

Better Together

Principles of Engagement

Second edition 2016





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From the Premier

Fundamental to our democracy is the concept that everyday people are involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

This means working together to identify problems and find solutions, and sharing ideas, expertise and wisdom to explore new opportunities.

The *Better Together* program was established in 2013 to foster this behaviour and ensure the State Government engages more effectively with all South Australians.

This second edition of the *Better Together Handbook* is a practical guide designed to help public servants carry out the Government's various forms of strategic engagement. It explains the six principles that should underpin all such work.

And it incorporates two recent and important developments in this field: the release of the Government's *Reforming Democracy Policy* in 2015; and increasing consideration and application of Public Value thinking.

Through the use of this *Handbook*, we can more effectively bring together the community, business and government, and we can make better decisions.

Our ultimate goal should be to improve the lives of citizens and make our State a place that really thrives.

I encourage all State Government staff to apply the *Better Together* principles to their daily work and – in the process – further mobilise the energy and common sense judgement of South Australians.

Jay Weatherill

Jay Weatherill MP
Premier

Our Vision: Reforming Democracy

South Australia at the cutting edge of democratic reform

The *Reforming Democracy Policy* statement recognises that citizens have both a right and a responsibility to be engaged in addressing the critical issues facing our state. Only through collective decision-making and collaborative problem-solving will South Australians build a society that reflects our values.

People and business thrive here because of our collaborative and collective approach, which is built on a rich history of democratic participation. Critical issues are addressed by combining the strength, wisdom and resources of the entire community. Experts are engaged to guide our decision-making, and our belief in democracy ensures citizens are involved in choices about what we value and can help convert ideas into action.

The *Better Together: Principles of Engagement* support this vision, guiding the government to make better decisions by bringing the voices of communities and stakeholders into the issues that are relevant to them. It provides a guide to best practice and will help us improve our engagement knowledge and achieve better outcomes from our work by really understanding what the public values. This will equip us all to be better leaders and innovators.

What is Public Value thinking, and why is the government using this approach?

Public Value thinking provides an approach to public sector management that puts citizens at the centre of program and service design and delivery. This aligns with the government's commitment to involving people in decisions that affect their lives, outlined in the *Reforming Democracy Policy*.

Public Value thinking supports innovation and engagement. It also helps to measure outcomes and reconcile competing priorities.

How can you apply Public Value thinking in your work?

Engage stakeholders and the public in a deliberative discussion about your initiative using the *Better Together: Principles of Engagement* and incorporate the outcome of this engagement in the initiative's design and evaluation.

More information about Public Value thinking is available on the *Better Together* website.

www.bettertogether.sa.gov.au

The Benefits: why is engagement important?

Good engagement practice is central to doing our job well and to ensuring the government implements effective and sustainable policy, programs, and services that deliver on community needs.

There are many reasons why engagement is central to good governance.

Effective engagement can

- ✓ Build strong, effective and sustainable policy and programs
- ✓ Build trust between government and community
- ✓ Generate public conversations
- ✓ Assist in addressing tight budgets and limited resources
- ✓ Generate inventive ideas and solutions
- ✓ Assist in deeply understanding community needs
- ✓ Maximise Public Value



The Better Together Principles of Engagement

The six *Better Together: Principles of Engagement* (the Principles) provide a basic reference to good engagement. If we're able to consider each of the Principles as we plan and implement an engagement, we can have confidence in our interaction with stakeholders and communities.

The six Principles are inter-related. They rely on each other and if we chose not to pursue one, the overall success of our engagement could be hindered. Of course, the attention, weighting or consideration given to each of the Principles may not be uniform and may vary depending on the circumstances, the focus or the stage of the engagement. However, all six Principles should receive fair consideration as you plan and implement your engagement strategy.

It's also important to note that the Principles should always be applied in ways that suit your engagement. They recognise and promote the breadth and variety of engagement opportunities. They acknowledge that each engagement has a different purpose, is undertaken in a different place, with different external influences and with different people.

- 1** We know why we are engaging
- 2** We know who to engage
- 3** We know the history
- 4** We start together
- 5** We are genuine
- 6** We are relevant and engaging



How to use the Better Together Principles



We know why we are engaging

You need to know why you're engaging with communities and stakeholders, and communicate this clearly to your participants. This is not about knowing what the final outcome from your engagement will be, as that will be shaped by what you hear from the communities and stakeholders you engage with.

To know why you are engaging:

- Know your engagement's purpose
- Understand the public's level of influence
- Communicate clearly
- Measure your impact
- Plan for flexibility

Know your engagement's purpose

It's vital that you have a clear understanding of your engagement's purpose and can articulate this. The purpose is why you are engaging.

Once you've established the purpose you can begin to define the objectives. Your objectives are what you hope to achieve from your engagement.

From the purpose and objectives you can start to identify the participants (Principle 2) and the most appropriate strategies and approaches to support their participation (Principles 5 and 6).



Your initiative doesn't stand alone. It will occur within a specific context and may be shaped by resource pressures, with different people seeking influence and competing priorities. It will mean different things to different people: some will be passionate about it, while others won't care. Within this wider context you need to work out what problems or dilemmas you want to solve and how you think this might work. This gives you a starting point from which you can begin to engage stakeholders. Public Value thinking tools such as the Strategic Triangle and Public Value Account may help you work through these questions.

Understand the public's level of influence

Once you are clear about the purpose and objectives of your engagement you need to be clear about the extent to which your participants and stakeholders can influence the decision or outcome. This will ensure that unrealistic expectations are not raised. The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum (see break out box to the right) provides a sound framework to help identify the appropriate level of influence.

You should be clear with your participants and stakeholders about their level of influence. Are you seeking to inform them, or consult with them, or collaborate with them?



The strategies and approaches used in your engagement should reflect the participants level of influence. For example, if you know that you can only inform a community, you should develop a sound communication strategy but not seek ideas or input.

The level of influence for participants and stakeholders will vary depending on the engagement's characteristics and may be different at different stages. For example, you may consult the community on the development of a transport plan (consult) but invite local councils and industry bodies to collaboratively draft the plan (collaborate).



IAP2 Spectrum – selecting your level of engagement

The *Better Together: Principles of Engagement* use the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum. *Reforming Democracy* is focused on engaging citizens at the higher levels of the Spectrum - involving, collaborating and empowering.

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with selecting the appropriate level of engagement by identifying the community's or stakeholder's level of influence on the decision or outcome.

The Spectrum shows that differing levels of engagement are legitimate, depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision being made.

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum¹

Developed by the International Association for Public Participation

Increasing level of public influence

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets • Web sites • Open houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Community meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Deliberative polling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen advisory committees • Consensus-building • Participatory decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens' Juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions



Communicate clearly

Once you have a good understanding of the purpose, objectives and the public's level of influence, you need to communicate this both internally and externally.

A good communication strategy allows you to reach out to the intended participants, tell them what's happening and make it really clear to them how they can get involved.



There is no place for jargon or government-speak in a good engagement process. Work hard to eradicate buzzwords from your communications. Also be aware of the levels of literacy and understanding of your intended audience.

Well-run engagement processes supported by strong communication strategies will assist you in talking with the community and stakeholders about the challenges being faced and what the options for addressing the issue are.

Measure your impact

We engage because we believe it will result in better outcomes, decisions, projects, policies, programs and better or more efficient use of public resources. Establishing engagement objectives, and then measuring your progress, allows you to compare your thinking and practice against the outcomes you seek to achieve. Evaluation can build transparency and accountability if you share the outcomes. It can contribute to the evidence base, identify good engagement practice and improve future practice.

Evaluation allows you to learn what worked and what didn't. It can also let you know if you've used public resources wisely.

Planning for evaluation should commence as early as possible. The scope of activities in the evaluation will vary based on the purpose and scale of the engagement. Early planning enables you to identify the criterion you will use to measure success and the information to be collected to support this, as well as what tools and resources are required. Early evaluation planning also provides an opportunity to clarify the purpose and objectives of the engagement process.

Plan for flexibility

Your engagement design needs to be responsive and flexible so that it can be adapted if your engagement is not achieving its intended purpose and objectives.

If something changes or your early engagement activity highlights a barrier to participation, or identifies a new group of participants or stakeholders that need to be involved, you will need to change your plan and adapt.

A good engagement practitioner will tell you that their engagement designs always change. This (contrary to popular belief) is a good thing – it means that they are constantly watchful and ready to change their approach should circumstances require it.



We know who to engage

Who should you be engaging with? Is there more than one community? Are there hidden audiences, hard-to-reach groups or people who may not be obvious stakeholders? These are key questions to ask at the beginning of an engagement that will help you determine which methodologies will attract people to your engagement (Principle 6).

Knowing who to engage with will flow naturally from knowing why you're engaging (Principle 1). Throughout your engagement there are likely to be different voices vying to be heard, and it may be appropriate to engage them at different stages and in different ways.

When thinking about who to engage, consider:

- **Who is affected and interested?**
- **Connecting with community leaders**
- **Moving beyond the stakeholder list**
- **Identifying hard-to-reach groups and individuals**
- **Collaborating**
- **Connectors, 'mavens' and salespeople**
- **Local government**

Who is affected and interested?

It's important to identify people, communities and stakeholders who are affected by and interested in the topic of your engagement.

People may be directly affected by the topic or issue that you are engaging on, whereas others may simply be interested in the topic. While interested participants may not be directly affected, they can still have very strong views, opinions and ideas on the topic.

Affected and interested people and communities may fall into particular geographic, demographic, social or economic categories.

Stakeholders may include non-government organisations such as advocacy groups, peak bodies, industry groups and unions. Or they may include academic bodies such as universities, research centres and think tanks. Interested stakeholders can often provide knowledge and insight, which complements the first hand experience of affected communities and stakeholders.

Often, interested stakeholders will be able to support your engagement with affected stakeholders and communities. For example, peak bodies in the disability health sector may be able to provide advice on the appropriate ways to access and work with people with disability and organisations that represent them.

It might also be valuable to engage with people and stakeholders who are not affected to get an independent perspective. This can be particularly useful for complex issues.

A good engagement is one that draws people into the process by understanding what motivates and interests them. Take the time to understand the communities you're going to engage, and get a handle on the people involved, their expectations, motivations and desires.

Try to understand what will motivate participation by asking, 'what's in it for them?'. Motivators can be intrinsic or extrinsic. People motivated intrinsically will take part without expecting any personal gain or benefit. For example, they may see the process as an opportunity to improve their community. People motivated extrinsically will expect some benefit or recognition from their participation. This could be immediate, such as the chance to win a prize related to the engagement (Principle 6). Or the motivation could be longer term – related to the outcome of the topic or issue that you are engaging on.



Connecting with community leaders

Find out more about the affected and interested communities. What are the key issues they are concerned with and what is the background to the specific issue you are engaging on (Principle 3)? Who are the community leaders who will be able to speak for their community and attract more people into the process, and what are the power dynamics in the community?

Community leaders may be obvious - local businesspeople, councillors, Aboriginal or multicultural leaders. Or they may be less obvious (and more difficult to find) — a local teacher, environmental volunteer, or doctor. To help you identify community leaders, it might be useful to monitor local media, looking out for people who are writing columns or regularly corresponding with the editor.

Moving beyond the stakeholder list

It's important that you consider those people you are engaging with from an appreciative lens and think about your stakeholders as an asset to your engagement process. Consider what they can contribute including their experiences and resources they can bring, as well as their key alliances.

In their book, *The Power of Co: The Smart Leaders' Guide to Collaborative Governance*² Vivien Twyford and others discuss the concept of collaborative governance and compel us to consider who to engage with from an entirely different perspective than the traditional stakeholder list.

Sometimes, because of previous poor engagement processes, staff representing the government can be viewed with great scepticism in the community, and many people won't trust you or your objectives. If you don't have the luxury of trusting relationships, you need to be aware of who does, and how they might be able to support you to connect with the people you need to. You can find out more about this at Principle 3.

The *Better Together* website includes some stakeholder analysis tools that may help you move beyond the stakeholder list.



Australian social researcher Hugh Mackay writes about the importance of a sense of place in his book, *What Makes Us Tick?*³ If you're engaging with a geographically defined community, you should recognise that their sense of belonging to that place is likely to be high. Showing respect to and understanding of the community can help build strong relationships.

Hard-to-reach groups and individuals

This is an important aspect of effective engagement that practitioners need to carefully consider.

Hard-to-reach groups that you may need to consider as part of your engagement process include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people, the disadvantaged and homeless, people with a disability, as well as children and young people. More information about making your engagement process inclusive of these groups is available on the *Better Together* website.

There is also sometimes a risk that a noisy minority will overwhelm the engagement process and prevent you from hearing the views and opinions of the quiet majority. Reaching the quiet majority will require effort. You'll first need to identify that they exist



Collaborating

and then discover why they are silent (not participating in your engagement). You may need to consider innovative ways to engage them. Having trust-based relationships with on-the-ground community leaders can be helpful with this. If you don't have trusting relationships with the community and can't establish them, random sampling can be an effective mechanism to obtain the views of a broad cross section.

Look for partnering opportunities. Are there other engagement processes or community events planned or underway that your process can be coordinated with? If there are you may be able to save time and resources by collaborating.

Another tier of government, government agency, or stakeholder may have stronger networks in the community than you, and you may find it much easier to partner with them to deliver engagement activities rather than starting from scratch or going solo.

Connectors, 'mavens' and salespeople

In his book *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*⁴, Canadian journalist and author Malcolm Gladwell identifies the types of people you need to connect with to drive change. He describes these people as being either connectors, mavens or salespeople.

- **Connectors** link us up with the world... people with a special gift for bringing the world together. They are described as 'a handful of people with a truly extraordinary knack [...for] making friends and acquaintances.'
- **Mavens** are information specialists - experts who are known for accumulating knowledge and sharing it with others.
- **Salespeople** are persuaders, charismatic people with powerful negotiation skills who can sell ideas and opinions to the public.

These categories might be useful to help identify people who could fulfil these roles and assist you with your engagement activity.



Who are the trusted leaders?

Identifying 'community leaders' and seeking their help to draw the community into an engagement process can deliver dividends in both numbers engaged and the quality of information gained.

Local Government

Keep local councils in mind when identifying your engagement audiences. Should you be catching up with the CEO, Mayor or Chairperson for coffee? Is it worth asking the council to promote engagement sessions through its networks? Or does the opportunity exist to partner with the council to deliver an engagement activity?

It's often acknowledged that local government is the closest tier of government to the people because of its daily interaction with communities. Councils may also be able to provide a local perspective on the issue or topic of your engagement and highlight any issues or concerns that might need to be understood before your engagement begins (Principle 4).



We know the history

'We told you lot all of this when you were here six months ago', the farmer complained loudly to murmurs of agreement from around the hall.

Engaging communities and stakeholders too much, or failing to build on previous engagement activities, can be as bad as not engaging at all. We often hear high-profile examples of communities and stakeholders complaining of not being engaged, but in reality there's a lot of engagement going on and it's important to be aware of this.

Nothing seems to rile people more than being asked for input time and time again, yet not being able to see the impact of their previous contributions.

Knowing the history involves:

- **Determining what we already know**
- **Researching background information**

Determining what we already know

Knowledge of previous government involvement in a community or with stakeholders is vital. This should include knowledge of activity by all tiers of government (often people do not distinguish between the three) and by all government agencies (remembering that their names often change and this can be confusing for the community).

Research can often reveal that a lot of engagement activity is occurring but in an uncoordinated manner. This can contribute to consultation fatigue – where communities are over consulted. This is compounded when their previous feedback has not been included in previous decisions or has not influenced subsequent engagements in the same region on similar topics. Corporate knowledge of previous engagements can be hard to obtain. To help, look for significant government projects undertaken in the recent past which may have spurred engagement, to identify practitioners who have worked in the community and have existing knowledge. You may also find reports and outcomes based on those engagements. Use these to influence your own work.

Researching background information

Other ways to find out the history about the issue you are engaging on include:

- **Accessing the YourSAy website** – there is a lot of information from previous government engagements archived there – www.yoursay.sa.gov.au.
- **Connecting to other agencies** - talk to your peers as well as the communication teams. These people will be a good source of corporate knowledge.
- **Reading the outcomes from the Country Cabinet events** – these provide a great overview of what's happening in regions, the issues raised by communities and the Government's response.
- **Access the State Government Archives** – they are an excellent resource available to anyone in government.
- **Talk to consultants that run engagement processes for government** – they can often provide you with a new perspective of what happened in a project they may have worked on.

When undertaking an engagement, it's worthwhile to specifically refer to any previous engagement activities in the community, explaining their outcomes, how they intersect with the current process, and why a new process is required. Where possible, build on the outcomes of previous engagements.



We start together

There is no doubt that early engagement results in better outcomes for both the community and government. Starting together to define the purpose and objectives may also save time and resources down the track, as the public's input at a project's genesis can reduce the risk of running into problems (including community opposition) later.

For communities, starting together can build a sense of ownership and stewardship. It can help to bring people together for a positive purpose, rather than having them lobby around a negative cause further down the track.

A co-design process that is started together can also create collective action by stakeholders and communities in implementing the solution.

To start together you should be:

- **Building relationships**
- **Working together towards outcomes**

Building relationships

Relationships are very important and form the foundation upon which to build successful community engagement. Strong, authentic relationships lead to trust, understanding and openness. Put in the groundwork for good relationships before doing anything else, and start early as this takes time. Relationships may be with internal or external participants. Government relationships are just as important as relationships with external stakeholders. Make sure you identify and build relationships with your internal stakeholders early during the planning phase of your engagement process (Principle 2). They could help shape your engagement process and provide you with expert knowledge and information to assist with your initiative.

Working together towards outcomes

Starting together means working with communities and stakeholders to identify challenges and opportunities, rather than starting from a predetermined outcome or decision.

You need to work with communities and stakeholders to identify the challenges (and opportunities) they are facing. This means taking a blank canvas approach, asking them to identify their concerns and aspirations related to your engagement's purpose. If you can establish collective or joint objectives with clear actions, all parties can work collaboratively to a positive outcome.

Encourage participation by allowing stakeholders and others to be part of designing the engagement process. This includes asking them how they and others should be engaged and what processes and mechanisms would work best for them.

Probably more so than the other Principles, how Principle 4 is applied or approached differs considerably across the levels of engagement on the IAP2 spectrum.



A key part of your role will be to bring your engagement, communications and policy staff together. Their collaboration and support is important to ensure that activities are well communicated and that those responsible for implementing the final outcomes understand the community's priorities. This will ensure that starting together can be achieved to a satisfactory level, with greater opportunity for positive outcomes.



We are genuine

Nothing could be more important than being genuine when it comes to engagement. People quickly pick up when actions or words lack authenticity. People can see through activities that are undertaken for the sake of fulfilling a process or ticking a box. If people think the process is not genuine, cynicism sets in and they disengage from the process. Engagements that aren't genuine damage the public's trust in government and make it harder for others that are engaging with the right intent.

Trust is one of the most important foundations upon which the legitimacy and sustainability of government systems are built. Building and maintaining trusting relationships is vital to the effective functioning of government. As a consequence, this Principle is key to both successful engagement and successful governing.

Being genuine requires:

- **Honest intent**
- **Listening to understand**
- **People at the centre**
- **Accessibility**
- **Recognition and celebration**
- **Closing the feedback loop**



Honest intent

The most important element is to be honest about your intent. Be completely clear about your purpose and level of engagement (Principle 1). Are you informing, consulting, involving, collaborating or empowering? Use this terminology and clearly communicate what it means, repeatedly. Repeating and reiterating this regularly will ensure that everybody is clear about your intent. This will ensure that expectations are managed. Sometimes things can change. If this happens be honest about this as well and explain the circumstances and implications.



A key part of managing expectations is to outline from the start what is negotiable and what is not negotiable. The negotiables are elements of your initiative that can be influenced and the non-negotiables are elements that cannot be changed or influenced by the engagement process. This may be due to safety, technical or legislative requirements. Being clear about what elements of the initiative your communities and stakeholders have an opportunity to influence will help manage expectations.

Listening to understand

Genuine engagement means listening to understand. Through active listening, you'll better understand the community and stakeholders you're engaging with; you'll be able to get a handle on their motivations; know what makes them tick; grasp what they recognise as challenges and opportunities; and learn how to effectively engage with them.

Listening in order to understand asks you to step back for a moment, taking time to listen with empathy and gain a better understanding of the state of play in a community. Upon deeper listening you may be surprised by some of the insights you gain and there's every chance your perspective will shift with your new information.

To make sure that you have heard correctly it is vital that you check back with the people you have engaged with to make sure that you have interpreted what they said correctly. This can be done in different ways (and should be done on multiple occasions). For example, you could type up the discussion from a session and invite the participants to provide feedback, giving them the chance to correct your interpretation or clarify a point. This can (and should) then be done again once a range of stakeholders or members of the community have been heard – summarising the breadth of all feedback received and if possible the government's initial thinking in response to this.

People at the centre

A successful engagement places people, not the topic or issue, at the centre of the engagement.

At the end of the day, everything we do in the public service should be focused on improving the lives of South Australians and their communities. Government does this by investing time and resources in a range of issues. The issues are diverse and the policy and program responses complex, but whether they are about economic development, environmental protection, reliable health care or excellent education, the final outcomes are for people and so should be shaped by people.

Accessibility

Ensure that your engagement has a high level of accessibility, providing people with appropriate and as many opportunities to participate as possible. This can mean ensuring timeframes for responses are appropriate; that venues (if a physical meeting is being held) are accessible and comfortable; and that people feel welcome and valued.

Accessibility can also be achieved by providing options for participation. Provide people with multiple opportunities to engage in your process. For example, you could hold a community workshop, publish the outcomes for comment on an online discussion forum, promote this work through a social media strategy, and seek broader input through an online survey.

Recognition and celebration

Because engagement is all about people, you need to recognise and celebrate what participants bring to the process. This includes their time, ideas, knowledge, networks and other resources. In doing this you need to acknowledge that people who are participating in your engagement are usually doing so voluntarily. Show your appreciation for this. This can be as straightforward as providing verbal recognition at the close of a meeting, following up with letters of thanks, and then coming back to participants to let them know what you've done with the material they provided. This demonstrates that even if you were unable to do anything with their input, you recognise that it's valuable because time was taken to provide it.

Closing the feedback loop

'What happened to my idea?', 'Did you listen?', 'Did you care?', 'Did it make a difference?' These are reasonable questions that participants of an engagement will ask.

The feedback loop is one of the most important elements of the engagement process and without it you cannot show real respect for your participants' contribution. Closing the feedback loop should happen throughout the engagement, not just at the end.

The concept of the feedback loop can be broken down into three elements:



We asked...

Remind people what the engagement is about. Restate the context and remind people why the engagement is being carried out. If you asked specific questions or provided materials, provide these again.



You said...

Provide people with an overview of what has been said so far. In a small group this might be individual feedback. In a large group or broad community engagement, it could be a broad overview of what has been said so far, highlighting the key themes and interesting points. It may be useful to provide graphically displayed statistics so people can see where their input ranked in comparison with others' priorities.



We did...

Outline what happened with the community and stakeholder input gained through an engagement and explain why it was or wasn't used. People will appreciate getting this transparent and honest feedback, even if their ideas and opinions were unable to influence the final outcomes.

Closing the feedback loop demonstrates your genuine commitment to the engagement and will give those involved confidence that their contribution was valued. Completing the feedback loop is a great opportunity to officially thank people for their input and participation. Those who successfully complete the feedback loop will have a much better chance of re-engaging the communities and/or stakeholders in the future, and you can keep the community as an activated, interested asset, which can be partnered with again and again.

We are relevant and engaging

Is it possible to have an engagement that may not be engaging? Yes. There are plenty of examples of engagement activities which fail to inspire, demonstrated by low participation rates, low-quality responses and a lack of goodwill at future engagements.

Our final Principle looks to the engagement activities themselves, the things you want people to take part in: the online discussion forum; the workshop; the Facebook page; the survey; the list goes on.

To be relevant and engaging you should:

- **Shape your engagement tools for your participants**
- **Be creative**

Shape your engagement tools for your participants

As you work through the Principles, you'll begin to understand what makes your communities and stakeholders tick. The better you know your communities and stakeholders, the greater your ability to shape engagement tools that will draw them into the process. As previously outlined (Principle 5), a successful engagement places people, not the topic or government, at the centre of the engagement, because it's the people who'll be affected.

In practical terms, putting people at the centre of the process means making sure that your process is as accessible and interesting as possible to the people and communities you want and need to engage. The following is a list of some of the things that need to be considered to make your engagement process inclusive:

- Timing
- Breadth of opportunity to participate
- Language
- Comfort and access
- Disability access
- Tools that are engaging and welcoming
- Cultural considerations
- Age and learning styles
- Literacy and numeracy levels of your audience

More information about how to address these considerations and make your engagement process inclusive is available on the *Better Together* website.

Be creative

To make sure your engagement methodologies capture the community's imagination and draw people into the process, you need to take it beyond mere bureaucratic tools. You need to think about personalisation, using creativity and relevance to make them as fun and as engaging as possible.

Engagement activities which stand out as highly successful are those which captivate their audiences and give them a clear purpose for being there. Sometimes that will mean fun and games, prizes, the use of multimedia and enthusiastic facilitation.



Deciding, Designing and Delivering Together

At his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln spoke of ‘Government of the people, by the people, for the people,’ to proclaim the value of democratic government. Today we could add a fourth clause: ‘with the people’, emphasising the arrival of participatory democracy and the importance of genuinely involving people in the work of government which goes well beyond political participation.

Successful engagement can come in many different forms and can involve the community to various extents (across the IAP2 Spectrum). *Reforming Democracy* proposes that we draw on the knowledge of our ‘experts’ in guiding our decision-making whilst ensuring that citizens are involved in choices about what they value and in determining the direction our state needs to take.

This requires a ‘deliberative’ approach to engagement. It requires that citizens be engaged through working in conjunction with experts to deeply consider the data, the facts and explore options for solutions together.

In his book *‘Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics’*⁵ Josh Lerner provides a number of case studies of ‘fun’ engagements.

On other occasions, and for different audiences, it may mean carefully constructed discussion papers, presentation of data and use of detailed case studies, but make these as creative and relevant as possible for your participants.



‘What’s in it for me?’ If your participants gain something from your engagement, then you’ve made it relevant for them. And this isn’t about having their say in lofty policy goals. Instead, it’s about immediate value, e.g. the parent who has some time out during a community conversation because a crèche is provided; the elderly woman who gets to enjoy the company of others when being interviewed over a cup of tea; or the food and sense of community enjoyed during a suburban barbecue.



What is a 'deliberative' approach?

Deliberation or 'deliberative' forms of engagement are not a new or additional level of engagement on the IAP2 framework. Instead, they are a type of tool or methodology.

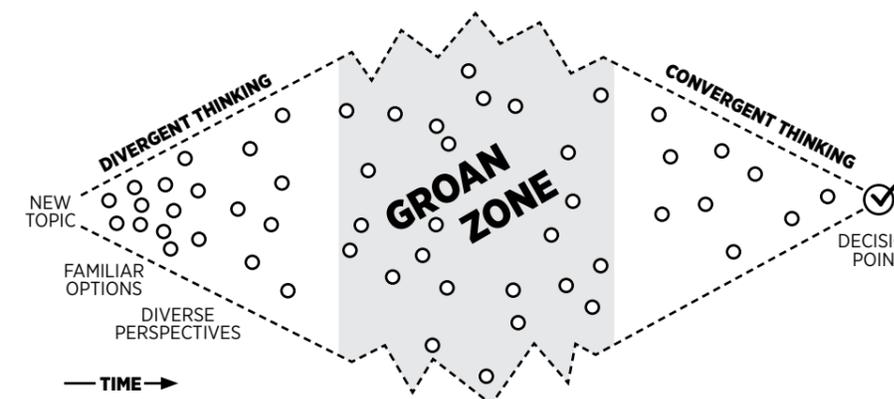
Key concepts of a deliberative approach include:

- INCLUSION** The ability to include many voices from all walks of life in decision-making. This can manifest through a random selection process or active involvement of those not normally included in engagement processes. Inclusion ensures that engagement is representative of the population and recognises diverse views and is based on equal opportunity.
- DELIBERATION** The opportunity to take a deep dive into a complex or tricky issue by sharing data, information, facts and with support from key experts in the field. In this way deliberative processes encourage participants to inquire, reflect and consider others views. A thorough exploration of the issues and implications is enabled and solutions which search for common ground result.
- INFLUENCE** Moving beyond inform and consult – to involve, collaborate and empower, improves the capacity of communities and stakeholders to influence policy and decision-making.



The 'groan zone'

So your engagement is over, you've fulfilled the feedback loop but now people don't seem to be at all happy. On paper, you've delivered a very successful series of engagement activities. People were enthusiastic and provided a whole variety of ideas and opinions about how to tackle the challenges presented. And this is the problem... we now have too many ideas on the table to reach a satisfactory conclusion.



Source: *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making*, Sam Kaner⁶

The model shown above outlines the path all engagement processes will take – the process will start with a topic, then as you gather feedback and input from communities and stakeholders very divergent ideas emerge.

The 'groan zone' is when those ideas are diverse and government is unable to use them to make a decision as there is so much information and so many diverse points of view.

The last part of your engagement will be to take those divergent ideas and converge them into a meaningful decision or outcome.

Your engagement planning should consider how you are going to work with your stakeholders and communities to overcome the groan zone and move into the convergent zone.

Deliberative tools

There are lots of innovative tools and methodologies that use deliberative approaches. There is more detailed information about these types of tools on the *Better Together* website.

Examples of deliberative tools that can also help to move you out of the 'groan zone' include:

- 21st Century Town Hall meetings
- World Café
- Issues Forum
- Nominal Group
- Citizens' Juries
- Participatory Budgeting (for example *Fund My Idea* and *Fund My Community*)

Digital engagement and social media

Digital engagement, particularly through mobile devices, allows the community to engage with government on issues that affect or interest them, at times and in locations that suit them.

Establishing effective online engagement tools allows you to reach more of your community and offers them different ways to engage. Face-to-face events are valuable for involving the community in your engagement, but there will always be members of the community who can't go to an event because of time, distance, work or family commitments, or other constraints. Online offers a way to engage them.

Digital engagement should therefore be a cornerstone of your engagement process. Digital engagement could be via an online consultation, discussion forum, survey, poll or crowd-sourcing ideas.

Reflecting the key importance of digital engagement, all government agencies are required to coordinate significant engagements through the YourSAy website, which helps agencies host open, two-way conversations with the community.

Digital tools will be vital in informing the public about your engagement. Social media is an important and growing method of reaching out to a broad group of people. More than 62 percent of Australians have a Facebook account ⁷ and (according to the *Sensis Social Media Report 2016*), 87 percent of Australians use the internet daily with 55 percent of these people accessing the internet more than five times a day ⁸.

The total number of people using the internet, and the increasing number of people using social media, presents a huge opportunity for government to connect with communities and stakeholders about issues that matter to them in real time. Social media channels provide a great space to amplify and promote your engagement activities, events and messaging, and can help you reach new audiences and demographics. But it's not as easy as just setting up a Facebook account and hoping for the best — developing online engagement and social media channels takes resources and strategic planning to make it a successful and worthwhile venture.

Not all members of the community can access digital platforms equally, so consideration will always need to be given to their particular needs by providing a range of options for people to participate in your engagement process.

Social media also provides a valuable way of finding out what issues your community cares about before, during and after your engagement.

Online engagement and social media is ever-changing. So in order to provide you with the most up-to-date information, we've come up with some practical tips that can be found on the *Better Together* website. This advice should be read in conjunction with the Office of the Chief Information Officer's Social Guidance for Agencies and Staff, which is available via digital.sa.gov.au.

yourSAy.sa.gov.au

Visit our website to learn more about the South Australian Government's online engagement hub.

Where to go for more support

The *Better Together* team within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is here to help. The team is constantly developing new strategies and partnering with government agencies to trial innovative approaches to drive high-quality engagement across government.

The team can help you with

Principles – take a deeper dive into the six guiding Principles on our website.

Training and events – attend our Principles training session and join more than 1,000 other public servants who have attended this training since 2013. For a deeper understanding of a particular engagement topic, attend one of our Masterclasses or Showcase events.

Planning tools – access a range of practical tools and resources to prepare, plan, implement and report a best-practice engagement process, as well as South Australian case studies on our website.

Engagement advice – the team is available to provide tailored support and advice to government agencies planning an engagement. Get in touch with us and find out what we can do to help.

Connect with us – we manage a community of practice, bringing together like-minded people who have an interest in (doing) great community and stakeholder engagement. Join our regular mailing list and receive invitations to our events or join our LinkedIn group (*Better Together South Australia's community engagement group*).

YourSAy – we manage YourSAy at yourSAy.sa.gov.au. This is your online engagement hub, where you can see what government engagement activities are happening across the state, learn more about South Australia's innovative engagement initiatives and host online discussion forums. Contact the *Better Together* team via bettertogether@sa.gov.au to find out how your agency can use YourSAy for your next engagement.

Social media – we have built strong and engaged online communities. We can promote your engagements via our social media channels to help you have open and transparent conversations with the public.

More details about the *Better Together* program, including how to get in touch, can be found on the *Better Together* website.

bettertogether.sa.gov.au

Definitions

We don't want to get bogged down in definitions, but we're keen to see a common language develop across government when we're referring to engagement. For the purpose of this document, it's useful to highlight the following definitions:

Engagement	The practice of actively bringing community voices into decisions that affect, impact or interest them.
Tools and approaches	The things we use to activate the community voice (e.g. Citizens' juries workshops, social media).
Stakeholders	People who have a stake in what's being explored. This may be an organisation, another layer of government, a school, an environmental group, or local business owner.
Community or Communities	The public at large who may or may not have a stake, but may have an interest or be directly affected. This may be people who live in a street, all South Australians, or parents interested in childhood obesity. The use of the term communities as a plural recognises there are many diverse communities with an interest or potentially affected.
Experts	These are people who can offer specific information, experience or expertise to a topic such as an academic, a political leader, a victim of crime, a shop owner or local resident.

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The Better Together: Principles of Engagement second edition 2016 has been shaped by the following people, groups and documents:

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- Geoff Mulgan, Chief Executive, Nesta UK, nesta.org.uk
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