11.0 Engagement and Influencing

National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales

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Introduction

The National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales are a set of ten principles for engaging with the public and service users.

The principles aim to guide the way engagement is carried out to make sure it is good quality, open and consistent.

They offer a set of guidelines to organisations within the public and voluntary sectors in Wales.

Image: Public meeting

They provide standards of good practice in public engagement, for use by government officials, elected representatives, public administrators, service providers, policy makers, participation and engagement practitioners, and anyone working to deliver effective public engagement.

Following these principles will ensure that people and communities can engage with decisions that affect them. Organisations are asked to commit to the principles, implement them in their work, promote them widely and share good practice to encourage continuous learning and improvement across Wales.

Cefnogi Trydydd Sector Cymru Third Sector Support Wales

The principles have been produced collaboratively by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), the Co-Production Network for Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), the Officer of the Commissioner for Future Generations, the Welsh Government, One Voice Wales, and participation and engagement practitioners.

Principles

1. Design your engagement to make a difference

Engagement offers a genuine opportunity to inform or influence decisions, policy, or services.

Guidance notes:

- Be clear from the start whether engagement is appropriate or not. Will engagement add information and insights to your decision-making processes, and will you be able to act on the results? Being clear about what can and can't be achieved will avoid tokenistic engagement, which can break down trust and goodwill, and have a negative impact on future engagement.
- If engagement is appropriate, be clear about which level of engagement will be most meaningful for your situation – (see **Definitions** section for further information).
- Engagement may tell you that change is not needed at this time. This can be a valid outcome of engagement, which makes a positive difference in terms of saving energy and resources for creating change where it matters most.
- Clearly communicate both the purpose of your engagement (why should people give up their time and how they and their communities could benefit) and the process (what can people expect from it, how and when).
- Monitor the accessibility, inclusion, and diversity of your engagement, to make sure that you are hearing the voices of people with different protected characteristics and lived experience, including underrepresented people.

2. Invite people to get involved, if they choose to

People have opportunities to engage as an individual or as part of a group or community, in an inclusive and welcoming way which does not put them under obligation or pressure.

Guidance notes:

- Those making policy or designing services have a responsibility to engage with diverse groups and must take steps to do so. Engagement means offering people the opportunity to be involved - it is a matter of choice for the individual.
- You should identify the people who may be affected by the issue or proposed change, and / or who have an interest in taking part.
- Different groups of people can be reached through the many communities and special interest groups that already exist in the voluntary sector.
- Ensure that your invitation to engage is appropriate, accessible, and relevant.

3. Plan and deliver your engagement in a timely and appropriate way

The engagement process is clear, communicated to everyone in a way that's easy to understand, takes place within a reasonable timescale, and uses the most suitable method(s) for those involved.

Guidance notes:

- Don't leave planning your engagement until the end: you should arrange your engagement at the same time as you are planning for your decision, policy, or service design.
- There are several levels of engagement, and you should decide on the most appropriate when you begin your planning (see **Definitions** section for further information).
- Select the methods for your chosen level(s) of engagement and use your networks and partners to extend your reach in the time you have available.

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- Several methods are available at each level of engagement to match people's different preferences, needs and abilities to take part. You will need to use a range of methods to reach everyone you need to reach (including digital and non-digital), and to enable people to take part in the way and in the amount that works for them.
- If your engagement has phases (e.g., a survey, then drop in events, then a focus group), participants at any one stage of engagement should be offered the opportunity to take part in the next stage(s), deepening their engagement and their understanding of the topic.
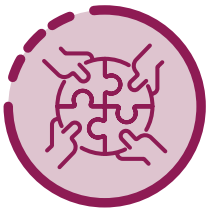
4. Work with relevant partner organisations

Organisations communicate with each other and work together wherever possible, to ensure that people's time, and organisations' resources, are used efficiently.

Guidance notes:

- At the start of planning your engagement, check whether your organisation or a partner organisation already has the information you need, or is already planning or delivering engagement in the same area or with the same people. For example, several Public Services Boards have developed joint databases of consultation and engagement work so that they can work more effectively with each other and with the public.
- Work with other organisations who also cover your geographical area or area of interest, whether they are in the public or voluntary sector. This will enable you all to make more effective use of available time and resources, reduce duplication, and create an engagement process which is more effective, produces less consultation fatigue, and improves returns.

5. Provide jargon free, appropriate, and understandable information

People have easy access to relevant information that is tailored to meet their needs.

Guidance notes:

- Pay attention to format: provide the main information in Plain English and Cymraeg Clir, and make it available in a variety of additional formats, e.g., easy read, large print, audio, video, child friendly, etc.
- Pay attention to language: make the information available in Welsh and English. Consider whether providing information in British Sign Language (BSL) and ethnic minority languages would be helpful to your audiences.
- Pay attention to tone: make sure that the information is culturally and religiously sensitive.
- Pay attention to content: do not overburden people with irrelevant information, but ensure you clearly communicate the things people need to know to be able to make an effective contribution.

6. Make it easy for people to take part

Any barriers are identified and addressed, so that people can engage easily.

Guidance notes:

- All of us can experience barriers to taking part, depending on the issue and the situation. You should recognise diversity, identify any potential barriers for different people, and take steps to overcome them. Understand who you're seeking to engage with and use the most appropriate means and channels for them to get involved.
- Participants should have the opportunity to identify issues they feel are barriers to their involvement (rather than the professionals / organisers alone). For example, you can ask at registration whether people have any access requirements or need any reasonable adjustments to take part.

- Consider digital engagement carefully: working online can make engagement accessible to many who for various reasons would not attend an event in person. But be alert to its downsides including digital exclusion (through lack of access to devices and / or data, skills or confidence, or accessibility). Include digital engagement alongside in person engagement.

- Be aware of the physical and attitudinal barriers that disabled people may face. Consider the access to buildings, to transport and to inclusive methods of communication (for example BSL interpretation) so everyone can participate fully and equally. Offer alternative information formats and ensure that online versions are accessible to users of assistive technology.

- Consider any distinct experiences and situations, including neurodiversity, different cultures and languages, LGBTQ+ identities, caring responsibilities, or other.

- Some groups of people with particular needs or preferences will need specific approaches and opportunities to get involved in engagement, e.g., children and young people. (There are **Children and young people's participation standards** that can help inform your engagement.) Plan to organise activities that are designed specifically for their requirements.

- Work with specialist partner organisations to access advice and good practice for supporting and enabling different groups of people.

7. Ensure people benefit from the experience

Engagement contributes to developing the skills, knowledge, and confidence of all participants.

Guidance notes:

- Good engagement goes beyond just getting people's views on a specific issue. It should contribute to developing people's ability to take part in community / public services / democratic / government processes. People whose

skills, knowledge, and confidence grow through a positive engagement experience are more likely to get involved again in future.

- The capacity and ability of different stakeholders to participate varies. Working with the support of partner organisations who are experienced in supporting specific groups will enhance your engagement.

- People must feel that they are valued and that their views are respected. When interacting in person, create a positive, supportive environment, with boundaries and balance so that everyone is heard respectfully. Pay attention to the tone of voice, language, and message that you put across, both in person and in written materials. Using professional facilitators, and / or developing your own facilitation skills, will increase the effectiveness of your engagement.

- Acknowledge people's contributions of time, views and lived experience. Thank people for participating. If you can cover their expenses, make sure they are not out of pocket for participating. If you can build it into your planning and budget, pay people for their time. (Seek advice on avoiding negative impact of payments on benefits recipients.) Use time credits, vouchers, or other forms of compensation to give a fair exchange for the time people have contributed.

8. Ensure the right resources and time are in place for your engagement to be effective

Enough time is allowed for both planning and meaningful engagement for the decision, policy, or service design. Appropriate training, guidance, support, and financial resources enable all participants to engage effectively, including community participants and staff.

Guidance notes:

- It takes time, people, skills, and resources to reach out to participants, make engagement accessible and informed, and provide a range of ways for people to express their
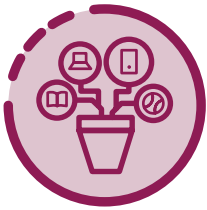
views or experiences. Engagement must be designed (and resourced) from the start to achieve the clarity of purpose, and appropriateness of methods, that will return the greatest effectiveness.

- Organisations cutting processes short due to limits on time or money results in poor engagement (wasting funding or public money), and negative experiences for participants (reducing trust, goodwill, and future involvement). If you are limited for time and / or money, design smaller but focused and highly meaningful engagement, to return the greatest value on resources available.

- Good management and leadership from within organisations are crucial for engagement to be supported, resourced, and carried out effectively.

9. Let people know the impact of their contribution

Timely feedback is given to participants about their contribution, and the decisions or actions taken as a result, using methods and forms of feedback that take account of participants' preferences.

Guidance notes:

- The key to motivating people to engage again is that they see the benefit and result from their contribution. Closing the communication loop and providing feedback in a timely way is essential.

- Keep in mind that public services move at a slower speed than people's lives, and outcomes can take months if not years to materialise, with processes being largely invisible to the public. Interim communications providing updates on the process will help participants feel they've not been forgotten about and grow their understanding of the systems they are informing or influencing.

- Not every contribution will be acted upon, but the explanation for decisions taken in response to participants' views helps build the trust that they have been heard and considered. When things that have been suggested in the engagement process are not acted upon, it is good practice to explain the reasons for this.

- Different participants will have different needs and preferences for receiving feedback, which should be taken into account – this links to their information and accessibility needs (principles 5 and 6).
- Feedback should be proportionate to the amount of input participants have provided. For example, you could have a mix of general information about the engagement process and its results via a general newsletter. This could be complemented by more specific and detailed feedback to a smaller number of more active participants, like a summary for people who engaged in a focus group or workshop.
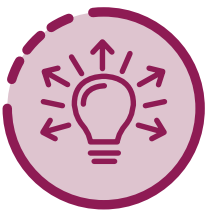
10. Learn and share to improve your engagement

People's experience of the engagement process is monitored, along with the accessibility, inclusion and diversity, and the outputs and results. Lessons learnt from the evaluation are shared and inform future engagement.

Guidance notes:

- It is critical that any engagement process is monitored on an ongoing basis, as well as evaluated after completion. This enables you to adjust and react to the unexpected while the process is under way.
- As well as building in monitoring and evaluation of people's experience, the reach and diversity, and the results returned by your engagement, it is important that you reflect on your own experience of the process. Record and share what you learn and use this to improve your practice.
- You can make your evaluation available to participants in an accessible and appropriate format, as part of the feedback from the organisation to participants after the engagement has concluded. It can also form the basis for a further phase of engagement, to review and design the process itself and improve it for the future.
- By striving for continuous improvement, and by recognising, valuing, and promoting good practice, you contribute to creating a positive culture of public engagement across your organisation.

Definitions

The following definitions are an up-to-date, and hopefully useful, point of reference. They cover a range of different methods or approaches which are included under the wider umbrella term of engagement. Different organisations will use one or more of these methods and approaches, and it is important that there is clarity and understanding from all participants about which is being undertaken.

Engagement

An active and participative process by which people can influence and shape policy and services that includes a wide range of different methods and techniques (including consultation, participation, and co-production and involvement).

Consultation

A formal process by which policy makers and service providers ask for the views of interested groups and individuals on specific policies, actions, or interventions.

Participation

People being actively involved with policy makers and service planners from an early stage of policy and service planning and review, to shape and influence the outcomes and decisions.

Co-production

When people who provide and deliver services, and people who access and receive services, share power and responsibility, and work together for mutual benefit in equal, reciprocal, and caring relationships. It enables people to access relevant and meaningful support when they need it, services to be effective and make a positive difference in people's lives, and people, services, and communities to become more effective agents of change.

Involvement

This requires organisations to be open to influence from citizens and stakeholders, moving to a culture of 'working with' rather than 'doing to'. In contrast to consultation, involvement approaches work with people at earlier stages, such as helping to identify issues and potential solutions, and being supported to remain involved right throughout design, implementation, and evaluation processes.

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These Principles were reviewed and republished in 2022 by **Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)**, with support from the **Co-Production Network for Wales**, the **Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)**, the **Officer of the Commissioner for Future Generations**, the **Welsh Government**, **One Voice Wales**, and participation and engagement practitioners.

Cefnogi Trydydd Sector **Cymru**

Third Sector Support **Wales**

Third Sector Support Wales is a network of support organisations for the whole of the third sector in Wales.

It consists of the 19 local and regional support bodies across Wales, the County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) and the national support body, Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

For further information contact
https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/contact/

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