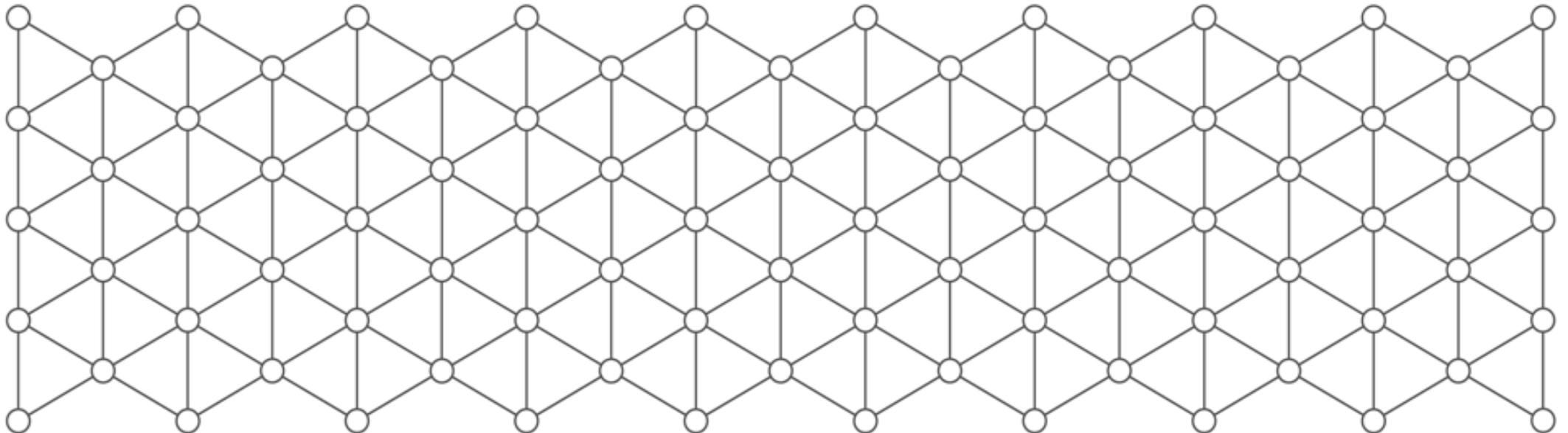


# Principles and Values for Community Engagement

A guide for government agencies and policy advisors on principles and values that guide good community engagement in policy making



## A suite of resources supporting Community Engagement

**Principles and Values 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. Introduction

## 1.1 A principled approach supports good engagement practice

Engagement between government and communities in policy making is a crucial element of the democratic process. As part of the social contract with government, people should be able to influence and shape the laws and policies that govern them. A principled approach to community engagement underpins good engagement practice. This in turn can improve policy relevance and outcomes, and trust in government.

Community engagement is an intentional process. Its specific purpose is to work across individuals, whānau, iwi, stakeholders, and communities – to identify, respond to or resolve problems, advance opportunities or progress outcomes.

Section 2 sets out eight principles of community engagement to guide policy advisors throughout the engagement process. These fundamental propositions collectively provide a foundation for effective engagement practice by the New Zealand public service. The principles are supported by engagement values – which guide and motivate attitudes and actions that also underpin good practice. Relevant values – including core values developed by the International Association for Public Participation – are outlined in section 3.

Respect, reciprocity and trust are three essential elements of good community engagement practice. Applying the principled approach outlined below will help ensure that relationships between the government and communities remain sound and demonstrate those essential elements of good practice.

## 1.2 Overview of the community engagement principles

In New Zealand, effective community engagement in policy making can be based on the following eight principles:

- A commitment to strengthening and deepening the Māori Crown relationship.
- Engagement can be led by anyone.
- Engaging early in the policy process.
- Open and transparent engagement.
- Genuine and meaningful engagement.
- Engaging throughout the policy process.
- Being responsive and flexible.
- Community engagement is not one size fits all.

These eight principles apply to the way that the community engagement elements of policy projects are designed, planned, and managed. They underpin all the other community engagement resources in the suite of resources listed on page 2, and are each outlined in more detail below.

## 2. Principles of good community engagement practice

### 2.1 A commitment to strengthening and deepening Māori Crown relationships

The Government has made a commitment to strengthening and deepening Māori-Crown relationships. A government agency, [Te Arawhiti](#), the Office of 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 for Crown engagement with Māori and principles to guide the development of effective Māori Crown relationships.

Te Arawhiti's guidelines for engagement with Māori explain that for Māori, the process of genuine engagement by the government involves an acknowledgement:

- of their rangatiratanga and status as Treaty partners
- that mātauranga Māori makes an important contribution to solving policy and practical problems
- that Māori have the resources and capability to contribute; and
- that some issues affect Māori disproportionately and they are therefore better placed to develop the solutions.

The Te Arawhiti guidelines note that the effort and costs of engagement will be reduced if agencies have established networks and ongoing relationships with Māori through which ideas can be tested as part of the normal work routine.

How public servants carry out their engagement with Māori is essential to developing the Crown's relationships with Māori. The following six

partnership principles developed by Te Arawhiti in [Building Closer Partnerships with Māori](#) support this:

1. Build the relationship before focusing 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 and flexible and accept risk
6. Share decision making.

Te Arawhiti's guidance on [Building Closer Partnerships with Māori](#), their [Framework](#) for Crown Engagement with Māori and companion [Guidelines](#) are useful resources for engaging with Māori in ways that will enable agencies to demonstrate the first principle of good community engagement. That is, having a commitment to strengthening and deepening Māori Crown relationships.

#### Ways you could apply this principle

- Ensure policy teams understand the elements of the process for genuine engagement with Māori (outlined above).
- Apply the principles outlined above whenever partnering with Māori.

## 2.2 Engagement can be led by anyone

Increasingly communities are working with government to solve complex issues – by helping shape government policies, programmes or other solutions. Community engagement on these issues and solutions isn't always best led or hosted by the lead agency within government.

In many cases where an approach to policy making in partnership with communities is selected, the government works alongside those affected by an issue – supporting communities to decide how to engage to resolve issues in a way that works for them.

When the approach to engagement involves consulting, involving or collaborating, a number of choices exist. For example, a community organisation may be better positioned than central government agencies to lead engagement on solutions or discover opportunities for reform. They may be better informed about and more trusted by the community. This may enable them to attract more people into the engagement process, yielding better insights into issues and possible solutions. This is particularly relevant for place-based initiatives and for issues that target or affect a specific group (such as rainbow communities).

Within communities, concerned individuals and groups may initiate engagement and policy development – drawing on their knowledge and expertise. This community-led engagement can also enrich government and local policy decision making.

Government is more likely to lead community engagement when legislative or regulatory change or government funding will be required for policies and services that apply nationwide. Again there are a range of options to consider for who within government leads the engagement. The lead agency responsible for the change is one option. Others are partnering with an agency in your sector who already has relationships of trust with key communities. Or you could partner with a population agency, to reach the communities they serve.

### Ways you could apply this principle

- Make intentional choices about who should lead community engagement on policy matters –
  - Locate or develop criteria for your government agency that help you decide who is best placed to lead specific engagements
  - Get those leading policy work to identify and assess options for who leads engagement, early in each project.

## 2.3 Engaging early in the policy process

Traditionally, government agencies have tended to only undertake community engagement mid-way through or late in the policy process. Sometimes this was to confirm the nature of the policy issue. Usually it was so the agency could get feedback on the likely pros and cons of policy options to solve a problem that they had already identified.

Early engagement will help to meet the Open Government Partnership commitment of the government, and develop stronger Māori Crown partnerships.

Applying the principle of early engagement isn't just about obtaining 'buy-in' to the process and outcomes sought. It's also about showing a genuine desire by government to understand and incorporate the community perspective or te ao Māori views into policy making from the start.

### Ways you could apply this principle

- Policy advisors seeking senior management agreement (and where appropriate ministerial agreement) to early community engagement as part of initial planning of policy projects.
- As you plan your project, identify at which points engagement with the community will deliver the most value (to the community as well as to your agency).
- Ensure that the insights and value you gain from early engagement are incorporated into the issues statement and policy objectives that frame subsequent work on policy solutions.

## 2.4 Open and transparent engagement

To build and sustain trust in government, engagement – between policy advisors and communities and stakeholders – must be conducted in open and transparent ways.

As policy advisors we need to be clear about what honest and robust dialogue the government is willing to have during the policy development process. At times there will be disagreement between government and stakeholders, or between stakeholders. Open and transparent engagement includes policy advisors and stakeholders discussing what's possible and within scope, what isn't, and why. And how the information gathered will be used.

Being open and transparent about decision making processes is also important – including who will make decisions, how and when.

### Ways you could apply this principle

- An additional and more powerful commitment to open and transparent engagement is to develop an organisational framework that includes a commitment to early engagement and open sharing of the policy issues to be considered, and calendar for consideration.
- Documents circulated to community participants before or during engagement clearly explain all the matters referred to above.
- All engagement participants are informed about how the communities' views were incorporated into decision papers and the outcome of the decision making.

## 2.5 Genuine and meaningful engagement

Public participation is a fundamental element of a functioning democracy, and not just through engaging in electoral processes. As laws and policies evolve over time and the need for new ones emerge, government has a responsibility to ensure they are based on and respond to the needs and desires of the community. Trust and goodwill can be built up over time by ensuring there's a genuine and meaningful effort to engage with the community to develop policy.

Relationships with individuals and organisations in communities can be strengthened by starting with a genuine intention to understand the value they bring to policy making and by engaging with an open mind. Genuine and meaningful engagement also involves making a real effort to understand the environment that communities, groups and individuals operate within, and their capacity to engage with government. And it means allowing people reasonable time to engage and respond. Material to support engagement should be clear and appropriately pitched.

Building relationships with communities on an ongoing basis, not just engaging on one-off policy issues, enables genuine and meaningful engagement. So does keeping communities informed about any changes in the engagement processes or expectations. Maintaining a continuing interest in how any changes already made are affecting communities will ensure participants will feel their engagement with you was genuine and meaningful.

Finally, meaningful engagement includes making a genuine effort to understand how to be inclusive of people from diverse populations who are impacted by or interested in a policy issue. This includes recognising that often individuals' identities intersect with a number of different groups (such as by age, gender, ethnic origin, and faith) which collectively shape their values, needs and preferences. You need to design engagement that they will experience as genuine and meaningful. The [Guide to Inclusive Community Engagement](#) can help with this.

### Ways you could apply this principle

- Have an up-to-date understanding of the communities that are relevant to your organisation's operations – and their interests – that policy advisors can draw on when planning specific engagements.
- Where possible, design engagement that provides as much room as possible for people to shape solutions and proposals.
- Think of engagement with specific groups and individuals as being not only to meet immediate policy making needs, but also to develop and sustain good and on-going stakeholder relationships.

## 2.6 Engaging throughout the policy process

Community engagement should be considered throughout the policy process. This includes as we create our policy work programmes and work through the policy development process to identify what to recommend to decision makers. It should be reflected in our advice to ministers about legislation, policy and services, and how to implement them. Community engagement should be a critical resource to strengthen relationships that are influential on our policy focus, activities, decisions and the outcomes government wants to achieve.

Effective community engagement can be used to help:

- design and review the engagement process
- initiate, define and shape the definition of the problem or opportunity – to ensure we understand who is affected by it, and how much, and why
- identify appropriate policy objectives – relating to that problem or opportunity
- identify and critically evaluate policy options for achieving policy objectives (including testing or trialling proposed solutions)
- choose a preferred option
- implement the preferred option (including administering and making decisions pursuant to the policy)
- monitor and evaluate the impacts of any policy decisions.

Good government decision making ideally requires engagement to be carried out throughout these stages in the policy process – not only because that’s good policy-making practice, but also to ensure a fair process or provide for natural justice and the right to be heard. In some cases the law requires it.

The Government of the day is always accountable for any policy decision it makes, and decisions that arise from implementing and administering it. Therefore, policy advisors must carefully consider when, how and with whom they should engage at each stage in the policy process outlined above. It’s particularly important to undertake appropriate engagement when implementing and then carrying out decisions pursuant to regulatory powers. A failure to properly consult in these circumstances could also lead to policy decisions that are later open to legal challenge.

While community engagement is relevant throughout the policy development process, the appropriate approach to engagement may be quite different at different stages in the policy process requiring varying engagement goals, approaches and methods. The appropriate community engagement approach will also be shaped by the nature of the policy and the impact it has for Māori and other citizens, stakeholders and organisational partners.

### Ways you could apply this principle

- Consider, for each stage in the policy process, how community engagement can contribute to achieving the objectives of each policy project.
- For each engagement purpose identified, select and implement appropriate methods.
- Use feedback from engagement processes to identify other issues for consideration or further policy work.
- Promote understanding of and careful adherence to consultation or other engagement requirements in legislation.

## 2.7 Being responsive and flexible

Being responsive and flexible means adapting policy processes and engagement approaches so they take account of the diverse circumstances of those you want to engage with. This may require adapting your initial plans for why, what, how, when, where, and with whom you engage, as the policy process unfolds. It can also include being responsive and flexible in how you listen and respond to feedback on the process and how it's working for stakeholders.

### Ways you could apply this principle

- Actively seek information about community member's needs, preferences and circumstances, and take this into account when planning engagement approaches.
- Adjust engagement plans (including engagement methods) if the insights show that you're not hearing from the right people and not getting the input you're looking for.
- Revise engagements approaches promptly and appropriately when community members raise concerns. Deliberately make space for them to raise concerns safely.
- Ensure that there's sufficient time and capacity to change engagement plans or methods based on participant or community feedback.

## 2.8 Community engagement isn't one size fits all

The community engagement approach appropriate to adopt for one policy project may be very different to that for another. What's appropriate will be determined by a number of factors – including the policy focus or question, and the diverse needs and circumstances of the people affected by the issue.

The [Community Engagement Design Tool](#) guide can support you in undertaking the thinking and information collection needed to inform decisions about the appropriate engagement approach in specific circumstances.

Within a given policy development project, it also may be appropriate to select quite different engagement approaches in certain circumstances. For example, at different stages in the policy cycle it may be best to hold small collaborative focus groups with specific sections of the community and then subsequently apply a wider consultative approach with the general public at large.

Further information about how to reach out and engage with all the diverse voices in our communities is contained in the [Guide to Inclusive Community Engagement](#).

### Ways you could apply this principle

- Intentionally use the Community Engagement Design Tool to assess the unique nature of the context, people, project scope and engagement purpose of your policy project – and tailor your engagement accordingly.
- Reassess the approach you take to identifying, reaching out to, and encouraging participation in engagement for each policy project – so that who you engage with and how is appropriate.

### 3. Other resources supporting engagement principles

There are a number of useful existing resources that set out some principles to guide how government agencies engage with specific communities or use specific technologies. The community engagement principles outlined above should be read in conjunction with them.

We have already referred (in [section 2.1](#)) to the useful resources that Te Arawhiti provides to support engagement with Māori, and building and strengthening Māori Crown relationships.

Central government also holds a unique engagement relationship with local government, which also represents the interests of New Zealand's many and diverse geographic communities. A set of principles to guide central government engagement with local government in policy making has also been produced by the Policy Project (working with local and central government representatives). These are contained in the [Guide for Central Government Engagement with Local Government](#).

Finally, the Department of Internal Affairs has produced [principles for online engagement practice](#), which guide and encourage collaborating online and using digital tools to explore new ways to engage.

### 4. Values supporting a principled approach to engagement

Values identify how we think the world should be. They guide or motivate attitudes or actions. They help us determine what's important to us. As public servants in policy roles, we need to draw on and integrate values from a number of sources.

The new Public Service Act 2020 specifies [five values](#) as fundamental features of how the public service should operate. The values that public servants' actions should exemplify are: impartial, accountable, trustworthy, respectful and responsive. [Section 14](#) of the Act explicitly recognises the role of the public service to support the Crown in its relationships with Māori, to engage with Māori and to understand Māori perspectives.

Other values that support a principled approach to engagement covered in this section are drawn from two sources:

- the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2's) Core Values
- those with considerable policy and engagement expertise who helped us develop this resource.

## 4.1 IAP2 Core Values for the practice of public participation

The IAP2 has developed the [IAP2 Core Values for Public Participation](#) for use in developing and implementing community engagement processes. The Policy Project endorses these values as supporting a principled approach to engagement. The purpose of the Core Values is to help make better decisions which reflect the interests and concerns of potentially affected people and entities.

The seven IAP2 Core Values are:

- Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
- Public participation genuinely seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by, or interested in, a decision.
- Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
- Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

These Core Values form the basis for the IAP2's Quality Assurance Standard. The Standard's purpose is to provide a basis for assessing the quality of community engagement projects and it's available at [IAP2 Australasia](#). These resources are a straightforward set of tools you can use to help you undertake a simple evaluation of a community engagement plan or completed project.

## 4.2 Additional values for community engagement

Some further values, which also support the community engagement principles outlined in Section 2, were identified while the Policy Project was developing this guide.

These further engagement values are:

- Respecting individuals as experts in their own lives.
- Enabling more inclusive engagement in policy making through developing a more culturally capable/diverse government workforce.
- Fostering enduring and ongoing engagement, not just episodic engagement.

These, the Public Service Act values, and the IAP2 Core Values together support the community engagement principles outlined in Section 2 of this report. They also underpin the other community engagement resources in this suite, as outlined on [page 2](#).