

THE SG TOGETHER GUIDE



PLUS

Tips on how to close the feedback loop.

How to do citizen engagement well

BEFORE WE BEGIN: SELF-ASSESSMENT

Take two different coloured pens. Use one to mark how confident you are now in each area and use the other pen to mark how confident you would like to be.

	Not confident		Super confident		
	1	2	3	4	5
Understanding your agency's policy and operating environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gathering and understanding ground sentiments from stakeholders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building trust and relationships with stakeholders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Planning, designing and evaluating engagements with stakeholders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facilitating and conducting engagements with stakeholders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making sense of issues and feedback from the engagements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Closing the loop with participants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Total:				/ 35

Adapted from the Citizen Engagement Framework.

Read more at www.buildingourfuture.gov.sg (intranet link)

Flip to page 7 of this booklet to find resources for improving your skills in citizen engagement.

What is SG Together?

For public agencies, Singapore Together, or SG Together, is about the government working in partnership with Singaporeans to build our future Singapore.

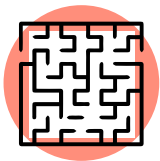
Citizen engagement is part of Public Sector Transformation, and is an ongoing, intentional process done with the public to build relationships

and civic capacity in order to produce better policies, services and outcomes for society.

As citizen engagement ramps up across the public sector, here are the principles and tips to help you improve citizen engagement in your agency, plus resources for deepening your engagement expertise.

Why SG Together is important

Singapore now has...



More complex challenges

The government does not have a monopoly of ideas. We need a broader pool of ideas and combined efforts to overcome these challenges.



A more mature and diverse society

People have different views, and also want to participate and contribute. We want to harness our diversity as a strength and not let it divide us.

And we aim to...



Grow joint ownership of Singapore's future

As more people participate and contribute, we will deepen our ownership of Singapore's future.

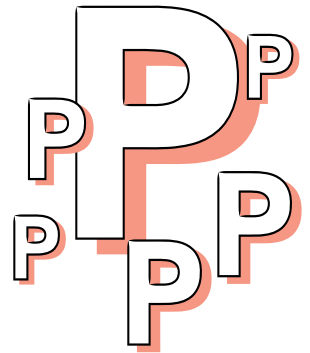


Build trust and care

Working with citizens helps to build strong relationships and foster trust and care, both between the government and people as well as among the people.

Ps, please

Our aspiration: We want to...



- Reach out to new people who have not been engaged before;
- Engage through processes that build consensus, co-create and co-deliver with citizens; and
- Open up new spaces for citizens to deliberate and design policies and prototypes.

PLANNING ENGAGEMENTS

In summary

- **What and why:** Define the issue and purpose of engagement.
- **Who:** Identify the right people to be involved in the engagement.
- **How:** Choose suitable modes of engagement and design the approach.
- **Close the loop:** Always include a feedback loop so your participants see the value of their contribution, and to guide future engagement approaches.



Questions to consider

Before starting

- What is the issue of interest?
- What is the context?
- What is the purpose of engaging citizens?
- What are the stakeholders' level of interest in the issue and attitude towards government?
- How do we manage risks?

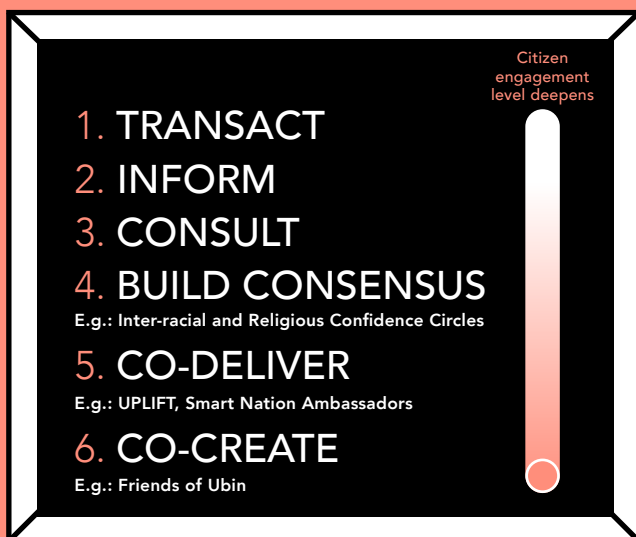
To deepen your engagement

- Can some of your closer stakeholders be engaged earlier, such as being invited to design the engagement process with you?
- How does your engagement help to strengthen a longer-term relationship with your partners?
- How might your engagement be designed to invite participants to step up and contribute?

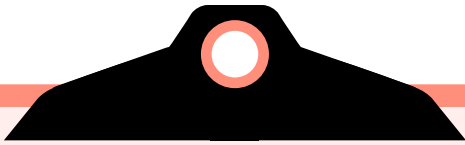


MODES OF ENGAGEMENT

SG Together is about moving towards deeper engagements. The mode of engagement depends on the type and purpose of engagement.



For examples of how different modes of engagements can be used for different projects, browse the Citizen Engagement Field Guide at www.buildingourfuture.gov.sg (intranet link)



PRINCIPLES OF GOOD CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

1

BE INTENTIONAL

Be clear about the purpose of your engagement. Poorly designed engagements generate discontent and distrust.

Ensure that there is scope for citizens' participation to have a real impact on policy and programme implementation.

Build your engagement efforts into your project timelines, e.g., allow a realistic amount of time to obtain and consider stakeholder input.

Build a database of participants for future engagements. The first one is just the start!

4

BE TRANSPARENT

Be upfront about the engagement objective. Provide information and data to help participants understand the issue, the engagement process and how they can be involved.

Give periodic updates to your participants, such as the feedback obtained and what will be done as a result of the engagement by the government and other stakeholders.

Give an accurate account of the feedback and ground sentiments. Over-sanitisation can make the engagement feel insincere.

2

BE PEOPLE-CENTRIC

Approach issues from citizens' points of view. Consider what makes sense to them (or to you as a citizen) rather than only what works best for your agency.

Study the profile and preferences of your target audience, and customise your engagement approach accordingly. Make it easy for them to participate, e.g., by choosing a convenient location and time, and using their languages.

Understand the context, including the values and beliefs of stakeholders, their backgrounds as well as historical and recent events that may affect their perceptions and concerns.

5

BE INCLUSIVE

Reach out to as many stakeholder groups that may be affected by the policy or programme as possible. Ask partners to help reach unknown or under-reached groups.

Lower barriers to participation, especially for minority groups, low-income groups, or those with special needs. E.g., Choose an accessible location or platform for your target audience, or go to where your audience is.

3

BE COLLABORATIVE

Build relationships. This is often critical to achieving outcomes though it may not be easily measured by performance indicators.

See issues and challenges as opportunities for collaboration and relationship-building. Engage with citizens and stakeholders to develop a sense of co-ownership.

Remember to consider your internal stakeholders, both within and across agencies. Consider issues holistically and aim to work across agency boundaries.

Engaging stakeholders does not always require the creation of new events. Work with partners (within and outside the Public Service) to identify existing platforms that can incorporate your engagement.

Find and work closely with partners who can help co-deliver, champion and amplify ideas, and influence people in their network.



**Communicate with logic.
Acknowledge and affirm emotions.**

CITIZEN ENGA

DISABILITY OFFICE (STRATEGIC PLANNING BRANCH), MSF

Tan Wei Lynn Senior Assistant Director

Tan Yeong Sian Assistant Director

They organised a series of disability-specific sessions with citizens and stakeholders to see how to work with partners in the people, public and private sectors to better support Persons with Disabilities in the areas of employment and independent living. The team ensured that the necessary support and arrangements (including adapted engagement strategies and sign language interpreters) were in place to enable participants to share their views and ideas.



NATIONAL POPULATION AND TALENT DIVISION, PMO

Chong Ser Chung Assistant Manager

As part of the organising team for the Citizens' Panel (CP) on Work-life Harmony, he helped to plan the process – from getting stakeholders to agree on the engagement approach, to running the programme for all four CP sessions. He oversaw the operations, logistics and addressed participants' needs for each session so that citizens had a positive experience throughout.

Hard

This is the first multi-agency effort using the Citizens' Panel as an engagement approach. The Public Service is rather new to this, so our capabilities are still nascent. We had to ensure that all 55 participants were meaningfully engaged and had their views heard. Such a democratic deliberation process also challenges us to do things differently – to respond quickly and appropriately to changing dynamics, and having participants decide on the final recommendations.

GEYLANG SERAI CULTURAL PRECINCT TEAM, PA

Hajah Mohaideen Head, Precinct Development

Fathima Begum Manager, Development & Engagement

For the Geylang Serai Precinct Placemaking Envisioning Exercise, the team coordinated 13 engagement sessions with various stakeholders. They used focus group discussions, townhall sessions, and online engagements to reach a wide audience of residents and youths. The team took placemaking courses and learnt from other agencies with public engagement experience.

Hard

It demands our patience and resilience, especially in getting the community to come forward. We need to keep open minds to accept frank (sometimes harsh) feedback from the public. We need to be professional in our responses and manage any uneasy situations that arise.

Often, there are strong and differing opinions among participants. Moderators will need to swiftly defuse tensions while ensuring that the participants know their feedback and opinions are vital for the engagement and are well received.

AGEMENT IS...

Hard

Different groups of stakeholders often face different, sometimes conflicting, challenges and priorities. Our policies and solutions cannot always please everyone. Bringing citizens into the same room and having them share their opinions with us made us feel vulnerable in some ways. However, we soon found that almost all participants were reasonable and constructive, and they appreciated the opportunity for their views and ideas to be heard. Citizen engagement is not just about government engaging citizens; it is also allowing fellow citizens to engage with each other and with other stakeholders to co-create and co-implement solutions together.

Easy

We had the support of many colleagues and agencies, both from the Public Service as well as our partners in the disability sector.

- The organising committee consisted of colleagues from the Disability Office, the National Council of Social Service, SG Enable and the MCCY.
- Volunteer facilitators from other agencies also stepped up to participate when we put out a call for facilitators.
- Partners from Social Service Agencies and even clients themselves volunteered their time and expertise to help out, which made the discussions more open, frank and constructive.

Easy

The participants were committed and went beyond the four sessions to learn about the issues and continue discussions. They were passionate about the topic, forthcoming and proactive in sharing their thoughts. Having support from the MCCY to build our citizen engagement "muscle" – providing feedback, facilitator training and practitioners for us to consult, as well as advice and guidance from more experienced MOH colleagues – also made a difference.



Easy

...if done by trained personnel, who carefully plan each engagement session for the best outcomes. Different community groups will need different kinds of engagement.

The materials used should be intuitive and easy for participants to understand. This in turn enables us to consolidate data and translate them into the desired deliverables. It's important to be open, sincere and listen attentively to the participants to understand their aspirations.



Build trust that goes both ways



A strong relationship begins with trust. Build and strengthen trust with every engagement. Find opportunities for partners and citizens to contribute to a better Singapore together.

Examples:

- In Singapore, the South Central Community Family Service Centre (SCCFSC) views their clients as members with as much to contribute as everyone else. The SCCFSC gets the members to help man the community café and prepare food in the community kitchen. They also get flat residents to contribute pre-used items to

the Goodwill Store, which are then offered free to those in need.

- In the US, the Smart Chicago Collaborative, along with the Southwest Organizing Project and LocalData, collaborated to create a mobile app that enables the community to report dangerous conditions in buildings and highlight their need to be renovated. The community served as data collectors, working with the government to revitalise the neighbourhood.

Close the power distance

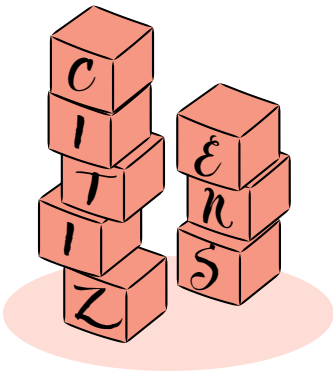


The power asymmetry in any government-citizen relationship means the government needs to make more conscious efforts to close the gap. This may involve the government providing greater access to resources, or visiting people where they are in their community spaces, instead of making them come to a government space.

Examples:

- Participate in Design is a local non-profit that helps neighbourhoods and public institutions design with people, not just for people. They have worked with agencies such as MND, HDB and PA to design places and spaces with the neighbourhood through participatory planning.
- The Participatory Budgeting Project is a non-profit organisation that empowers people in North America to decide together how to spend public money. The volunteer application process is designed so that a broad range of people would be included.
- Some online consultation platforms, such as vTaiwan, also adopt offline engagement strategies (e.g., offline communication of results, consultations, workshops) to bridge the digital divide and widen their reach.

Build citizens' civic capacity



For successful two-way partnerships between the government and citizens, the citizens should be equipped with sufficient civic capacity. This can create a virtuous loop – capacity can be built through educating and empowering citizens, and over time this would create space for more effective and meaningful future collaborations.

Examples:

- The Seoul Metropolitan Government established the Seoul Non-profit Organisations (NPO) Centre, a fully-funded organisation that encourages

an engaged citizenry through supporting ground-up community projects, supporting civil society organisations, and building partnerships between civil society and the government.

- Many community organisations (e.g., civic crowdfunding platforms like New York's ioby and Sydney's chuffed, and participatory planning organisations like Adelaide's CoDesign and New York's Project for Public Spaces) provide regular workshops and training for the community.

LEVEL UP!

Make full use of the range of tools and resources available to improve your skills in citizen engagement.

- 1. Frameworks and tools:** Citizen Engagement field guide and case studies, stakeholder prioritisation and engagement planning framework
- 2. Training programmes:** Customised training and Civil Service College courses. Download the LEARN app or approach your training coordinators to enrol in these courses

- 3. Resources for testing and implementation:** Our Singapore Fund (for partners' ground-up projects), Citizen Engagement seed fund (for agencies to try new engagement approaches)

Competency	Courses
Foundation programmes	Introduction to Citizen Engagement EE-module CEE10
Understanding policy and operating environment	Existing programmes under CSC's policy prospectus
Building trust and relationships	Sense-make and empathise through powerful conversations Engaging citizens meaningfully in difficult conversations
Planning, designing, and evaluating engagement	PNW10
Facilitation	Facilitation for public engagement
Leadership programmes	Engagement immersion for leaders programme

- 4. Evaluation:** Citizen Engagement Impact Evaluation toolkit

- 5. Digital tools for continuing/sustaining engagements:** IDEAS! portal, volunteer.sg

- 6. Advisory/peer support:** Advisory panel, message/engagement testing, facilitation support, communities of practice

Want to explore the next bound in citizen engagement? Contact the SG Together secretariat and the MCCY for support: red@mccy.gov.sg

Q&A

Closing the loop

Coordinating Director for SG Together, Ms Dawn Yip from the MCCY Partnerships Project Office, shares how to build trust while engaging citizens.



Closing the loop helps to build trust.

What are situations to avoid in citizen engagement?

One common complaint is that sometimes, the government asks citizens for their ideas, but then does not close the loop with them on what happened after that. The citizen experiences this as an incomplete process, and may wonder why they should bother. A second scenario is when the government gathers ideas from citizens, then comes up with a solution so quickly that citizens wonder if the government already had the answer waiting in the wings all along. Neither of these scenarios is good participatory process!

How do we build trust while managing stakeholders' expectations about what views or ideas can be implemented?

It helps to set expectations upfront, so that stakeholders understand the purpose of any engagement. It also helps to bring diverse stakeholders together, so that they can hear each other's perspectives and understand for themselves that some views and solutions are mutually exclusive.

And finally, it bears repeating that closing the loop helps to build trust. Acknowledge ideas that were accepted or had traction, explain why ideas were not taken onboard, and provide regular check-ins and updates.

How can we reach out to a wider group of stakeholders to engage?

Consider reaching out through public calls for participation, new

platforms and groups that we have not engaged before, and using digital tools to broaden your reach.

Map out your stakeholder landscape to spot new opportunities. I encourage public agencies to experiment with innovative approaches to connect and engage with our citizens and stakeholders better.

TIP

Close the feedback loop by providing a summary of the feedback obtained and the outcomes of the engagement, and what will be done because of the engagement – not just by the government, but also other stakeholders.

MEASURING OUTCOMES

What gets measured gets managed... and helps us better capture what we want out of partnerships.

Deeper modes of citizen engagement are ultimately aimed at social outcomes such as stronger social capital and civic responsibility. These might not be adequately reflected through measuring “objective” outputs, so consider what else should be measured to understand the impact of engagement.

1

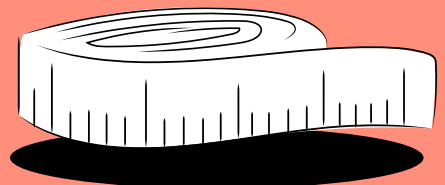
Focusing on the process of co-designing urban spaces with people, Barcelona’s Raons Publique placed less emphasis on the number of participants. Instead, they emphasised the experience that participants leave with, and their desire to be part of subsequent participatory processes.

2

To measure the success of their youth-related engagement, South Australia’s Department of the Premier and Cabinet focused on seemingly more subjective indicators, such as participants’ changes in behaviours, perceptions, and beliefs. They felt that knowing the value people received from the training was more important than merely the reach of the engagement.

3

For a more balanced view of the impact of community projects, NYC’s Citizens Committee collected both qualitative data (e.g., compelling stories on how the projects funded made an impact to the community) and quantitative data (e.g., the number of people involved in the projects, the size of the physical space being transformed).





“Citizens are at the centre of our work. While we serve citizens, they can also be our partners... in shaping a common future.”

— The Citizen Engagement Field Guide

