would like to see in the LECP. They then wrote their own report.

Civil Society Panel

A Civil Society Panel made up of representatives from different groups protected from discrimination under the Equal Status Acts[14] supported this project. The panel built on ideas about human rights and social values.

- They identified actions that would support the Public Sector Duty in the LECP.
- They outlined steps needed to achieve a desired outcome or goal.
- They focused on the inputs and activities needed to produce a specific result, rather than on the outcome itself.

For example, they talked about how many groups were excluded from employment. They suggested that public agencies and other large businesses could contribute to solving this. When they used external contractors to provide services they should contract social enterprises that give employment and training opportunities to groups who are marginalised.

Identified needs

By doing this work with the different groups we found out what needs of the relevant stakeholders could be supported by local organisations or agencies.

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14 The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 ('the Acts') prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education. They cover the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community. IHREC, 2023.

Feedback and recognition

We invited key decision-makers within Galway City Council to meet with the groups involved in this project, to listen to them, speak about their ideas for the next LECP, and to provide feedback on the council's next steps. We did this so we could:

- let people who took part know how their views would be considered

- manage people's expectations about what could and could not happen next

- make people feel their contribution was meaningful.

This was a time-consuming aspect of our inclusive, responsive community engagement. It was difficult to support outside working hours due to the Local Community Development Committee's (LCDC) significant workload. However, the feedback process was crucial as it had the power to:

- develop understanding between communities and decision-makers

- build trust through transparency about decision-making processes

- manage expectations for change

- enable better outcomes and greater impact of actions and policies as communities and partners felt part of the process

- pave the way for future engagement if people saw that their interests and concerns were being addressed.

Influence on the LECP

We used feedback from the engagement project to identify actions and outcomes for the first LECP Implementation Plan 2024–2025. This was in draft at the time of publication. Of the over 60 actions drafted at the time this guide was published, 21 link directly to what was said by people involved in the series of engagement activities. Some 17 objectives came from feedback at the engagement activities. Actions that were not included in the first Implementation Plan may feature in the Implementation Plan for 2026–2027.

For example, inputs from members of the Traveller community informed the action to increase access to education and skills training. The Traveller community wanted this to support marginalised communities so they could progress into meaningful employment.

This action aims to increase participation in existing courses and provide other supports like childcare. The aim is to improve job prospects and increase supports in areas like:

- digital literacy
- English as an additional language
- work experience.

This action also aims to expand online learning opportunities by providing internet access to those living in Traveller Specific Accommodation.

Actions that were not included in the first Implementation Plan may feature in the Implementation Plan for 2026–2027.

Key learning

- Targeted consultations were key to supporting inclusive engagement.
- We engaged the stakeholders who already worked with communities experiencing marginalisation.

Feedback and recognition processes:

- support greater community understanding of planning processes
- improve trust in agencies and services
- give meaning to engagement processes.

Considerations for future engagement

This project required a great deal of time, resources and coordination by people with the time and skills needed to listen well. It is important to be open to people's views and to avoid silencing people. To do this, you need to be able to think about problems in different ways. For example, the Trans and Non-Binary community faced challenges from a lack of national policy. But the Local Economic Community Plan (LECP) is local so we had to think about how they could be supported at a local level. We invited ideas rather than telling people that their problem could not be addressed.

We had to take a flexible approach. For example, there are differences in communication, and experience between the Deaf and hearing communities. We took time to understand this and build shared understanding about big ideas so we could identify actions for the community.

The groups taking part appreciated the additional measures taken to make sure that their independence and views were respected. We made sure that they agreed on actions and had a chance to deliver their own message to key decision-makers.

County Wicklow Pilot

Project team:

Wicklow Local Community Development Committee (project lead)

Wicklow Public Participation Network

Wicklow County Council

For Case Study 3 'we' means the project team named above.

Aim

Our main aim was to build on the model of consultation used to develop the Wicklow Public Participation Network's (PPN) Vision for Community Wellbeing (VCW).

Support networks and community leaders

We aimed to engage existing networks and key community leaders. We wanted to support them so they could understand the background and context for developing the LECP and the Vision for Community Wellbeing (VCW).

Training

We aimed to train and support them and other community members to:

- run the consultation process with their groups
- compile outputs to feed into the LECP and VCW.

Report back

We aimed to report back on the learning about what was needed to enable these groups to engage in consultations.

Approach

We formed a project Reference Group made up of people from, or representing, communities whose voices were seldom heard including:

- Travellers
- older people
- migrant communities
- LGBTQI+ communities
- people affected by substance misuse
- rural and urban disadvantaged communities
- disabled people.

Our project was informed from the beginning and throughout by discussions with this Reference Group.

The Reference Group examined our initial project approach. It highlighted significant barriers to taking part for target groups like more pressing concerns about:

- the cost of living
- housing
- transport
- immigration status.

Participation was particularly threatened by negative past experiences of people who did not receive feedback. It was also threatened by people's experiences in the past of giving feedback but it was not acted on.

The Group also identified a range of practical measures to enable and encourage participation. Based on this feedback, we adapted our approach to investigate and facilitate genuine, inclusive engagement.

We continuously looked for input from the Reference Group and incorporated it into the project. We adapted the relevant actions on an ongoing basis to keep them relevant.

The following outcomes were direct results of the Reference Group's input to the LECP process.

1. Marginalised people included

People affected by marginalisation responded positively. They engaged with us when they could see that we adapted our project based on feedback from the Reference Group.

This created opportunities to network and build on strong relationships with these communities. It has meant that the LECP is informed by the lived experience of those who are often left out of the conversation.

2. Social Inclusion Network Group set up

The LCDC has established a Social Inclusion Network Group (SING). This includes representatives from the:

- LCDC
- Council
- community organisations
- groups with lived experience of marginalisation.

The Network will:

- share experiences
- provide peer support
- identify gaps
- monitor how local policies impact on social inclusion
- inform LECP implementation plans and further iterations of the LECP.

The Network will create opportunities for networking and collaboration. It will create proposals and actions that deliver added value to existing initiatives. The SING will aim to improve shared understanding of how different communities are marginalised.

By facilitating and engaging with the SING, Wicklow County Council is also making significant strides towards fulfilling its obligations under the Public Sector Duty.

3. Power of communication

As the LECP is put into action, ongoing communications will keep people informed about the progress of actions and their impact.

We ran 'Community Catch Up' feedback events throughout the county. At them we told people that had taken part in the LECP consultation about what had happened as a result of their engagement.

Wicklow County Council and the PPN produced a booklet illustrating how the LECP goals, objectives, and actions translated into activity in the community. This meant they could see and feel, the link between policy and practice.

Influence on the LECP

The cost of living crisis emerged as a recurring theme through the various engagements. In particular, how it affected people's physical and mental wellbeing. Food security and food poverty were of particular concern.

This was supported by a research report commissioned following the COVID-19 pandemic to investigate the issue of food poverty in the county.[15] As a result, it is now an action in the LECP 2023–2029. The local authority will apply for funding under Healthy Wicklow for a food co-ordinator to put in place the recommendations of the food poverty research.

1. Set up a Co Wicklow Community Food Partnership.

2. Develop a three-year work plan.

3. Compile and distribute a directory of community food services in Co Wicklow.

4. Hold a networking event for community food services and food responses in the county.

5. Explore the feasibility of Community Groceries and Community Cafés in the county using the social enterprise model.

Feedback from those taking part in engagement

"

I never bothered with policy and consultation before, but after getting involved with the VCW LECP consultations I wanted to make sure that the voices of these young people would be heard."

Although we are based in Co Wicklow, I never felt we were connected to the county because a lot of our work was done at national level. Wicklow PPN has brought us into the county and helped us to make valuable connections and ensure that the voice of migrants is included in local policy development."

I never knew much about the last LECP and I certainly don't feel Travellers were part of it. This time I feel I know a lot more about it and am happy that our voice has been heard."

15 An Exploration of Food Poverty in County Wicklow, Research Report, 2022 commissioned by Co. Wicklow Local Community Development Committee and Co. Wicklow Children and Young People's Services Committee.

Considerations for future engagement

Those taking part in inclusive engagement must have clear and genuine opportunities to influence outcomes.

Engagement activities must be continuously adapted and informed by the experience of people from or representing marginalised groups.

Plan for engagement enough in advance and provide adequate time.

Resource engagement activities with enough:

- time
- personnel
- skills
- experience
- materials.

Manage expectations by outlining what is and is not within the scope of the plans being developed.

Highlight to participants the benefits that can come from their input.

Use venues and facilitators already familiar to participants. Work with groups to incorporate consultations as part of a regular meeting, for example, work with Traveller Healthcare Workers during scheduled community sessions.

Where appropriate, combine multiple consultations that can take place within the same period to make efficient use of people's time and effort.

Incentivise or reimburse participation, for example, give prizes.

Give regular feedback to those taking part on the outcomes of the engagement process. For example show:
- how plans became a reality
- the impact of certain actions
- why other actions were not undertaken.

Meeting people where they are: Cork City

Cork City Council

For Case Study 4 'we' means Cork City Council.

Approach

We broadly advertised the Local Economic Community Plan (LECP) consultation process to the general public. We offered people and organisations a wide range of ways to submit their thoughts. These included:

- online and paper surveys
- written submissions
- exhibition stands in 10 libraries city-wide
- in-person events.

We collaborated with UCC's Civic and Community Engagement team to organise two large multi-stakeholder engagement events as well as a council staff event using a format called 'CityLabs'.

CityLabs is a platform for universities and cities to collaborate by gathering and sharing different points of view and knowledge of social issues. It is a tool to support work towards positive social impact. Find out more: https://www.ucc.ie/en/unic/

Reaching the seldom heard

We held a dedicated event with a variety of community associations in a local community centre. These associations represent a broad range of communities whose voices are often not included in consultation processes. In addition to this, we particularly targeted efforts on reaching the seldom heard voices of:

- single parents
- the Traveller community
- disabled people
- young people.

We organised unique events where we could meet people in a way that they could easily communicate their ideas and feelings. The events helped people forge new relationships and begin new collaborations.

We designed each event to suit the groups attending. To make sure we were consistent, we used the same questions from our survey and multi-stakeholder events across all engagements. We organised each of the following events using different formats that would best suit each target group.

Single parents

We collaborated with national and local organisations to organise an event for single parents. The goal of this workshop was to translate national facts and figures into local actions that could be included in the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). We arranged the events to make it as easy as possible for single parents to take part. This included:

- holding the events after school as many of the parents we consulted worked part-time during school hours
- providing on-site childcare
- providing hot food and drinks
- language translation services according to the nationalities of those registered.

Local organisations that provided relevant supports to this group also held information stands.

The Traveller community

With support from the Sláintecare Healthy Communities initiative, we partnered with Springboard. This is a Tusla Child and Family Support Project that has a well-established relationship with the residents of St Anthony's Park, a halting site in Cork City. We went to the park to meet residents where they lived and used the Place Standard tool© to capture residents' views of 'my place'.

We catered for mixed literacy levels by recording discussions visually as they took place through a process called 'graphic harvesting'. This involves drawing images and writing notes on a board as the discussion develops. The material on the board represents what people are saying during the discussion. The outcome of the project was positive with more than 50 per cent of the residents taking part.

> The Place Standard tool© is a way to assess places. It provides a simple framework to structure conversations about place (physical and social elements) and can be used in a variety of settings.
> Find out more:
> https://www.ourplace.scot/tool

Disabled people

We organised the LECP consultation for disabled people in collaboration with the:

- Cork Access Group
- Cork City PPN
- Independent Living Movement Ireland
- Disability Federation of Ireland.

This meant the event was co-designed with disabled people to make sure the selected venue, event timing and communication forms to be used (verbal, written, both) were accessible and preferable to them.

Young people

We combined an LECP meeting with an annual strategic planning meeting of the Northside Youth Forum. This Forum comprises 13 youth groups from a range of backgrounds.

The meeting was held with organisers the young people already knew and in a space familiar to them. We provided pizza and used interactive activities, creating a safe space to maximise how people could take part.

The distraction posed by mobile phones was offset by encouraging those taking part to use their phones to anonymously respond to polls using software called 'Menti'. This built trust and encouraged discussion.

Many young people do not feel confident speaking up in an open forum. An arts facilitator wove young people's contributions on paper ribbons through a loom creating a physical tapestry of the discussions.

Influence on the LECP

Cork City Council is in the process of collating and analysing all the consultation data and plan to produce a written report using plain English guidelines. This report will be shared with all those engaged in the consultation process. This will strongly inform the new LECP due to be published in early 2024.

The dedicated event with community associations identified the need for a local network and annual conference. CCC will respond to this by ensuring collaborative actions with and to support Community Associations will feature in the LECP.
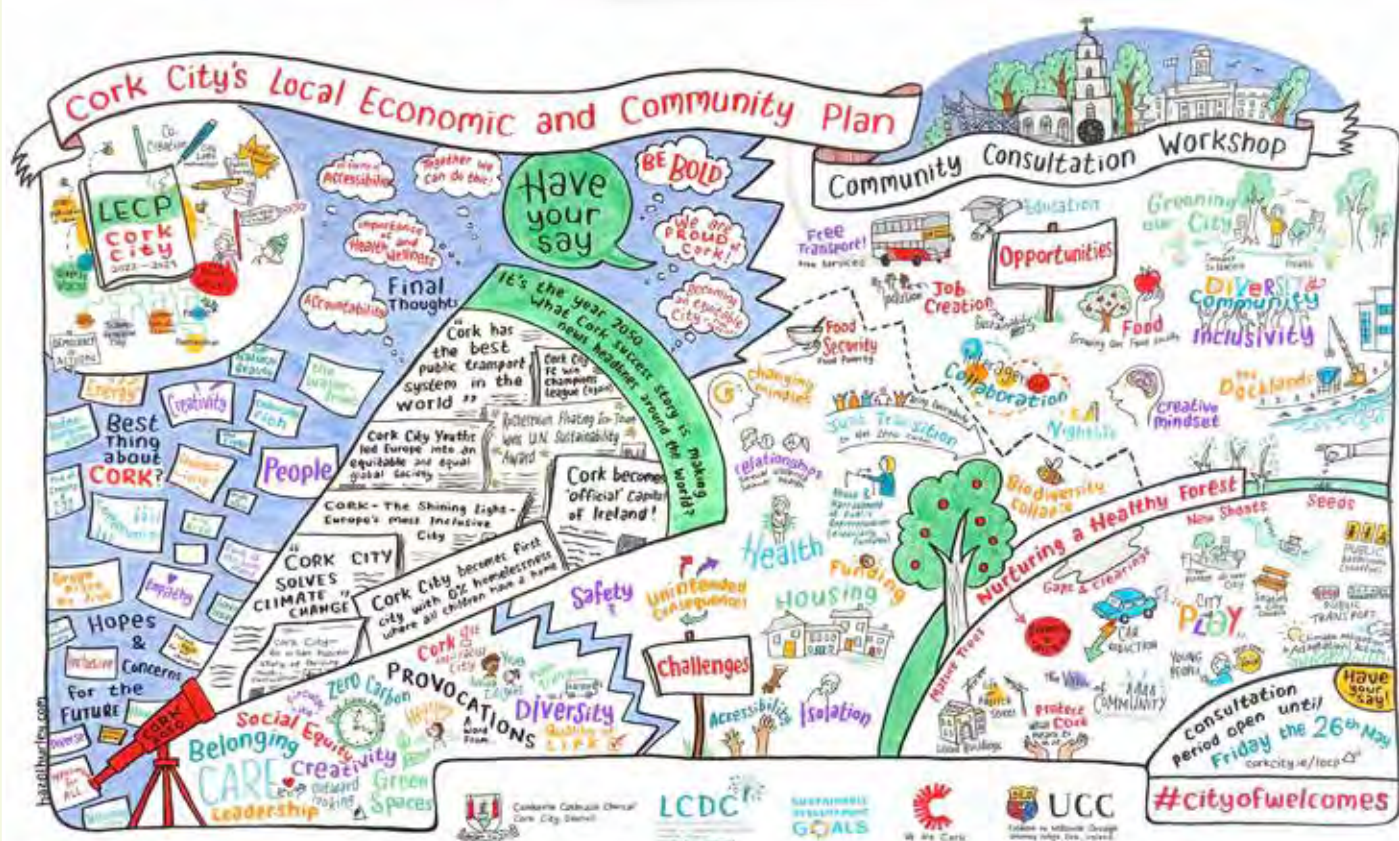
Considerations for future engagement

Work with connected organisations

Co-create the event with organisations who have built trust with the target group.

Use a range of strategies

Adopt a multi-method approach. Consider using non-verbal tools such as graphic harvesting.

Creative presentations

Other ways to creatively facilitate an event could include using an arts facilitator or various tools and technologies to create engaging and dynamic engagements. This can appeal to different types of people and could overcome literacy difficulties.

Invite local community leaders

Invite dynamic local community leaders to events to provoke and stimulate discussion about, for example, how:

- their community has benefited from the outgoing LECP
- they attract funding.

Source appropriate facilitator

Source the right facilitator who has existing trust built with your target group.
Spend time before the event to thoroughly brief all facilitators involved.

Facilitate remote participation

As far as possible, organise events where people can contribute both in-person and online.

Make sure closed meetings have no surprise visitors

If holding a closed 'focus group' type event, make sure that there are no unexpected visitors from staff or agencies. Unexpected visitors can make those taking part cautious if they do not expect another person in the room.

Take your time

Depending on the format, the timeframe for engagement could sometimes be spread out over a number of days instead of cramming it into one event.

Work with people right through the year

Our Community and Economic team engages with organisations and communities year-round through different programmes and inter-agencies. This makes it easier to get stakeholders involved during public consultations.

Coordinated engagement: Planning Roscommon Together

Primary delivery partners:

Roscommon County Council

Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)

Public Participation Network (PPN)

Roscommon Integrated Development Company

For Case Study 5 'we' means the groups listed above.

Background

In early 2023, local development stakeholders in Roscommon came together under the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) to create the 2023-2029 Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP).

At the same time, both the Public Participation Network (PPN) and Local Development Company were asked to consult communities on associated policies that would align and dovetail with overall LECP goals.

Organisations planned together

We wanted organisations to plan together for the county so we promoted inclusive engagement and user-friendly consultation techniques.

We got feedback at sessions by using open-ended questions, visual aids and activities. These included:

- mapping exercises where those taking part used stickers to identify needs in specific areas
- placing coloured dots on priority themes
- allocating coins representing where money should be spent.

The benefit of this type of coordinated consultation process is that even when those taking part contribute at just one event, they have a say on multiple local plans and strategies.

Data is hugely important as a tool to support decision making. Local stakeholders need to work together to reduce consultation fatigue and avoid asking the same audience to take part in lots of different consultations.

Learning from the joint consultation approach

Planning Roscommon Together

Some of the key success factors in the Planning Roscommon Together initiative were:

- how the stakeholders worked together
- the tools and techniques used during the consultation process.

Accessible and activity-based consultations enabled contributors to have their say on a variety of topics in a one-stop environment. These blended consultations gave target audiences multiple chances to contribute and take part effectively.

The ultimate goal was to:

- make the consultations enjoyable and interactive
- reduce consultation fatigue
- maximise feedback, using the information we received from sessions in many policies.

If we were to carry out a similar exercise again, we would consider using more translation technology to support in-person conversations with people whose first language is not English.

Influence on the LECP

Feedback from the consultations directly influenced actions in the new LECP. It was in draft at the time of publication. For example, several programmes were identified as working well in Roscommon to meet social inclusion objectives. These included the:

- Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)
- County Roscommon Refugee Resettlement Programme
- Family Play Bus
- Traveller Programme.

People taking part in consultations also indicated that they wanted more social inclusion activities. They recognised and celebrated Roscommon's growing diversity as a strength and a source of richness.

These findings informed the LECP action to host community events that:

- celebrated Roscommon's diversity
- highlighted the contributions and talents of people from all walks of life.

This could be through festivals, art and workshops that encouraged interaction and understanding among different groups in the county.

Considerations for future engagement

Involve all stakeholders and explain process

It is important to involve every stakeholder in the process from the outset.

It is essential to define the target audience and make sure they understand all the reasons for the consultation. For example, they should understand the:

- subjects to be discussed
- policies included in the consultation.

Use a collective brand

Agree a collective consultation brand from the outset. Develop a cohesive marketing strategy to communicate with the target audience and to promote the consultations.

It's important to let the audience know who is involved and what they are being asked to provide feedback on.

Use plain English and ask thought-provoking questions

You must use clear and accessible language and content. It should be thought provoking and allow those taking part to have their say.

Avoid using closed questions that often limit the quality of feedback received. More user-friendly and inclusive questions should be used like:

- What is working well?
- What's not working so well?

Use a mix of consultation techniques

Use a mix of techniques to make sessions enjoyable and accessible:

- online surveys
- focus groups
- workshop sessions.

Considerations for future engagement

Plan in-person consultation sessions carefully

When attendees arrive tell them what is going to happen and where everything is. Use creative consultation activities and visual aids to encourage quality feedback.

Use open-circle seating format to encourage conversation and feedback. This works better than theatre-style formats.

Promote accessible and inclusive consultation sessions

It is really important to have a variety of user-friendly tools and techniques to hand. Activity-based feedback sessions empower those taking part to contribute and express their feedback in an open manner. This way quality information is generated.

Work together on several policies

Bring local development stakeholders together so they can work on multiple policies in one go. This creates synergy. It allows for sharing of resources so that more can be achieved more quickly than would be done from using a series of separate consultations.

Use data for multiple policies

Data received during any consultations should be open and have multiple uses. It should support the development of a variety of documents and policies from local to national level.

High-level learning from the DAF Engagement Project

The Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF) Engagement Project has shown that it is crucial to allocate enough time, personnel and other resources to the process of inclusively engaging communities.

This can result in better engagement processes that meaningfully involve marginalised communities. It allows their lived experiences to inform policy, planning and decision-making. It is important that people can see the result of their engagement in the outcome of the process.

This can help restore the trust of those who may have been disillusioned by previous processes. It can also result in better buy-in and support for the implementation of plans.

Engagement processes include:

- a task – **what** is to be achieved
- a process – **the way** that task is achieved.

Process indicators

The way tasks are achieved will create the conditions for buy-in, ownership and participation.

Process indicator: Contributions reflected

- The way people can see their contributions reflected in the output.
- How well they feel that the time they gave to the engagement process was spent.

Process indicator: Ownership

- How much those who took part feel a sense of ownership of the output.

Process indicator: Buy in

How much people who took part are:

- happy with the output
- willing to take part in:
    - implementation
    - review
    - re-designing the process if it is not fit for purpose

Process indicator: Willing to take part in the future

- How much the people who took part are willing to engage in similar or future engagement processes.

The case studies in this guide show the following:

Engagement processes need a significant amount of time

A rushed process risks further excluding communities and adding to the negative experiences that members of marginalised communities may already have of attempted engagement.

- The process must allow time for briefings about the task in-hand.
- It must allow time to set out the scope, opportunities and limitations of the process.
- It must allow time for preliminary consultation with communities by representative organisations and groups.

Engagement processes need be undertaken by people with the appropriate skills and experience

Engagement and consultation are processes that require knowledge, skills and experience that are rooted in an understanding of:

- the right to take part
- marginalised communities and the issues they face
- negative experiences with statutory and other organisations
- the barriers to taking part
- the ways to overcome barriers.

Engagement processes need the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience

These may be:

- available in-house, but don't assume this
- developed in-house, given appropriate levels of training and upskilling
- brought in from outside. If brought in, the same criteria apply.

Engagement processes need enough resources

Enough resources are required to ensure that time, staff and expertise are available. Funds are also needed to reduce barriers to taking part, for example for:

- transport
- suitably accessible venues
- translators and sign language interpreters.

Engagement processes need clarity and honesty

We need to make it clear from the outset what is and what is not within the scope of the:

- plans
- strategies
- other decisions that the engagement process is due to inform.

This may involve admitting to the limitations of the plan in question. However, it is more important to:

- be honest
- be clear
- manage the expectations of those taking part.

Communicating the scope of a plan is also a good opportunity to highlight the benefits of those taking part contributing to the plan.

Engagement processes can work together

The case studies show how well engagement processes can work when carried out properly.

Engagement processes can be combined

When appropriate, multiple agencies can come together to hold a coordinated engagement process. They can look for input from marginalised groups that will inform multiple plans or decisions. This allows resources to be pooled and shared. It can also reduce the potential for consultation fatigue amongst those taking part and makes the most of their time.

Engagement processes benefit from flexible and adaptable approaches

Engagement plans should be shared with people from the communities or groups to be targeted. You should ensure that these plans reflect the expertise and lived experiences of these people.

Similarly, once you undertake a consultation activity, those that took part should be invited to review it. You can then use their feedback in the next activity and encourage more engagement and participation.

Willingness to adapt an engagement process in this way is a strength. It shows a genuine openness to the participation of those most marginalised and lets them know that their engagement is valued.

Engagement processes should welcome and value those involved

- Make sure that the venues are set-up in a way that is welcoming and informal.
- Make sure that the times of events are varied and suit participants.
- Make sure that anybody facilitating has the right expertise and is familiar with the types of issues that might arise.

Be creative:
- get people talking and moving
- use humour
- use art
- break into small groups
- food is a great way to get people talking informally either before or during an event.

Make the most of venues, time slots and facilitators that are familiar to those taking part. This can help to put people at ease. A friendly space and approach can help to make people feel welcome. Cover their expenses or recompense them in some other way to show that their contributions are appreciated.

Engagement processes should be accountable

People running engagement processes should hold themselves accountable to those that take part. This starts by providing feedback on what has been done, or will be, as a result of the process. It is also important to communicate about the issues raised and considered but that cannot be addressed, and why.

This dialogue should be ongoing rather than just once-off after a consultation. People affected by a policy, plan or decision and particularly those that took part in informing it, should be regularly updated on progress against actions.

Some helpful ways to do this are outlined in the section 'Creative tools for inclusive community engagement' on page 79.

Engagement is an ongoing process

When we produce progress reports or reviews of plans and strategies, it is a good opportunity to be accountable and to involve communities affected by the plan or strategy. The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty gives:

- public bodies templates to do this
- community organisations resources to support this.

Consultation and strategic planning are linked but different processes. It is usually the job of a small number of people to distil and analyse the information gathered. They identify potential actions to address the issues raised within the framework being developed of the:

- plan
- strategy
- policy.

It is critical to undertake ongoing engagement with people affected by plans or policies to make sure actions remain relevant to them.

Resources

Creative tools for inclusive community engagement

From Workhouse Union and Amicitia

These creative tools can help guide you through the different stages of inclusive community engagement. In an effective engagement process they help inform the:

- opening (starting the engagement process)
- exploration
- decision-making
- next steps.

Community engagement is an ongoing process. Inclusive community engagement takes time and effort. The process works to co-create the necessary support and context for the community and people you are engaging with.

Methods in each stage are not fixed. They can overlap and be used at different stages than the stages listed below.

Opening

The initial stage of any facilitation process, the 'Opening' sets the tone for the entire session. This is where:

- participants are welcomed
- the agenda is introduced
- the environment is set as safe and inclusive.

Opening makes sure everyone feels valued and ready to engage. Effective opening activities can:

- break down barriers
- foster trust
- energise the group for the journey ahead.

Some methods to support an effective opening include the following.

Invitation and support

Put time and effort into:

- how people and communities are invited to take part
- what supports they need to attend and fully engage with the process.

Declaring a safe space

Begin by saying that the session is a safe space where all voices are valued and discrimination or judgement is not tolerated. This sets the tone for open and respectful dialogue.

Check-in round

Open the session by asking each person taking part to share:

- how they're feeling
- something they're looking forward to in the session.

This helps participants to be present and engaged.

Setting expectations

Ask those taking part to share one expectation or hope they have for the session. This can help align goals and set the tone.

Exploring

Diving deeper, the 'Exploring' phase is where ideas flourish, and perspectives are shared. This stage is all about discovery and understanding. Through creative facilitation tools, encourage participants to brainstorm, discuss, and delve into the topic at hand.

Exploring is a space for curiosity, where the group widens its collective understanding and identifies opportunities or challenges. Ways to help facilitators at this stage include the following.

Scenario building

Building a scenario is useful for gathering insights from a large, diverse group. This method involves presenting short scenarios followed by discussion questions. Those taking part engage in dialogue and key points are collated to understand varied perspectives.

Participatory photography

Photography allows those taking part to capture their daily lives and experiences. They take photos that can be a powerful tool for storytelling and highlighting issues that might be overlooked.

Place games

Playful games are a useful way to engage people in thinking and acting innovatively about their local place. Play adds an element of openness. People who may have opposing viewpoints can navigate complexity in new and surprising ways. It can also help all stakeholders to look at a challenge or opportunity in new ways.

Community walks

By organising guided tours of the community, those taking part gain first-hand insight into the day-to-day realities of marginalised groups. This immersive method offers a deeper understanding of local experiences and challenges.

Decision-making

After the expansive exploration comes the focused 'Decision-making' phase. Here, the group begins to:

- narrow down ideas
- evaluate options
- make informed choices.

Creative facilitation makes sure people can collaborate and that everyone has their say. It's about finding consensus, prioritising actions, and ensuring decisions resonate with the collective group's insights and aspirations. Effective methods at this stage include the following.

World café

People sit at tables in small groups and talk about set questions. After a short time, they switch tables and begin again. At the end, the main ideas from all the conversations are captured.

Innovative surveys

Sometimes surveys miss the little details of people's lives. Fun surveys can help with this. For example, a 'Consultation picnic' is a relaxed get-together in a park where people can share their thoughts while enjoying a picnic.

Games like community quizzes and bingo can also get people talking about local issues in a convivial way.

Gallery walk with dot-voting

Display various ideas or projects on walls or tables. Those taking part walk around, reflecting on each and adding their comments. Help a group to quickly select the best options by giving them a limited number of stickers to add to the ideas gathered during the engagement.

Fishbowl discussions

A small group discusses a topic in the centre (the fishbowl) while a larger group observes from the outside. Roles can be rotated to ensure diverse participation.

Next steps

The journey concludes, but the work continues in the 'Next steps' phase. This is where the group:

- outlines actionable plans
- assigns responsibilities
- sets timelines
- sets intentions for future engagement.

It is also a time for:

- reflection
- feedback
- commitment.

To make sure everyone is on the same page and feels a sense of direction, it is vital to close the feedback loop. This means collecting feedback. It also means communicating to those taking part:

- how their input has been used
- what changes or actions have resulted from it.

This builds trust and makes participants feel valued and acknowledged. Here are some methods to guide this phase.

Reflective silence

Dedicate a few minutes at the end for silent reflection, allowing those taking part to:

- internalise the discussions
- think about the next steps.

One-breath feedback

Run a verbal round where everyone taking part can give feedback in one or two sentences only. Take 30 seconds each.

Letter to myself

Ask for written feedback. This can inspire action and help group members to apply their insights after a session.

Engagement hubs and noticeboards

When an engagement process is complex and needs time, it can work to set up a hub to continue to collect ideas and input over time. These might involve:

- a simple noticeboard in a library
- a covered blackboard in a local park or community garden
- taking over a vacant shop front as a noticeboard.

Closing the feedback loop

After gathering feedback, take time to share it with participants. Let them know how their input shaped decisions or influenced the project. There are a number of ways to achieve this including:

- newsletters
- reports
- follow-up meetings.

This reinforces trust and ensures everyone feels their contributions are meaningful.

Conclusion

Inclusive community engagement is more than just a process; it's a commitment to making sure every:

- voice is heard
- perspective is valued
- participant feels a sense of belonging.

The tools provided here are by no means an exhaustive list. But they do provide a flavour of ways you can encourage meaningful dialogue and build stronger, more inclusive and resilient communities.

Additional 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 as well as local authority publications such as County Development Plans or Area Plans.

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 LGBTQI+ 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 simples engagement tips for a range of target groups as identified under the country LECP.

You can download the guide from sligoppn.com:
Sligo-PPN-Booklet-A5-V3.pdf (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.

> 66
>
> 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

"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)

- Carlow PPN Toolkit for Consultation: **Consultation-Toolkit-2019-Booklet.pdf (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

- 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

- 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

- 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)

- Scottish National Standards for Community Engagement: Support materials — VOiCE (voicescotland.org.uk) / NSfCE+online_October.pdf (squarespace.com) –

- University College Cork Environmental Research Institute: Imagining 2050 Deliberative Futures Toolkit Imagining2050Toolkit.pdf (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

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: • 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.	✓

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

Verification	Interpretation of stakeholders input is verified with them before consultation findings are finalised.	✓
Feedback	Arrangements are in place to provide feedback to contributors on what is happening as a result of any consultation.	✓
Next steps	Plans are in place for use of the consultation findings in terms of informing decisions, strategies or plans.	✓
Reflection	Review the consultation process, considering the following questions: • 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 Irish Government 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.[16] 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.

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16 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.

Open Government Action Plan

The Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform have facilitated the co-design with civil society organisations of an 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 evidence[17] 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 5.5[18] and to reducing inequalities in terms of social and political inclusion and inequalities of outcome in support of SDGs 10.2[19] and 10.3[20].

If used for the purposes of local planning, this Guide will also enhance achievement of SDG targets 6.b[21] and 11.3[22].

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17 OECD: Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: CATCHING THE DELIBERATIVE WAVE innova-tive-citizen-participation-new-democratic-institutions-catching-the-deliberative-wave-highlights.pdf (oecd.org)
18 **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"
19 **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."
20 **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."
21 **SDG target 6.b**: "Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management".
22 **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:
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International Spectrum of public participation

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

iap2 International association for 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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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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

pobal
government supporting communities

ildn
IRISH LOCAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Community Work Ireland

ciste na gcuntas díomhaoin
the dormant accounts fund

Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann
Local Government Ireland