

Appendix: Community Engagement

Greater Wellington Regional Council Engagement approach

Greater Wellington Regional Council has a responsibility to engage with the community and some aspects of this activity are set out in the Local Government Act 2002. The council also recognises the value of community engagement and uses the following definition to describe its approach:

Community engagement is the process of ensuring that communities of people within our region are able to be involved through a range of mechanisms in the planning, development and delivery of programmes and services affecting their communities. It includes the provision of timely, accessible and complete information; appropriate forms of consultation; and enabling communities to actively participate in influencing decision-making and service delivery where applicable.

The Council has a suite of essential reference documents which are designed to assist all staff undertaking community engagement across all aspects of GWRC activity.

The suite of documents incorporates:

- Community Engagement Strategy
- Community Engagement: The Techniques Toolbox
- Decision Making Process and Guidelines (May 2010)

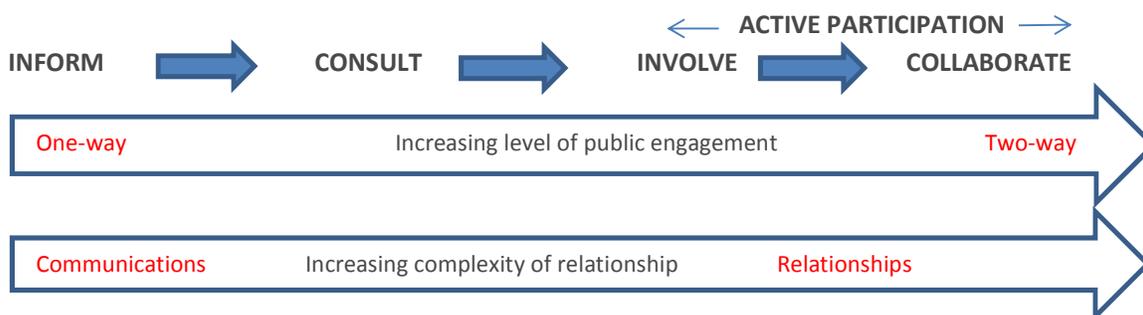
Excerpts from the Community Engagement: The Techniques Toolbox and the community engagement strategy are provided for the Te Awarua o Porirua Whaitua Committee's information. The committee may choose to develop a formal whaitua engagement strategy at a later date.

Excerpt from the Community Engagement: The Techniques Toolbox and Community Engagement Strategy

GWRC has adopted a public participation spectrum to demonstrate the possible types of engagement with the community, adapted from work of the International Association for Public Participation. This model shows the increasing level of public impact as you progress through the spectrum from left to right - 'informing' through to 'collaborating'. 'Informing' stakeholders has no expectation of receiving feedback, and consequently there is a low level of public impact. At the other end of the spectrum, 'collaborating' with stakeholders implies an increase in expectations and therefore an increased level of public impact.

Differing levels of engagement may be required during the varying phases of decision-making on an issue, and for different stakeholders.

Community engagement is a process involving techniques and approaches on a continuum from basic information provision to longer-term collaboration. The four levels of engagement are:



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There is no single formula to define what community engagement technique(s) to use for which engagement level on the continuum. Judgement is required. Knowing how and when to engage comes through training and experience.

Engagement techniques

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES AND TOOLS
1. <u>Information</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Posters, postcards, fliers, banners, advertising and publications• Local newspaper press releases, publications, radio and TV interviews• Newsletters, letters, leaflets or summaries• Information stalls/open days/roadshows/exhibitions• Public and specific meetings, presentations, briefings• Website updates• Email, texts alerts, Twitter, webpage subscription, Facebook, MySpace, podcasts
2. <u>Consultation</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questionnaires and surveys, structure feedback form, polls, surveys• Online surveys and e-consultation (via the internet)• Face to face interviews/telephone interviews• Residents', citizens', user panels and community groups• Discussion/focus groups/forums/e-forum• Written consultation - letter or email• Consultation events/workshops/roadshows/world café/ exhibitions/general events/festivals/shows• Online consultation, discussion groups and blogs• Public, neighbourhood or specific meetings or surgeries• Documents or information available in offices, public buildings or online• Verbal consultation with community representative
3. <u>Active participation</u>
<u>INVOLVING</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public or specific targeted discussion meetings with interested parties• Public or stakeholder workshops to identify issues and shape options• Public visioning events, ideas competitions, interactive displays• Consensus conference (questioning experts before making recommendation)• Online discussion forums• Citizens' juries and panels• Interact with Councillors, GWRC employees
<u>COLLABORATING</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community advisory committee• Community steering committee• Community reference group• Partnerships• Charrette• Consensus building and participatory decision making forums• Whaitua Committee¹

¹ See page 39

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Many community engagement techniques can be used across a range of engagement levels; it is how they are used that determines their suitability for information, consultation or active participation.

Principles and tips

Before initiating a community engagement planning process it is important to be familiar with the legislated principles for community engagement as set out in the Local Government Act 2002 Section 82, and GWRC's six guiding principles which form the basis for all GWRC community engagement:

GWRC's principles of community engagement are summarised as:

- Connecting with those hardest to reach
- Changing the ways government and the community work together
- Being open-minded and listening, understanding and acting on experiences different from our own
- Open and accountable practices and processes
- Incorporating diverse values and interests
- Working together to add value

In applying these there are a number of tips to facilitate better outcomes:

- 1. Take engagement seriously** – producing a lot of glossy brochures is not enough to strengthen relationships between GWRC and its communities. Being successful is about planning information, consultation and active participation, setting goals, working together and evaluating whether the engagement achieved its goals.
- 2. Start from the public's perspective** – consider the community and individual's perspective first and treat them with respect. People are often reluctant to be involved and might mistrust you and your motives. Expectations are created when government gets people involved. By putting yourself in the other's shoes you will realise that people's time is a scarce resource and that it takes hard work to get people engaged. Having the right mix of information, consultation and active participation appropriate to your issue/project is important. Being open, interesting, friendly, honest and adaptable and demonstrating how people's input is taken into account are hallmarks of good engagement.
- 3. Deliver what is promised** – keeping your word and building trust are essential. Conducting engagement for its own sake – just to be able to say people were involved – will backfire. This will make it more difficult to involve people in the future. Engagement techniques must be used correctly and not as cosmetic actions or to defer difficult decisions. Be open about what is negotiable and non-negotiable and do not offer options for consultation if there are none; only promise what you can deliver. Using the right techniques for the task will help here.
- 4. Watch the timing** – stronger relationships between GWRC and its communities need time to be built to show results. Information, consultation and active participation all take time. People need time to familiarise themselves with the issues, be involved and contribute to decisions that impact on their lives. Involving people too late can have negative impacts, while involving people earlier in decisions can achieve better outcomes with properly managed expectations.
- 5. Be creative** – there are no ready-made solutions to your challenges. Relationships between GWRC and communities are dynamic and ever changing. New stakeholders emerge. Engagement must be tailored to a specific situation and challenge. Be flexible, learn from others and

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identify new opportunities. Look at new techniques and technologies and how these complement more traditional methods.

- 6. Balance different interests** – information, consultation and active participation can lead to broad accommodation of interests and broad consensus, but can also raise divergent views and many questions. Learn how to balance these diverse views and input. Build and sustain relationships to foster understanding and clarify issues, provide opportunities for community and individual voices to be heard and share input with others. This gives consensus a chance.
- 7. Be prepared for criticism** – engagement is no guarantee against criticism and conflict, which are a normal part of democracy; so expect some conflict. Remember if you invite people to say what they think, then do not be surprised if they end up doing exactly that. Be prepared to find out that their ideas and your ideas may not be the same. The goal of good engagement is to get input from citizens when your project has room for this, not a round of applause. Some community representatives (news media, interest groups, lobbyists) may use your engagement process to articulate their position and this can lead to conflict if not properly managed. Try not to leave unjustified criticism unanswered. Work towards constructive outcomes.
- 8. Involve employees** – be open and engage internally as well as externally. Use information, consultation and active participation as a mirror to ask how issues are dealt with internally. Employees' input is important and practicing internally what is aimed for externally can lead to better decisions. An organisation with values through behaviours that build openness, transparency and involvement, will support strengthening relations with communities and individuals.
- 9. Develop a coherent policy** – strengthening relationships between GWRC and its communities is itself a GWRC policy and is a useful support for decision making and the process of democracy. However, it is not a substitute for GWRC to make decisions, but complements formal institutions and processes of representative democracy. The way GWRC carries out its engagement policy counts, including reporting on how decisions were made, who was responsible, who was engaged and how.
- 10. Act now** – prevention is better than cure. Be more proactive, use existing opportunities and involve people before decisions are made. Take a step-wise approach to the techniques in this toolbox, learn from experience and make sure you use the right techniques for the task at hand.
- 11. Follow up** – relationships with communities are ongoing and need to be based on trust and mutual respect. Relationships should not end when a particular engagement process does. People and individuals who participate in an engagement process should be informed of the process's outcomes.