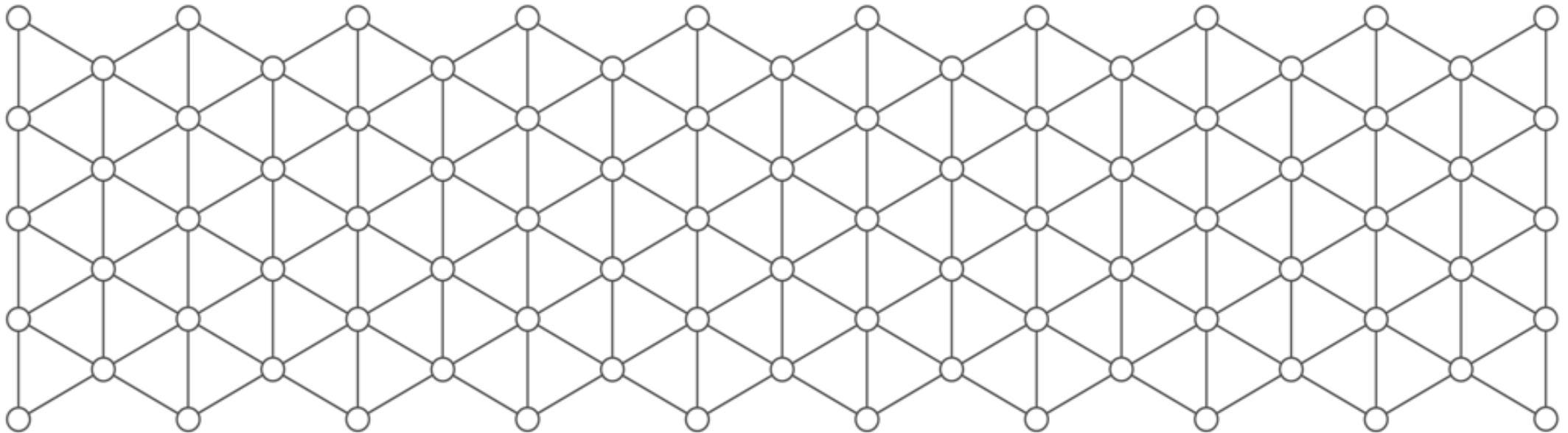


Getting Ready for Community Engagement

A guide for government agencies on building capability and readiness for community engagement



A suite of resources supporting Community Engagement

Getting Ready for Community Engagement is one of six new community engagement resources for policy advisors and government agencies within the Policy Project's Policy Methods Toolbox. These were developed by the Policy Project to fulfil Commitment 5 of the Open Government Partnership 2018 – 2021 National Action Plan. Commitment 5 aims to assist the New Zealand public sector to develop a deeper and more consistent understanding of what good engagement with the public means (right across the International Association for Public Participation's Spectrum of Public Participation).

The six new community engagement resources are:

1. **Good Practice Guide for Community Engagement** – A guide for policy advisors on good community engagement practice, including at each level of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.
2. **Principles and Values for Community Engagement** – A guide for government agencies and policy advisors on principles and values for good community engagement in policy making.
3. **Getting Ready for Community Engagement** – A guide for government agencies on building capability and readiness for community engagement.
4. **Community Engagement Design Tool** – A tool to help policy advisors identify the level on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation most appropriate for a specific policy project.
5. **Selecting Methods for Community Engagement** – Resources to help policy advisors choose the right engagement methods to support good engagement planning.
6. **Guide to Inclusive Community Engagement** – A guide for government agencies and policy advisors on inclusive community engagement in policy making.

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1. Context and purpose

People affected by and interested in government policy increasingly want to be able to influence the decisions politicians make on their behalf. This means government agencies responsible for policy advice need to strengthen their organisational readiness to engage effectively with the community on policy matters.

Sustaining effective community engagement practice in government policy making and integrating it throughout the policy process requires:

- leadership and organisational commitment to that practice, and often
- a change of policy-making culture and philosophy or mindset.

This Getting Ready for Community Engagement resource is for senior leaders in the Public Service and the policy managers reporting to them. It provides guidance on how to ensure your government agency is ready to engage effectively with the community on policy matters as they arise.

2. Organisational readiness and the benefits of change

In developing this resource, we asked some policy advisors what aspects of leadership and organisational support were required for Public Service agencies to get better at integrating community engagement into policy practice. They identified these factors:

- a mandate from senior leaders to change the way we engage (a mandate to engage early and test assumptions, longer policy timeframes, willingness to share power, more support for cross-government engagement)
- resourcing to enable capacity to engage (including using secondments to mitigate resource constraints)

- capability in community engagement (people with the right skills and experience)
- systems that support the processes that underpin community engagement.

Investing in community engagement leadership, more organisational capability and better engagement support systems can have wide benefits. They enable policy issues, opportunities and solutions to be identified and assessed more readily and in more depth. Over time, this builds better relationships between government and communities. It also promotes greater trust and willingness from all parties to engage on future issues.

3. Developing a community engagement framework

An effective way to ready your agency for community engagement is to develop an organisational framework or policy on engagement. This needs to be clearly linked to your agency's strategic ambitions. A fit-for-purpose community engagement framework or policy:

- sets out your organisation's expectations for good community engagement practice
- specifies roles and responsibilities for community engagement across your organisation
- identifies the capability and resources available to underpin your agency's community engagement in policy making
- takes into account the capacity and capability of the communities it engages with.

This helps ensure your staff have a common high-level understanding of the why, what, who, and how of community engagement for your agency. It also ensures that there are clear accountabilities for doing it well.

4. Strengthening leadership, systems and relationship capital

Enabling effective community engagement at the policy project level requires a prior investment in engagement leadership. You can demonstrate this by focusing your organisation on strengthening the engagement capability of your policy teams. Also by authorising the development of systems that support those teams to deliver successful engagement events with the communities you serve.

Setting up community engagement across a series of policy projects is more effective and efficient if agencies get ready to engage through:

- identifying the engagement priorities at a strategic level right across your organisation's policy work programme
- building and strengthening partnerships with iwi and Māori organisations
- strengthening relationships with other key stakeholders, community groups and key individuals
- allocating the resources needed to build people capability, systems, and sufficient capacity to engage.

4.1. Identifying community engagement priorities across the policy work programme

Creating an effective programme of community engagement practice for your agency involves a number of steps. First review the annual or long-term policy work programme from a community engagement perspective.

Begin by identifying which are the most strategically significant policy issues or opportunities to be considered in the coming year.

To achieve this, consider which policy issues and opportunities will:

- benefit from early community engagement
- require significant, broad community and stakeholder engagement
- require a contained and targeted community engagement approach
- have significant interest for Māori.

Next, ensure those leading the strategically significant policy projects do some early thinking about the likely engagement approach. That is, where engagement with different groups should lie on the Spectrum of Public Participation¹ – with Spectrum levels being Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower. The [Community Engagement Design Tool](#) provides advice for policy advisors on designing community engagement. In particular, it focuses on how to do the analysis to decide what levels of influence on policy making to recommend for specific policy projects.

Collating and analysing the community engagement dimensions of your overall policy work programme is useful. The information helps you think critically about the viability of what is planned for the various communities you serve. It also enables you to provide ministers and other decision makers with well-informed and robust advice on the upcoming community engagement approaches.

¹ Developed by the International Association for Public Participation, with the communities' level of influence on decision making increasing as you move from left to right across the Spectrum.

4.2 Building and strengthening partnerships with Māori

The Government has made a commitment to strengthening and deepening Māori Crown relationships. Te Arawhiti, the Office for Māori Crown Relations has been established to lead that process – and support government agencies to improve their engagement with Māori.

Te Arawhiti has developed a framework and principles to guide the development of effective Māori Crown relationships.

Building closer partnerships with Māori is a resource for public servants produced by Te Arawhiti. It sets out six principles for building strong Māori Crown partnerships. The principles support future-focused partnerships that respond to the needs and interests of Māori communities as well as the Crown, to deliver improved outcomes for both Treaty partners.

4.2.1 Six Principles for building strong Māori Crown Partnerships

1. Build the relationship before focussing on the work
2. Plan together from the start
3. Value each party's contribution and knowledge
4. Ensure outcomes are meaningful to all parties
5. Be open, be flexible and accept risk
6. Share decision making.

Te Arawhiti have also developed a Framework and Guidelines for engaging with Māori. The approach outlined by the Guidelines involves identifying:

- the kaupapa (principles and values) for engagement – including the extent of cultural, environmental, social, and economic dimensions
- who to engage with, and what the interests are in the kaupapa
- how to engage; on a spectrum of involvement, recognising that partnerships should underpin engagement on questions that are significant for Māori.

Demonstrating organisational leadership in community engagement also means reviewing the overall policy programme through the lens of Māori interests. This can be achieved by partnering with Māori to identify issues that are likely to be of local, regional, or national interest to Māori. That will provide a basis for building effective relationships with Māori, based on understanding shared values and interests. You'll also strengthen relationships with Māori by demonstrating your organisation's commitment to community engagement that is early, comprehensive and influential across all relevant policy activities.

4.3 Strengthening relationships with diverse stakeholders, communities and individual citizens

People leading individual policy projects often tend to adopt a relatively short-term and transactional view of engagement. Their focus is often on how to get the information and input they need for today's issue. Engagement leadership means having a longer-term focus. It means building and sustaining trusting relationships with key stakeholders that are enduring. Relationships that can be relied on to inform the policy work programme of multiple years.

It's worth considering the likely impacts of the overall community engagement elements of your work programme (outlined in section 4.1) through this long-term relationship lens.

Consider how you can draw together and document the insights from episodic, project-by-project engagements with key stakeholders. This will help you build institutional knowledge – including common understandings of themes, what works well, and how to manage issues.

A further challenge for your agency is how to obtain a wide enough reach into communities – to understand how policy issues and possible solutions are seen by the diverse groups affected by them. Engagement leadership also means setting clear expectations for your policy teams about this. Agencies need to reach beyond the stakeholders that they already have enduring relationships with – who can be relied on to tell them their views. Policy teams need to look for ways to engage with diverse groups and those who are harder to reach through traditional methods. Section 3.1 in the [Guide to Inclusive Community Engagement](#) can help with this. That section provides specific advice and practical actions for getting your policy agency and teams ready for inclusive community engagement.

4.4 Building people capability, systems, resourcing and capacity

This guidance has suggested that agencies do an annual stocktake of the community engagement aspects of their whole policy work programme. This will provide useful input to senior leadership discussions – including about whether organisational engagement capability and capacity is sufficient and appropriate to successfully deliver what is planned.

Demonstrate engagement leadership by scheduling a senior leadership discussion on the following questions:

- Are our policy team members sufficiently trained and skilled to meet our community engagement expectations?
- Do we provide clear guidance that early on each policy project should consider the best engagement approach (level on the IAP2 Spectrum)?
- Do we provide clear guidance on detailed planning and undertaking policy-related engagement?
- What tools do we make available to policy teams to support their community engagement? Are they aware of these? How could they be improved?
- What specialist engagement capability (from within our agency or externally) can policy teams call on to support engagement design, planning and management?
- What do we know about the resources and needs of the various communities we want to engage with?
 - How does that influence their ability to participate effectively in the engagement process?
 - What is our policy on providing people and organisations with financial or other assistance to engage?

Discussing these matters will help your organisation identify what to resource and prioritise – to more successfully bring the voices of the community into policy making.

On the community engagement capability building front, there are several helpful resources for your policy teams to be aware of. These include:

- The Policy Project’s Policy Capability Framework. This supports government agencies seeking to review and assess their readiness for community engagement and their people capability for this. The Framework challenges agencies to think about their team make-up and diversity.
- The Policy Project’s Policy Skills Framework. This outlines 15 skills for policy advisors including skills in *Engagement and Collaboration*. This helps them assess their level of engagement and collaboration capability: at developing, practicing or expert/leading levels.
- The Policy Project’s complementary online Development Pathways Tool. This identifies practical actions that policy advisors can take to achieve developing, practicing and expert/leading skill levels in engagement and collaboration – through learning on the job, learning from others, and formal learning.
- The Māori Capability Framework – Organisational capability component developed by Te Arawhiti, the Office of Māori Crown Relations. This supports agencies to address areas for strengthening their leadership, capability and system settings to better engage with Māori. This framework outlines six areas where agencies can build Māori-related organisational capability.
- Outside government many community and business organisations will have their own engagement frameworks and resources that advise on how to build quality engagement impact, which they may be prepared to share on request.

There are also five other engagement resources available in this series to build individual community engagement capability and undertaking effective community engagement – for details refer page 2.

5. Conclusion

Leaders of Public Service agencies need to ready their organisations for more and better community engagement in policy making – as both citizens and senior politicians are increasingly demanding this.

To achieve better community engagement in policy making, you and your senior leader colleagues will need to demonstrate engagement leadership. That means fostering a change of policy-making culture, philosophy and mindset – at both the senior leader level and at the policy team level. Organisational commitment to integrating community engagement throughout the policy process is needed. The best way to grow your organisational capability in engagement is to learn by doing.

This guide has identified a number of practical steps you can take to ready your organisation for effective community engagement. Develop an engagement framework or operating model for your agency’s community engagement. Regularly take stock of your agency’s overall policy work programme, and intentionally determine the community engagement approaches that each policy project will require and with whom. Strengthen relationships with Māori, stakeholders, communities and individuals. And finally build your agency’s people capability, systems, resources and capacity for community engagement.

Making our organisations much more ready for engagement will require commitment – and will yield dividends. Better harnessing the insights and commitment of our diverse communities through effective engagement can help us do our job better. It can enrich our policy advice. This offers us many new possibilities for drawing more people into problem solving and sharing responsibility for better achieving desired outcomes.