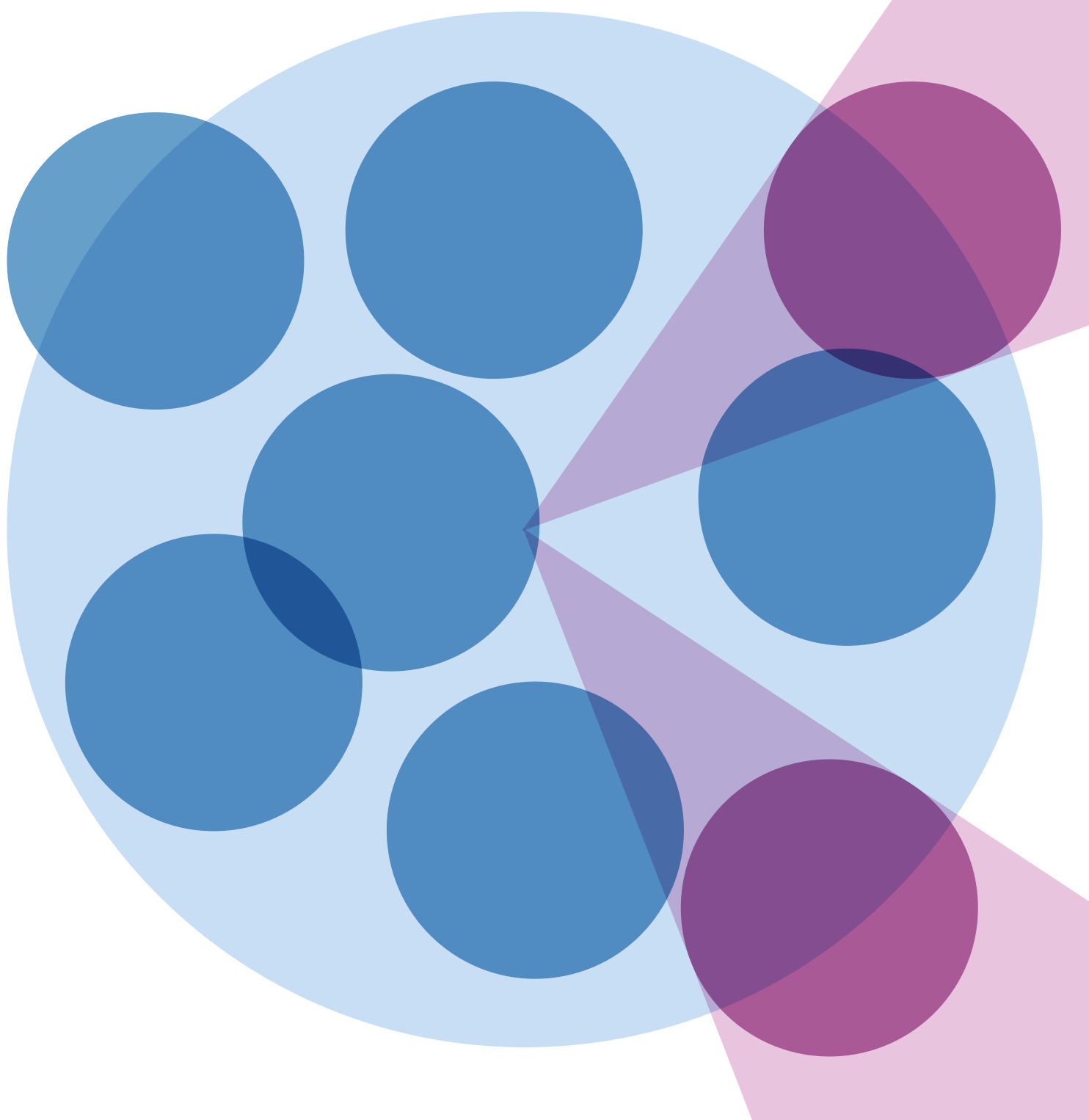


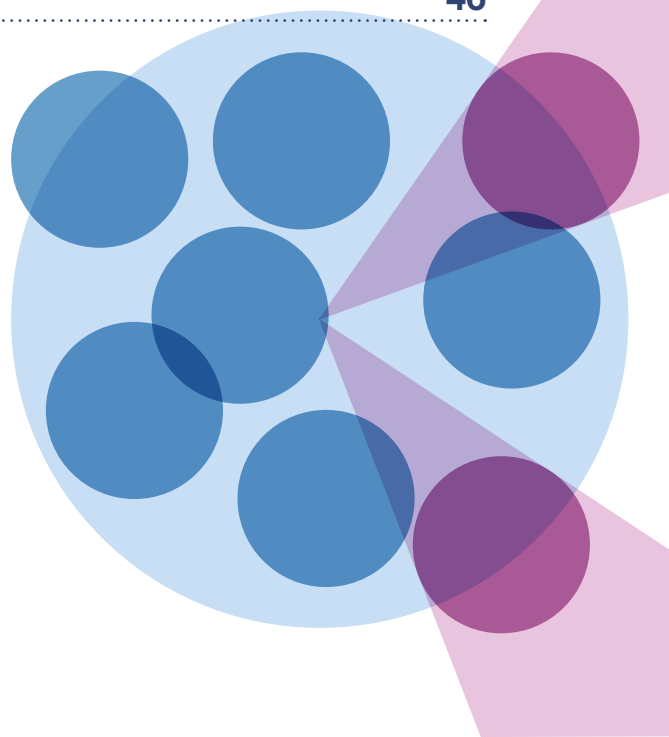
Participation Handbook



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Basics of participation

Participation is an umbrella term used to describe how people get involved in decisions which affect or are important to them. This can be in their local communities, as part of interest group campaigns, or in government policies and decisions.

Scottish Government's vision for public participation is that people can be involved in the decisions that affect them, making Scotland a more inclusive, sustainable and successful place. We require and benefit from evidence and expertise that is produced through engagement, research and collaboration with members of the public and stakeholders, who have insight and experiences that we need to understand in order to develop effective policies and services.

We support public participation by:

- creating opportunities for meaningful participation when the outcomes of policy and service design can be influenced
- considering and using the results of participation activities as part of our policy and decision making processes
- feeding back to participants and the wider public the results of participation activity and the difference it has made

This Participation Handbook was developed as part of [Scotland's Open Government commitments](#) to improve the way people are involved in policy-making and service delivery.

This guidance is a toolkit that you can refer to as needed to help make decisions about participation within your policy area.

In many instances, Scottish Government officials will not deliver participatory work themselves. This is because:

- participatory work requires specific skills and experience that government officials may not have
- good quality participatory work is characterised by a levelling of power dynamics – this is difficult to achieve if government officials with decision-making power and a stake in the outcome are running an engagement
- participatory work tends to require a more substantial amount of time and resources than most government officials will have available to them

It is important that officials are well informed about what good quality participation work looks like and that they understand how to plan their work to include meaningful opportunities for the public to participate in government decision-making or service design. Throughout 2024, a Participation Procurement Framework is being set up. This will provide a quicker and easier route for government officials to commission good-quality participatory work with specialist and experienced organisations, and this guidance supports effective working relationships with these organisations.

This guidance supports good practice in participation across government by providing you with key information needed to take decisions about when and how to undertake participatory work. This includes:

- informing you about participation, participatory methods and when to use them

- setting out the importance of inclusive practice and examples of what this looks like
- providing a guide to developing an effective engagement strategy
- supporting informed conversations with colleagues and analysts about participatory work
- signposting to further resources

The Scottish Approach

Providing opportunities for people to participate in ways that will influence policy, service design and decision making is a fundamental part of the [Scottish Approach to Government](#).

The drive to increase participation in and with government rests on two key principles:

- that people have the right to contribute to, and to influence, the decisions that affect their lives, choices and life chances
- that involving the people likely to be affected by the decision in the process results in better decision making

The distinctive Scottish Approach is characterised by moves towards embedding more participatory, [co-productive](#) and assets-based approaches at the core of how government operates. It recognises the important role that people have in bringing different types of knowledge and experiences to address the challenges faced by government.

Improving opportunities for participation means moving away from ‘doing to’ or ‘doing for’ towards a culture of ‘doing with’.

Open Government commitment

Participation is one of the three key pillars of the international Open Government movement, led by the [Open Government Partnership](#). The Open Government Partnership’s declaration of principles, to which we are a signatory, describes the commitment to supporting participation as:

‘We value public participation of all people, equally and without discrimination, in decision making and policy formulation. Public engagement, including the full participation of women, increases the effectiveness of governments, which benefit from people’s knowledge, ideas and ability to provide oversight. We commit to making policy formulation and decision making more transparent, creating and using channels to solicit public feedback, and deepening public participation in developing, monitoring and evaluating government activities.’

Doing participation well

Effective and well-managed participation of people in policy development and implementation from the earliest possible opportunity leads to decisions that:

- deliver more efficient and effective services
- better meet people’s needs

- better reflect community values
- have a greater likelihood of effective implementation
- demonstrate accountability (particularly in relation to the use of public money)

When not done well, it can damage the reputation of the specific initiative and of the government as a whole, by:

- reducing trust in government - when the results of participation are not seen to be acted upon
- building stakeholder frustration in situations where external organisations and individuals feel they have already given representations on the issue previously
- reducing the likelihood of future participation - when people feel their contributions have not been considered, or they have not received feedback about how their input has been used
- not meeting legal requirements - there are some policy areas where an Act sets out specific mechanisms for how and when engagement must be carried out
- undermining previous undertakings, commitments or practices which have given certain people or groups a legitimate expectation that they would be invited to contribute
- being an inefficient use of public money e.g. when there is already clear and available evidence on the views of stakeholder groups or the wider public on the issues

Equalities and human rights

Everyone has the right to participate in decisions which affect their human rights. Participation in political and public life is crucial to empowering individuals and groups. It is essential to eliminating marginalisation and discrimination. It is inseparably linked to other human rights, such as the rights to freedom of opinion and expression and the rights to peaceful assembly and association.

Participation, human rights and equalities are all linked: fair access to participation is an equalities and human rights issue. It complements and should be considered alongside a range of other work in this area.

Addressing inequality

A key purpose of participation is to shift power.

Those facing the greatest inequalities also face the greatest barriers to participating in decision and policy making processes. These include direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, birth, disability, nationality or other status.

Even when there is no formal discrimination, inequalities and inequities in accessing other human rights can inhibit the effectiveness of participation rights. Unless participation methods are designed with equality, equity and inclusivity at their core, inequality continues to be reproduced and power is not shifted.

This is a vicious circle – without understanding the perspectives of those

most excluded in our society, policies continue to be designed that do not meet their needs and which continue or even worsen inequality.

This guidance exists to support the inclusive and equalities-focused involvement of stakeholders in all stages of the decision-making process. This rests on the central idea that power is shared in the design and delivery of the participation itself, as well as in deliberation and decision making on the issues involved.

Public sector equality duty

This guidance complements the equalities and human rights responsibilities of those who take forward participation activity in meeting the [public sector equality duty](#) (Equality Act 2010). This is a legal, binding obligation that requires Scottish public authorities to ensure due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination
- advance equality of opportunity
- foster good relations

Legal commitments

Our commitment to participation and to using a variety of methods of engagement to facilitate that participation was set out in the [Scotland Act](#). Its key principles are:

- power-sharing
- accountability
- openness and participation
- equal opportunities

The commitment to facilitating participation was further embedded in the [Standing Orders for the Scottish Parliament](#). These state (in Rule 9.3) that for any Government Bill introduced to Parliament it will be set out what consultation, if any, was undertaken.

This means there is a requirement to demonstrate that there have been opportunities for people to participate in the process of developing a Bill.

The choice to use the word ‘consult’ in the Standing Orders has led many to assume that a traditional written consultation process has to be followed in order to meet this requirement. This is not necessarily the case. As guidance in the [current Bill Handbook](#) says:

written consultation is only one of a number of consultation methods that can constitute a consultation process”

Consultation is just one level of participation, and a traditional written consultation just one way of consulting. There can be many benefits to written consultation, and in some instances it is a requirement. But it is important to open up opportunities for participation in ways that best suit the needs of your policy area, the type of contribution you are looking for, and the characteristics and needs of the people you want to engage with.

Whatever type of engagement methods you decide on, you will usually need to obtain appropriate Ministerial clearance.

Please note, there are a limited number of policy processes that set out when and how engagement is to be carried out. This is either by stipulating a traditional written consultation at a specific stage (e.g. on the policy proposals rather than the draft instrument), or by mandating timelines or publicising opportunities for participation in specific places. In these cases you must meet these requirements.

Defining participation

Participation is an umbrella term used to describe how people get involved in decisions which affect or are important to them. There are some common factors that define key features of participation.

Voluntary

Participation can be encouraged, supported and made more attractive, but it is fundamentally about a free choice to take part or to not take part. People participate because they want to.

About action

People are moved to action for a range of different motives and their involvement may be limited in time and scope, but all participation requires an action of some kind. Even a relatively passive form of participation such as signing an online petition involves expressing an opinion and a degree of activity and effort.

Collective or connected

Participation means being part of something. Even when the action is of an individual nature, such as contributing to a consultation, there is a sense of common purpose and the act itself has a collective impact or ambition.

Purposeful

All participants want to do something that is worthwhile in their own terms, and every participatory act has, and is intended to have, consequences. At the very least,

participation makes a difference to the individual participant; at most, it also helps change the world around them; and sometimes it does both.

Participation can take a variety of forms:

Social participation

This involves collective activities such as volunteering, grassroots community groups, mutual aid or skills sharing.

Individual participation

People's individual actions and choices that reflect the kind of society they want to live in, such as how individuals spend their money or charitable giving.

Public participation

This is the engagement of individuals with the various structures and institutions of democracy and decision making: it could include voting, contacting a political representative, campaigning and lobbying, or taking part in consultations or other forms of engagement initiated by government.

Community participation

Participation is not restricted to individual interests. Organised community groups are often a mechanism for participation, which can focus on issues which have implications for a place or broader community.

National Standards for Community Engagement

The [National Standards for Community Engagement](#) are Scotland's good-practice principles designed to support and inform the process of community engagement, and improve what happens as a result. They describe the main elements of effective community engagement, and set out detailed performance statements that everyone involved can use to achieve the highest quality results and the greatest impact.

They are intended to act as a central benchmark and reference point for best practice, and have been widely accepted by a range of practitioners as key principles for effective practice.

There are seven standards:

- Inclusion: we will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement
- Support: we will identify and overcome any barriers to participation
- Planning: there is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions
- Working together: we will work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement
- Methods: we will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose
- Communication: we will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement

- Impact: we will assess the impact of the engagement and use what we have learned to improve our future community engagement

The [National Standards for Community Engagement](#) provide examples of what good engagement looks like. These are a useful practical guide to complement the information set out in this document, and should be referred to as a way to benchmark your own plans and activities.

Identifying opportunities for participation

Identifying opportunities for participation requires knowledge of:

- different levels of participation aka the spectrum of participation
- different policy delivery stages when participation can be used

Using this information, you can decide what levels of participation are most appropriate depending on the stage of policy delivery you are at. You can also plan ahead, to identify future opportunities when different levels of participation may become possible and beneficial.

Spectrum of participation

The spectrum of participation is a way to classify levels of participation according to their purpose and the offer which is being made to participants. It has been widely embraced as a way of understanding the different roles people can play in a government initiated engagement process.

A version of the [IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation](#) is set out below. It is a useful tool but is not intended to imply a scale of increased value or virtue. Instead, this model explicitly recognises that different levels of participation serve a different function. They are all useful and appropriate at different points in policy and decision making – you may choose to use more than one level at different stages of a piece of work.

Engagement undertaken at each level makes a different ‘offer’ to participants about how their contribution will be used. It is important to be clear with participants about the level of engagement on offer and what range of opportunities there will be

for them to be involved. This helps manage expectations and allows people to make an informed choice about how and when to engage.

Inform

Purpose

- to provide the public with balanced and objective information
- to inform those with an interest in the outcome (i.e. stakeholder groups)

Offer to participants

- we will keep you informed
- we will provide information openly and transparently
- we will not withhold relevant information

Consult

Purpose

- to obtain feedback on analysis, alternatives, proposals and/or decisions
- to inform those making the decision or developing proposals

Offer to participants

- we will keep you informed
- we will listen to and acknowledge your concerns and aspirations
- we will give serious consideration to your contributions
- we will be open to your influence
- we will provide feedback on how your input has influenced the outcome

Involve

Purpose

- to work directly with participants throughout the policy or decision making process, ensuring their concerns and aspirations are understood and considered
- to enable participants to directly influence the decisions or options developed

Offer to participants

- we will keep you informed
 - we will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the outcomes or alternatives developed
 - we will provide feedback on how your input has influenced the outcome
-

Collaborate

Purpose

- to partner with participants in each aspect of a decision, including defining the issue, developing alternatives and identifying preferred solutions
- to share the development and decision making process as much as possible

Offer to participants

- we will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions
- we will incorporate your advice and recommendations into decisions or implementation to as far as possible

Delegate

Purpose

- to place final decision-making in the hands of the participants
- to hand over the ability to make decisions and/or take action

Offer to participants

- we will implement what you decide

Delivery cycle

The delivery cycle describes the process of policy making in stages:

1. Visioning
2. Development
3. Appraisal
4. Decision making
5. Implementation
6. Evaluation

There are opportunities for participation across each stage of a policy delivery cycle. Different levels of participation will provide different types of information to policy and decision-makers at each stage of the delivery cycle. Choosing the best approach for your needs will require a clear understanding of the purpose of your engagement and the type of contribution you are asking participants to make.

To support your work across these stages, you may find it useful to draw on the National Standards for Community Engagement [VOiCE software](#), designed to support the planning, delivery and review of well-constructed, managed and evaluated engagement.

Visioning

The process of defining the agenda by identifying and understanding the issue to be addressed, and the wider context surrounding the process. This will also establish what is not in scope and what constraints may limit the ambition of an initiative.

Development

The stage where issues are explored in more detail to generate options, recommendations or potential solutions. Participation at this stage allows people to have an input early, when it can be most valuable. If people are involved at too late a stage, decisions may have already been made that close off options or ideas which could be important to them.

Appraisal

The process of reviewing and evaluating options to measure support, identify problems and seek suggestions for amendment. This stage will end with a firm policy proposal. Most engagement by government currently takes place in this stage – asking people for their feedback on policies, proposals or upcoming decisions.

Decision making

The stage where a commitment is made to a particular policy or implementation strategy. Within our current system of government there are limited opportunities for direct participation in decision making, although there is a growing move towards more collaborative approaches to decision making and power sharing with partners.

Implementation

Putting in place the services, strategies, policies or changes resulting from the decision. This is a practical stage and in most cases participation at this stage is a case of stepping into a new delivery cycle. The exception is when there is an opportunity to deliver with partners.

Evaluation

An assessment of the design, implementation and outcomes of an intervention. This enables learning, improvement, and can lessen the likelihood of repeating mistakes.

When to inform

Informing is the foundation of any engagement process and should be understood to be applicable to all stages of the delivery cycle.

As a standalone process, it is most appropriate when there is little or no room for negotiation (e.g. legal obligations) or a decision has already been made (e.g. clear manifesto commitments).

Providing information about our activities, policies, plans and performance is also the foundation that supports all other ways of engaging the public and stakeholder groups in our work. It is a vital part of building good relationships.

Informing activities that assist participation include:

- letting the public know that work is going on around a particular issue
- communicating opportunities for participation in policy development
- supporting people to understand the details of a particular policy
- publishing information or data related to an issue
- announcing a government decision

Key principles for effective information provision include:

- that information must be provided in accessible and relevant ways (including in 'plain English' and in translation and other formats)
- that information must be easy to find or request and effectively signposted
- that relevant information should not be withheld unless there is a strong and justifiable case for doing so

When providing information it is important to be clear on your target audience, your purpose, your channels, and the potential impacts for the audience. You may wish to provide avenues for your audience to respond – do so in a way that manages expectations, making clear what the possible range of outcomes are for these responses.

Scottish Government staff should contact the Communications and Ministerial Support Directorate for advice on communicating with and informing the public.

When to consult

Consulting is the most common approach to engagement used by government.

Consultation is widely used to collect a range of viewpoints held by the public and stakeholder groups to inform decision making. It is not limited to a formal written consultation, although this is the approach many people first think of when they hear the term 'consultation'.

Consultation methods may vary but the key feature is that it is an 'extractive' process. This means that the issue to be addressed is framed by government and decision makers are seeking responses to already identified questions, options or proposed courses of action.

The 'offer' made to participants is therefore limited to:

- we will keep you informed
- we will listen to and acknowledge your concerns and aspirations
- we will give serious consideration to your contributions
- we will be open to your influence
- we will provide feedback on how your input has influenced the outcome

Written consultation that is open to anyone to respond to is an established practice in the Scottish Government, and will continue to have a fundamental and legitimate role within government. It is a proven and well understood means of seeking the views of the public and stakeholders in the development of new policies and legislation.

But it is important to recognise that written consultations are only one of many ways that we can ask, listen to, and act on the views of the public and stakeholders.

Other methods for consultation, include:

- surveys
- public opinion polls
- qualitative interviews
- roadshows or public meetings
- focus groups
- workshops
- roundtables or working groups

Consultation at different stages of the delivery cycle

Visioning: can help you collate the range of different opinions and perspectives on the issue you are seeking to address. It can also identify elements of the issue that you may not yet have considered.

Development: can help you collect ideas for a solution or a range of alternatives.

Appraisal: can help you measure levels of support for a proposal and identify where there is a need for amendment.

Decision making: there is no role for consulting approaches at the decision making stage. Instead it is about decision makers using what they have learnt through consulting with people at the earlier stages to help inform their decisions.

Evaluation: you can hear views on the impact of an initiative.

Read more about [consultation in Scottish Government](#).

When to involve

Taking an involvement approach to participation emphasises a two-way relationship between government and participants.

Involvement-based approaches tend to work best in the early stages of a policy making process. This is when people have the most opportunity to influence the policy options being developed.

The goal of an involvement approach is to open up space for an exchange of information and perspectives, and to explore ideas for a solution. This is helpful when there are a number of possible outcomes available. Often participants are required to understand complex information or to step outside their own interests and recognise the (sometimes competing) needs of others.

Involvement promotes dialogue between government and participants, and sometimes between participants themselves. 'Dialogue' is a specific form of conversation that aims for all participants to hear and understand the opinions, reasoning and priorities of others.

The 'offer' made to participants is:

- we will keep you informed
- we will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the outcomes or alternatives developed
- we will provide feedback on how your input has influenced the outcome

It must be recognised that this 'offer' is contingent on decision makers balancing the views of participants in the engagement process alongside a variety of other evidence, arguments and policy priorities

that they have been presented with. There should be transparency to participants about the different pieces of evidence that are involved in this balance of decision-making, so there is clear understanding that outputs from a participatory engagement will not be the only influencing factor on a resulting decision.

Methods that support involvement include:

- qualitative interviews
- focus groups
- workshops
- deliberative engagement models
- roundtables or working groups
- participatory strategic planning
- user research
- people's panels
- improvement methods
- citizen research

The most effective methods engage people in ways that are relevant to them. Successful processes start from where participants are 'at'. This means physically (by going to participants in environments they are already in or comfortable with) and mentally (by beginning with a learning phase to ensure all participants have a foundation of relevant knowledge).

This helps everyone involved understand the issues in the context of their own realities (personal or professional) and focus on the things that are most important to them, whilst having an awareness of different points of view.

Involvement at different stages of the delivery cycle

Visioning: help give you a better understanding of different perspectives on the issue under consideration and provide an opportunity to understand why people may hold the views they do. Concerns or aspirations can be considered early on. Participants can also be supported to understand different points of view.

Development: gathering an understanding of views to contribute to proposals, alternatives, recommendations or service models developed.

Appraisal: understanding their preferences and priorities.

Decision making: there is no role for involving approaches to participation at the decision-making stage. Instead it is about decision makers using what they have learnt through the involvement of people in the earlier stages to help inform their decisions.

Evaluation: an involvement approach could help better understand the impacts of a policy or decision from the perspective of those impacted by it.

When to collaborate

Collaboration involves government sharing power with partners or organisations outside of government to influence a decision and sharing responsibility for an outcome.

Collaborative approaches tend to be most constructive when policy makers are genuinely uncertain about how best to proceed, or need to innovate in response to changing external contexts i.e. when there are multiple possible solutions.

Collaboration is also particularly valuable when the ultimate decision may have different implications for different segments of the population. In these cases a collaborative process should enable stakeholders to test, evaluate and negotiate potential impacts against the wider common good. They should also propose measures to mitigate against any negative impacts before decisions are made.

Collaborative processes are usually time intensive and demand a significant commitment from all involved.

Distinguishing features of a collaborative approach

Collaborative approaches to policy and decision making start from the position that the government is just one of a number of stakeholders with an interest in the outcome of the process. Unlike informing, consulting and involving approaches to participation, in a collaborative process the government steps back from its central framing and decision making role.

The 'offer' made to participants is:

- we will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions
- we will incorporate your advice and recommendations into decisions or implementation as far as possible

In most government contexts, the conditional statement 'as far as possible' is particularly relevant, as final decision making authority is retained by Ministers. In undertaking a collaborative process this must be made clear to participants to avoid creating false expectations about the strength of their influence.

Methods that support collaboration

There are a number of broad approaches to collaboration that are central to establishing more participatory forms of policy and decision making:

- qualitative interviews
- focus groups
- workshops
- deliberative engagement models
- roundtables or working groups
- expert advisory and lived experience groups
- participatory strategic planning
- user research
- improvement methods
- citizen research
- panels

These methods are the same as those that can be used to Involve people. The difference between the two approaches is how you use them and what your offer to participants is.

Collaboration at different stages of the delivery cycle

Visioning: collaboratively defining the problem, need or issue that will be addressed. This can be an important step in ensuring that elements of a situation are not overlooked, which could cause problems at later stages.

Development: collaboratively identifying solutions that will best meet the needs of all stakeholders.

Appraisal: identifying points of common ground that could enable a proposal to meet the needs of both government and external stakeholders.

Decision-making: sharing the process and the responsibility for any decision made, up to an appropriate point.

Evaluation: working together to assess impacts, in order to better understand the impacts of a policy or decision.

When to delegate

Delegation is the most rarely deployed level of participation by the Scottish Government as Ministers retain ultimate responsibility for any policy implemented by government and any resulting demands on public finances.

It is increasingly being used within local governments, particularly in Participatory Budgeting (PB). In PB, decisions over a specific amount of a council's budget are devolved to the local community, which makes decisions about allocation. Read more information about [Participatory Budgeting in Scotland](#).

The offer made to participants in a delegated process is that we will implement what you decide.

Activities at this level give the greatest amount of control over the outcome to the participants. There are therefore only limited circumstances where delegation is an appropriate choice of participatory approach for us to take.

Given this level of control, it is important to ensure that a diversity of voices are involved and the full range of stakeholders are represented.

Methods that support delegation

Methods that have been used by governments to delegate decisions to the public include:

- referenda
- community votes
- participatory budgeting

- mini-public deliberations, for example, Citizens' Assemblies, where a pre-engagement commitment has been given to deliver on the conclusions or recommendations

Delegation at different stages of the delivery cycle

Visioning: adopting a vision that has been set by others, or sourcing from stakeholders the key issues that should be addressed by the policy intervention.

Development: asking others to generate recommendations or potential solutions, often with input from a variety of sources, which will be appraised.

Appraisal: taking and committing to implement the preferred choice which others have selected from a range of presented options.

Decision-making: giving power to others to make the final decision on committing to a course of action, usually within pre-agreed remits such as with participatory budgeting.

Evaluation: handing over the assessment to an external evaluator, or voluntarily entering a programme of external verification which will involve stakeholders.

Designing effective participatory engagements

Familiarity with different levels of participation and their use in the policy delivery cycle is the foundation on which decisions about participatory work can be taken. This section provides information on a key next step: how effective engagement strategies to support inclusive, high quality participatory work can be developed.

In many instances, Scottish Government officials will not deliver participatory work themselves. This is because:

- participatory work requires specific skills and experience that government officials may not have
- good quality participatory work is characterised by a levelling of power dynamics – this is difficult to achieve if government officials with decision-making power and a stake in the outcome are running an engagement
- participatory work tends to require a more substantial amount of time and resources than most government officials will have available to them

It is important that officials are well informed about what good-quality participation work looks like and that they understand how to plan their work to include meaningful opportunities for the public to participate in government decision-making or service design. Throughout 2024, a Participation Procurement Framework is being set up. This will provide a quicker and easier route for government officials to commission good-quality participatory work with

specialist and experienced organisations, and this guidance supports effective working relationships with these organisations.

Inclusive participation

High-quality participation work is relevant and purposeful, safe, kind, respectful, transparent, accountable, accessible and inclusive.

Participants involved are informed, empowered, and taking part voluntarily.

This guidance aims to support meeting these responsibilities by setting out what inclusive participation looks like. Key features of inclusive participation include:

- designing engagements with people furthest from government in mind – this will result in approaches that everyone can successfully and meaningfully engage in
- safeguarding equal access and providing logistical support (e.g. disability access, translators/translated materials, remuneration, expenses)
- using specific methods and approaches to include groups or individuals who are less able or likely to participate

Making sure participatory work is genuinely inclusive can be complex. It requires forethought, careful planning, and a clear vision of the longer term – including of outputs, impact, and how all this will be communicated to all involved.

Working in this way becomes easier when inclusivity is built into the day to day of our roles. Doing this may require a shift in how we work, for example being prepared and able to constructively challenge others (including senior leaders) when needed, and pro-actively advocating for people furthest from government.

Working in an inclusive way is key to building trust and benefitting the communities that you are working with – these are aims of participatory engagements that are equally important to the evidence and insight produced. Firstly, consider carefully what the purpose of an engagement is – in particular whether the information you need is already available. If the public or stakeholders have recently been engaged with on a similar or the same issue, you should carefully review the outputs of those engagements and be certain that there are gaps in the information you need before commencing a piece of participatory work. Analysts in your local Analytical Service Division may be able to assist with access to relevant existing evidence. The public and stakeholders should not be expected to repeat themselves and duplication of work is not an effective use of government resources.

When you have decided to proceed with a participatory approach, the first steps in building trust and benefitting communities focus on participants being able to make informed decisions about their involvement. This includes:

- being honest and realistic about the scope of influence for each engagement, including any limitations

- outlining to participants what can and cannot be changed, and communicating this clearly to all involved
- taking a transparent approach throughout all stages of an engagement, so that participants have the fullest possible understanding of what is happening, why, in what context and with what consequences

You should ensure that any engagement offers opportunities for meaningful impact – it is not ethical or an appropriate use of resources to engage the public on a decision that has already been taken or on an issue where there is no meaningful scope for public influence. The impact of an engagement should always be reported back to participants, so that they can clearly see the difference that their involvement has made. Participants should be informed about project timelines and when they can expect to see outcomes following their input.

Representation of different groups of people in participatory work requires careful consideration. There are situations where a sample of participants that is representative of the general population will be suitable for a project's aims (for example, a Citizens' Assembly), but there will be many instances where this is not appropriate. Participatory work tends to focus on engaging with marginalised and under-represented groups to address specific issues or design specific services. Over-sampling or exclusively working with participants who have a particular characteristic or circumstance can be an appropriate and valid approach.

Inclusive approaches to participant sampling and recruitment include:

- ensuring you are aware of all affected groups, based on the outputs of an Equality Impact Assessment or comparable exercise – these groups should then be appropriately included in a sample, bearing in mind that over-sampling or exclusively working with participants who have a particular characteristic or circumstance can be a valid approach
- considering existing evidence bases and where there are gaps in representation – proactively address these so that you are listening to new, unheard or marginalised groups
- using methods of recruitment and engagement that address structural barriers to participant involvement
 - learn about the needs of different communities and demographics that are to be engaged with
 - advertise engagement opportunities in a wide range of locations and formats, to reach a more diverse range of people
 - consider carefully and make clear the practical and financial support that needs to be on offer to participants e.g. tech support using video calls, BSL support, easy-read background information, payment of expenses and compensation for time
- engagements should be delivered in different formats and at different times of day e.g. offer evening and weekend workshops, a mix of online and in-person workshops (including rural locations if appropriate), opportunities for written and verbal contributions
- consider carefully which methods are appropriate for the communities and demographics that are to be engaged with e.g. young people may value gamification elements to their involvement
- ensuring safeguarding and a trauma-informed approach – this could include the provision of mental health and wellbeing support during engagements, and aftercare following the conclusion of an engagement

You should discuss sampling and recruitment with your local Analytical Services Division and with the contractor delivering this work.

Ensuring that participants are not left financially out of pocket for their involvement in your work is key. This includes covering the full range of expenses and, where appropriate, compensating people for their time. It is particularly important that we understand the perspectives and experiences of people in marginalised groups, so that we are equipped to develop policies and services which meet the fullest range of needs. Without payment of expenses and compensation for time, many people are not able to take part – their involvement may mean taking time off work or paying for childcare.

Separate guidance is available on paying participant expenses and time. This guidance provides:

- a set of key principles to follow as you plan and take decisions about paying participant expenses and compensating participant time
- a step-by-step guide for the process to follow when paying participant expenses
- examples of amounts to consider paying participants, depending on what is being asked of participants
- a step-by-step guide for the process to follow when compensating participants for their time
- information on tax and welfare benefits implications

There will be instances where engaging the expertise of individuals in a community in a more formalised way will be beneficial, for example as community facilitators or peer researchers. Individuals within a community have a wealth of their own direct experience as well as understanding of the situations of the wider community. They often hold a trusted position within communities and can provide considered advice and support to all involved. You should discuss with the contractor delivering this work how community facilitators or peer researchers can be involved.

Designing and delivering inclusive participation is not a static process – you should expect to revisit questions of what inclusive work looks like, who is excluded and how this can be resolved.

Further resources:

- [Gunning Principles](#)
- [Knowledge is Power](#)
- [Scottish Learning Disabilities Observatory - inclusive research recommendations](#)
- [National InsA practical guide to being inclusive in public involvement in health research](#)
- [‘Hard to reach’ or ‘easy to ignore’? Promoting equality in community engagement](#)
- [A social designer’s field guide to power literacy](#)
- [Paying people with lived experience for their participation A review of legislation, literature, and practice](#)
- [Trauma-informed design: an introduction for non-profits](#)
- [Practical hints for inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation](#)
- [Working alongside people with lived experience \(experts by experience\): Principles for ensuring respectful and fair co-working](#)

Developing an engagement strategy

Engagement is the direct activity we take to create opportunities for people to participate in policy, service design and decision-making processes. An ‘engagement strategy’ is the wider plan for this work and the context in which effective opportunities for participation are undertaken. Its overall aim is to ensure that participatory work takes place at a time and in a form which maximises its impact on government decision-making, in line with the offer you are making to participants.

Government officials will need to play a role in the development of an effective engagement strategy – in particular, ensuring that there is buy-in from key decision-makers and that there are genuine opportunities for participant influence on an issue.

This section provides key information that it is helpful for you to understand in order to commission participatory work that includes the development of an engagement strategy, and to work collaboratively with a contractor that has specialist skills in this field to do so.

Ideally you should work collaboratively with a contractor to develop an engagement strategy at the beginning of a delivery process, so that a contractor is fully informed about the wider timescales and opportunities for influence in your policy area. It is important to identify the best timing and staging for different, proportionate engagement activities and plan for them accordingly. This may be an iterative process and you should factor in

time to work with a contractor to re-visit an engagement strategy.

In practice, identifying opportunities for engagement is often a neglected part of the delivery cycle and is instigated responsively when needs arise. Be aware of this risk, and take action at the earliest possible stage. Set out in your Invitation to Tender (ITT) what your engagement strategy requirements are likely to be, and prioritise discussing this with the appointed contractor.

In developing an engagement strategy, it is important to recognise that engagement is a process, not just the outreach activity.

You may find it useful to draw on the National Standards for Community Engagement [VOiCE software](#), designed to support the planning, delivery and review of well-constructed, managed and evaluated engagement.

High-level purpose

Your engagement strategy will initially need to set out the high-level purpose and intentions of your work. This will involve considering:

- the why – the reasons you have for choosing to open up an issue, question or decision-making process to wider participation
- the difference made – linking the outcomes of these activities to decision-making processes, service delivery and/or social change

It is important that you make analysts in your policy area aware of your proposed engagement work at the earliest possible stage, so they can advise most effectively and inform you if there is existing evidence or research activity relevant to your work. You may also wish to commission a literature review in advance of deciding whether to undertake piece of participatory work – analysts can advise on this. You can then discuss details and practicalities with analysts either to inform the development of your engagement strategy, or once you have considered each step of your engagement strategy.

You should also contact the Digital Engagement team at the earliest possible stage, so that they are aware of your work and can advise on digital methods for engaging with the public and stakeholders.

Planning engagement activities

With these key questions answered, you can further develop your engagement strategy to consider practical details of each activity. Developing an effective engagement strategy to facilitate participation, especially in a complex policy area, is likely to contain a range of different activities at different levels, at different points in the delivery cycle.

Use the steps below as building blocks for your engagement strategy. Each step should form a section of the strategy. Many of these – in particular later steps – are likely to be undertaken by a contractor commissioned to deliver this work, but you should expect to be actively involved in work to define the purpose, scope and opportunity of the work. Your Invitation to Tender (ITT) should set out a clear idea of the outputs required, and your contract management approach should plan for your team's involvement in decisions relating to all of these steps.

**Step
1**

Define the purpose

**Step
2**

Define the scope and opportunity

**Step
3**

Identify the outputs required

**Step
4**

Identify who needs to be involved

**Step
5**

**Choose a preferred method
or approach**

Step 1: Define the purpose

Establishing a clear purpose, and getting agreement on it across your team and from all parties in a decision-making role, is the single most important stage of planning any engagement process. It should set out clearly what can and what cannot be influenced.

Being able to make a clearly defined statement of your purpose at the outset of any engagement activity is vital for:

- ensuring a commonly shared understanding of the potential impact of the engagement i.e. what difference it can make
- enabling you to ensure that the right mechanisms are in place to transform the findings from your engagement into outcomes i.e. that there is a clear route for influence at an appropriate stage of the delivery cycle
- giving participants the opportunity to make an informed choice about getting involved i.e. a choice made on the basis of understanding the level of influence their participation can have and how their input will be used

Key questions to ask

What is the key purpose/s of our engagement?

What information / contribution is it that you specifically need from the engagement?

- what is the engagement process going to add to what you already know
- what tangible outputs do you want to have produced during and after the process
- what specific questions or problems you are inviting participants to address

How are you going to use this information?

What are the limits to public/stakeholder influence?

Fundamentally, can anything change as a result of participation? If not, you may want to consider whether engagement, beyond keeping people informed, is appropriate at all.

Step 2: Define the context and opportunity

Every engagement exercise takes place within a wider context:

- existing (and previous) decision making contexts, including party positions, UK wide policies and local policy drivers
- public awareness and history of engagement with the issues, including emotional and personal connections and relationships of trust between institutions
- practical constraints including budgets, timescales, resources etc

As part of the planning process it is important to define the interest, commitment and involvement of key decision-makers in the process and how the proposed engagement fits into the relevant decision-making systems.

Understanding the wider context is important to ensure that it:

- links with other relevant activities going on at the same time so that outputs can be shared or joined up
- does not duplicate other activities – one of the easiest ways to frustrate or alienate participants is to create a situation where they feel they are being asked to repeat their contributions
- is responsive to participant needs or sensitivities by appreciating their wider roles and commitments
- builds on previous experience and learns lessons from the past, particularly where relationships or trust may have become strained

- progresses quickly and is relevant to the needs of all parties

The earlier section on inclusive participation considers this from the perspective of equalities and inclusion.

Key questions to ask

Is this the right time in the delivery cycle to invest in initiating a participatory process?

Are decision makers supportive of your participation process and willing to give 'conscientious consideration' to the outputs? If not, you will need to consider how to gain their support. You might want to refer to the Basics of Participation section of this guidance.

Why might potential participants want to engage with you and what is their motivation for participating?

Have previous attempts at involving the public been successful? What have you already learned?

Is your process the only current attempt to initiate participation on this issue?

Are there opportunities to use the participation of the same target audience in addressing more than one topic?

Do you have enough resources, both time and money, to run the process?

You may want to consider, if time or resources are pressed, whether this is the right time in the delivery cycle to initiate participation, or whether a simpler approach could serve your needs at this point.

Step 3: Identify the outputs required

The outputs of an engagement exercise refer to the types of information that the process will deliver.

Determining the type of outputs you require will involve considering your overall purpose and the level of participation being used.

Identifying the type of outputs you are seeking at the early stage of planning for participation will help:

- ensure that you are able to choose the most useful approach – different participatory methods are designed to produce different types of outputs
- frame the questions you pose to participants
- identify who needs to be involved

Key questions to ask

What, specifically, should the engagement process achieve/deliver?

Is there shared agreement on the outputs required?

It may be useful to differentiate between 'primary' (essential) and 'secondary' 'nice to have' outputs, as this will help focus your choices relating to methods and participants

To assist you in making decisions about how to take forward engagement processes, a range of types of outputs are set out below:

Identification of issues and what they mean to different people. Engagement activities designed to deliver this type of output will involve opening up the issue to explore participant concerns and the implications different policy or delivery approaches may have.

New ideas in situations where policy or delivery challenges are persistent, or where the context may have changed (such as changed demographics in a neighbourhood, or a different regulatory environment) requiring engagement with people to generate new ideas for how to respond. Engagement activities designed to deliver this type of output will encourage creative problem solving and should only be undertaken when there is a genuine appetite and opportunity for innovation.

Specific decision on preferences i.e. verdicts where there are a clear and defined set of options to be considered.

Better understanding of the needs of service users to be better able to design, implement, or evaluate a policy, service, or programme.

Assessments of how services are currently being delivered to establish a greater understanding of the status quo in order to identify options for change e.g. an evaluation of a specific service or more widely, for example about the experience of single-parenthood or homelessness.

Overview of perspectives to better understand opinions and experiences around a topic in order to identify concerns, generate options, and develop solutions.

Recommendations for delivery using feedback from service users or other stakeholders on pre-existing or proposed options for how, when or where services are delivered.

Identifying priorities for improvement based on an overview of concerns or ideas about a topic that provides a clear indication of participants' preferences (or the relative acceptability) of different options for improvement, including reasons why.

Step 4: Identify who needs to be involved

When initiating an engagement process it is important to recognise that ‘the public’ is not a useful answer when considering the target group for participation.

The type of participants who need to be involved must be informed by your purpose and the outputs required i.e. what is it specifically that these people can bring to the process. Achieving clarity on ‘who’ needs to be involved will also help determine the most appropriate method to use for your engagement activity.

Some points you may want to consider when thinking about who you want to participate in your engagement include:

- do participants need to agree with a specific objective or goal to be able to participate or is diversity of participant opinions important to your purpose?
- do participants need to have ‘lived experience’ of the issue, in order to add value to the process?
- should the process be open to anyone who wants to participate or should recruitment be targeted to those who have a specific characteristic or circumstance? Or does the nature of the issue under consideration mean that participants should be representative of the population?
- is it important to your outputs that participants bring ‘fresh eyes’ to the question or will it add more value if participants are already engaged with the issues?

- should those with professional or technical expertise be participating alongside members of the public on an equal footing or should the role of ‘experts’ in the process be different, for example to provide information?

It is important to ensure that a diverse range of participants (e.g. those on low-incomes, unemployed or underemployed, or with caring responsibilities) can participate and that the sampling and recruitment approach taken is appropriate to the range of people who need to be engaged with. There is further information on this in the inclusive participation section of this guidance.

Separate guidance is available on payment of expenses and compensating participants for their time.

Key questions to ask

Who do you need to hear from to deliver the outputs you are looking for?

Why would people choose to participate? What is in it for them?

What is the role you are asking them to play?

Are there any barriers to participation for your target group? If so what are these and how will you overcome them?

Consider structural and practical factors that may restrict a person’s ability to engage with your initiative. Directly ask participants or representative organisations what these barriers could be and what can be done to address them. Issues could include:

- timing of meetings (whether online or in person)
- length of time given to respond

- access to technology
- language requirements
- awareness / knowledge / interest in the issue

There is further information on this in the inclusive participation section of this guidance.

Step 5: Choose a preferred method or approach

This section lists alphabetically a range of common engagement methods that can be used to deliver specific types of outputs, and the types of participants you would typically involve in each method.

These methods are recognised across government and wider society, and have been developed to deliver specific types of outputs.

It is important to note that engagement methods are not fixed, and often the best results come from developing a bespoke approach to meet your specific needs. Following the steps in this guidance will help you clearly identify these needs.

There are a number of online resources, through which you can explore different forms of engagement:

- [Participedia](#)
- [Open Policy Making Toolkit](#)
- [Civic Innovation Toolkit](#)
- [Involve's Knowledge Bank](#)
- [Engage2020 Action Catalogue](#)

Appreciative inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry works with a small core group of participants to explore what has worked well in the past to build a vision for the future. This small group builds outwards through friends/family/strangers into a much larger group, and could eventually involve hundreds of people.

Appreciative inquiry is conducive to collaboration at the visioning, development and evaluation stages of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- new ideas
- assessments of how services are currently being delivered
- recommendations for delivery
- priorities for improvement

Participants typically involved:

- existing users of a service, those with lived experience of a topic
- people with a particular interest in the issue
- those likely to be most impacted, now or in the future

Citizens' Assemblies

A type of deliberative workshop that involves a relatively large body (50-250) of people, selected to be demographically representative of the general public coming together to deliberate on an issue. A Citizens' Assembly will typically take place over several days, often spread out over weeks or months.

A means of involving participants at the visioning, development and/or appraisal stages of the delivery cycle. More rarely, it can be used as a tool for delegation at the decision-making stage.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- new ideas
- overview of perspectives / concerns
- recommendations for delivery
- priorities for improvement
- assessment of proposals – preferences or acceptability

Participants typically involved:

- representative sample (i.e. mini-public)

Citizens' juries

A type of deliberative workshop that involves a small group of people (12-24), representative of the demographics of a given population, who come together to deliberate on an issue over a period of 2-7 days (not necessarily consecutive).

A means of involving participants at the development and/or appraisal stages of the delivery cycle. More rarely, it can be used as a tool for delegation at the decision-making stage.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- specific decision i.e. verdict
- recommendations for delivery
- priorities for improvement
- assessment of proposals – preferences or acceptability

Participants typically involved:

- representative sample (i.e. mini-public)

Citizen research

Citizen research identifies those most affected by a decision or policy, trains and supports them to lead on wider engagement with their peers, and brings evidence from that engagement back to government.

It is most conducive to involving and collaborating, especially at the visioning and appraisal stages of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- new ideas
- better understanding of the needs of service users
- overview of perspectives / concerns
- priorities for improvement

Participants typically involved:

- existing users of a service / those with lived experience of the topic
- people with a particular interest in the issue
- those likely to be most impacted (now or in the future)

Community-led action research

Taking a similar approach to citizen research, community-led action research is where the community decides on the issue to be researched, designs and carries out the research, and makes use of the results to achieve positive change. Help might be sought from academics, council officers or organisations with research expertise, but it is ultimately the community who decides what they want to find out, how they will do this and why.

This could be most conducive to involving and collaborating, especially at the visioning and appraisal stages of the delivery cycle. Its focus on action to produce change means that it could be well used at any stage of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- new ideas
- better understanding of the needs of service users
- overview of perspectives / concerns
- priorities for improvement

Participants typically involved:

- existing users of a service / those with lived experience of the topic
- people with a particular interest in the issue
- those likely to be most impacted (now or in the future)

Deliberative workshop

A form of facilitated group discussion that provides participants with the opportunity to learn about an issue, consider it in depth, understand and challenge each other's opinions before reaching an informed conclusion.

Useful as a means of consulting, involving and collaborating, and can be used at all stages of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- new ideas
- better understanding of the needs of service users
- assessments of how services are currently being delivered / current situation
- overview of perspectives / concerns
- recommendations for delivery
- priorities for improvement
- assessment of proposals – preferences or acceptability

Participants typically involved:

- any group of participants, especially those with initially opposing views

Distributed dialogues

Decentralised conversation-based events at which stakeholders and other interested parties set up groups and events to discuss a topic agreed with the commissioning body, using an agreed format and background material.

Most conducive to consulting at the visioning, development, appraisal or evaluation stages of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- new ideas
- overview of perspectives or concerns

Participants typically involved:

- existing users of a service, those with lived experience of the topic
- people with a particular interest in the issue
- those likely to be most impacted, now or in the future

Focus groups

A guided discussion with a small group (6-15) of people. They are normally one-off sessions (1-2 hours), though several may be run in different locations or with different groups on the same topic.

Effective as a means of consultation most often at the visioning and/or appraisal stages of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- better understanding of the needs of service users
- assessments of how services are currently being delivered / current situation
- overview of perspectives / concerns
- recommendations for delivery
- priorities for improvement
- assessment of proposals – preferences or acceptability

Participants typically involved:

- existing users of a service, those with lived experience of the topic
- representative sample (i.e. mini-public)
- those likely to be most impacted, now or in the future

Multi-stakeholder steering groups

These are made up of stakeholders (professional, public and/or community representatives) who meet at key stages during the course of a project to oversee it and influence strategic decisions.

Conducive to participation at the involving and collaborating levels, and at all stages of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- new ideas
- recommendations for delivery
- priorities for improvement
- assessment of proposals – preferences or acceptability

Participants typically involved:

- people with technical knowledge / specialists
- professional / public stakeholders
- existing users of a service / those with lived experience of the topic
- those likely to be most impacted, now or in the future

Online crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing harnesses collaborative problem-solving and innovation through an open call for help and ideas, allowing any internet user to contribute via an online space, usually according to a loose guidance.

Online crowdsourcing is relevant to consulting and collaboration at the visioning and development stage of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- new ideas
- identification of issues

Participants typically involved:

- people with technical knowledge / specialists
- existing users of a service / those with lived experience of the topic
- people with a particular interest in the issue

Opinion polls

The polling of a representative sample to gather qualitative or quantitative data, in order to understand and quantify public opinion.

Opinion polls are useful for consulting at the visioning and / or appraisal stages of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- specific decisions
- overview of perspectives or concerns
- priorities for improvement
- recommendations for delivery
- assessment of proposals – preferences or acceptability

Participants typically involved:

- representative sample (i.e. mini-public)

Participatory budgeting

An umbrella term for mechanisms that delegate decision making power over public sector budgets and investment priorities to members of the public. In Scotland these practices are most often used to influence spending in local areas.

Participatory budgeting is useful for delegating at the decision-making stage of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver

- new ideas
- specific decision i.e. verdicts
- assessment of proposals – preferences or acceptability

Participants typically involved:

- existing users of a service, those with lived experience of the topic
- people with a particular interest in the issue or area

Participatory strategic planning

A consensus-building approach that helps a community come together through workshops of 20-50 people. Public and expert stakeholders work together to agree how they would like their community or organisation to develop.

Relevant to involving and collaborating at the development and appraisal stages of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- specific decision i.e. verdicts
- recommendations for delivery
- priorities for improvement
- assessment of proposals

Participants typically involved:

- people with technical knowledge, specialists
- professional and public stakeholders
- existing users of a service, those with lived experience of the topic
- those likely to be most impacted, now or in the future

Pop-up democracy

The use of temporary, site-specific installations / or exhibitions that invite unplanned participation. These types of opportunities are often held in busy public places e.g. supermarkets, high streets and local community events and offer passers by the chance to learn about an issue or proposal and leave comments.

Most useful as a means of informing or consultation at the visioning and/or development stages of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- overview of perspectives, concerns
- priorities for improvement
- assessment of proposals – preferences or acceptability

Participants typically involved:

- existing users of a service, those with lived experience of the topic
- people with a particular interest in the issue
- those likely to be most impacted, now or in the future

Public or 'town hall' meetings

Members of a community come together to discuss issues and concerns with a public official, government representative or decision-maker. Typically operates as a question and answer session and will not usually provide space for in-depth discussion or engagement with participants.

Town hall meetings are most conducive to informing and can be utilised at all stages of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- overview of perspectives / concerns

Participants typically involved:

- professional and public stakeholders
- people with a particular interest in the issue

Qualitative interviews

An established form of research in which participants are taken through interview questions designed to explore a topic or issue in depth. Participants are given space to expand their answers and accounts of their experiences and feelings – the goal is to understand the motivations and reasoning behind any concerns and opinions they hold.

Qualitative interviews are an established means of consulting at the visioning, development, and evaluation stages of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- better understanding of the needs of service users
- assessments of how services are currently being delivered
- overview of perspectives, concerns

Participants typically involved:

- existing users of a service, those with lived experience of the topic
- people with a particular interest in the issue
- those likely to be most impacted, now or in the future
- professional and public stakeholders

Stakeholder roundtables

Roundtable discussions are small group discussions (generally 10-15 people) where everybody has an equal right to participate. Participants are invited by the organisers to take part because they are recognised as having a 'stake' in the question or issue to be discussed.

Stakeholder roundtables are suitable for involving and, potentially, collaborating at the development, appraisal and evaluation phases of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- new ideas
- better understanding of the needs of service users
- overview of perspectives or concerns
- recommendations for delivery
- priorities for improvement

Participants typically involved:

- people with technical knowledge, specialists
- professional / public stakeholders
- existing users of a service, those with lived experience of the topic
- people with a particular interest in the issue

Traditional written consultation

An established practice within government and, in some limited situations, the required approach to engagement. Typically written consultation will be underpinned by a written consultation paper. This provides information on the topic and sets out questions for response.

Consultation papers are published online. Stakeholders and members of the public are invited to respond via [Citizen Space](#), the Scottish Government's Consultation platform. A traditional written consultation is open to anyone who chooses to respond.

A means of consulting that is most useful at the appraisal stage of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- better understanding of the needs of service users
- overview of perspectives or concerns
- assessment of proposals

Participants typically involved:

- people with technical knowledge, specialists
- professional and public stakeholders
- people with a particular interest in the issue

User panels

A regular meeting of service users about the quality, management and/or direction of a public service.

User panels are relevant to involving and at times collaborating at the development, appraisal and implementation stages of the delivery cycle. They can also be used to evaluate a service.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- better understanding of the needs of service users
- assessments of how services are currently being delivered / current situation
- recommendations for delivery
- priorities for improvement
- assessment of proposals

Participants typically involved:

- existing users of a service, those with lived experience of the topic
- those likely to be most impacted, now or in the future

World café

An engagement method that makes use of an informal café setting in which participants explore an issue by discussing it in small groups over multiple rounds. It is a method characterised by a strong underpinning philosophy that wisdom comes from people engaging in 'conversations that matter'.

It is most conducive to consulting (gathering public feedback) and involving (incorporating concerns and aspirations) in the development stage of the delivery cycle.

Outputs method is designed to deliver:

- identification of issues
- new ideas
- overview of perspectives or concerns

Participants typically Involved:

- professional and public stakeholders
- existing users of a service, those with lived experience of the topic
- people with a particular interest in the issue
- those likely to be most impacted, now or in the future

Next steps

One of the purposes of this guidance is to support informed discussions with government colleagues and analysts about developing effective engagements and delivering these in successful collaboration with a contracting organisation that has skills and expertise in this field.

It is important that officials are well informed about what good quality participation work looks like and that they understand how to plan their work to include meaningful opportunities for the public to participate in government decision-making or service design. Throughout 2024, a Participation Procurement Framework is being set up. This will provide a quicker and easier route for government officials to commission good quality participatory work with specialist and experienced organisations, and this guidance supports effective working relationships with these organisations.

Time and budget required for different methods will vary depending on factors like:

- the number and range of people to be involved
- geographical spread
- participants' support and access needs
- nature and scope of issues being considered

These are all dimensions of your engagement that you should consider further with analysts in your policy area and contractors delivering this work who will have a view on or will take responsibility for:

- designing a sampling strategy
- choosing the most appropriate methods
- drawing on existing evidence
- commissioning social research
- monitoring and evaluation
- ethics
- participant expenses and remuneration

You should contact the Digital Engagement Team at the earliest possible stage, so that they are aware of your work: DigitalEngagement@gov.scot. They can advise on digital engagement plans, and if needed can support your engagement work using digital platforms such as [Citizen Space](#) and [Dialogue](#)



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