

### Introduction

Recently, the BC government has taken an enthusiastic approach to citizen engagement. By allowing citizen's different ways to connect, policies, services and the web will be more inclusive of different perspectives, regions, people and needs.

There are many different ways for citizens to interact with government. This can include attending a face to face meeting or townhall, leaving a comment on the blog, or sending a tweet or a letter to an MLA.

Citizen engagement is integral to the way the B.C. government approaches program, web and policy development. [Citizens@the Centre](#) was the foundation and starting place for moving in this direction. It articulates the commitment to citizen participation and engaging citizens more directly with their government.

Government must align its citizen engagement activities to create a quality citizen interaction and service experience that will be:

- Accessible and available to all citizens;
- Be recognized as trusted and reliable source of information;
- Provide a consistent, citizen-centric user experience;
- Eliminate redundancies and increase efficiencies for government.

The purpose of the information below is guidance to Ministries and BC public servants on designing citizen engagement initiatives as of June 2014; it may also be useful to other governments and citizen engagement practitioners globally.

**Table of Contents**

Introduction..... 1

What is Citizen Engagement?..... 3

Defining the Purpose ..... 4

Determining Scope..... 5

Defining the Audience..... 6

Tools Planning..... 8

Privacy..... 10

Dedicating Resources..... 11

Managing Risk and Issues..... 12

Framing the Discussion ..... 13

Engaging Leadership ..... 14

Spreading the Word..... 15

What Happens to the Feedback? ..... 16

Measuring Success..... 17

Tracking Progress..... 18

The Analysis..... 19

Close out and Lessons Learned..... 19

Feedback to Participants..... 20

Getting Started ..... 20

### What is Citizen Engagement?

Government has several reasons for wanting to engage citizens. For example:

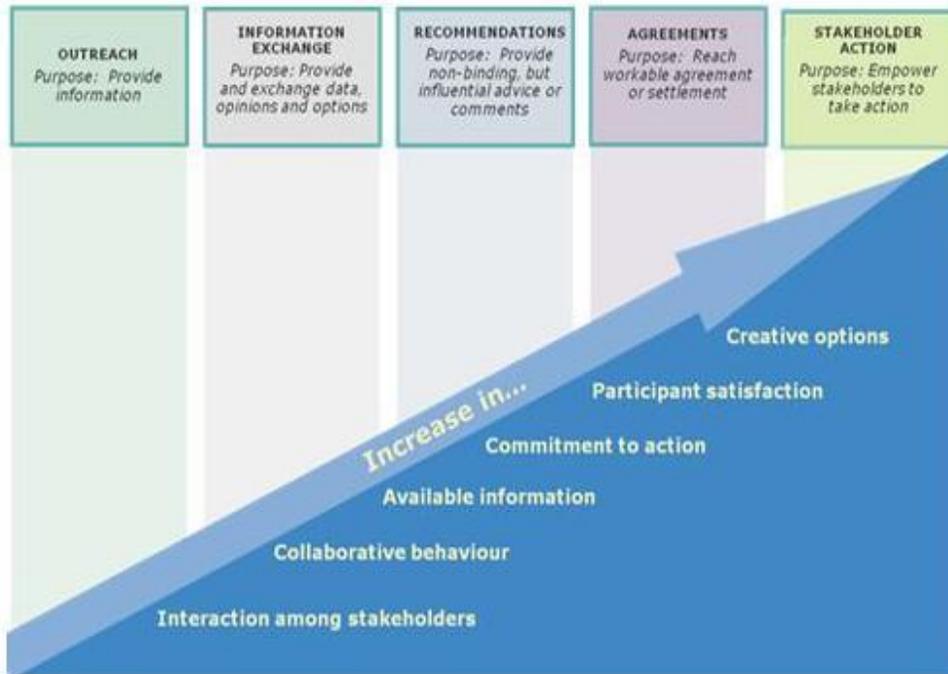
- **Citizens should have a say in the issues that affect them.**  
Citizens are more likely to support government decisions when they've been consulted and have had a say in shaping them. This gives people a sense of ownership over issues they believe are important.
- **Government doesn't have all the answers.**  
Many of the issues that face us today are complex (e.g. climate change). Addressing these issues requires input from a lot of people – many of whom don't work in government. Engaging these people in conversation and action will help us work towards solutions.
- **It helps you prioritize.**  
Engaging citizens helps government better understand peoples' interests and opinions. Knowing what's important to people can lead to more responsive government.

Citizen engagement can be done in many ways with many tools. No one way is appropriate in every circumstance. You will need to define the purpose of your engagement to determine the best approach.

## Defining the Purpose

The first step in designing a citizen engagement initiative is to clearly define what you want to achieve. Perhaps you want to get input on a changing policy, you want to involve the public in solutions to reduce homelessness, or you are looking for citizens to play a role in emergency preparedness; regardless of your overall idea, it is essential to clearly define your purpose.

As you define your purpose you also will want to think about where the program area currently sits on the engagement spectrum and what your goal is for the future:



*Graphic courtesy of Deborah Dalton, Center for Conflict Prevention and Resolution, Environmental Protection Agency*

We suggest that Ministries spend time upfront defining the purpose as this will help in decision-making throughout the project. It is also important that all staff working on the project understand and are working towards the same purpose. Also the purpose is a very important piece to what you communicate to your audience, so it is important to be very clear and concise.

One way to define your purpose is to use the following sentence guide:

*We [who is responsible for the consultation] want to understand the views of [the audience] about [the topic or question you are asking the audience] so that [who is responsible for taking action] can [take the following action] by [timeframe] to achieve [the corporate or social aims].*

*Sample: Parliamentary Secretary John Yap wants to understand the views and values of stakeholders and the public about current liquor rules so that he could provide recommendations to government on changes to the liquor laws by the end of 2014.*

### Determining Scope

The Province is involved in a diverse range of services, projects, activities and planning matters, and it is recognized that processes may vary according to the level of impact of a particular issue. A good conversation is to talk about the level of impact, for example is the project local or site specific or regional and does it involve service delivery or policy development.

Also important is to determine what information we are seeking. What is the scope and limitation of the discussion? A clear understanding of what is needed from the discussion, and what decisions are likely to be influenced by the findings helps to keep the process relevant and avoid misunderstandings with British Columbians about possible outcomes that may be outside the scope of the process.

Similarly defining the timeframe for the engagement process will be required up front. At what stage of the project will the discussion with the public be undertaken? When will the process begin and end? Are we talking to citizens at the very beginning or 'scoping' stage of a project, or on a specific element of an overall plan? Are there key dates or deadlines to be considered? Are there decisions that will need to be made during the process?

### Defining the Audience

Defining the audience is an important component to planning an engagement. It is important to identify your desired audience, and how they prefer to provide input. Some questions to ask are:

- Who is the primary audience? These are individuals and groups that you want to ensure you hear from.
- Who is the secondary audience? These are individuals and groups who would be beneficial to include.
- What is the key perspective of each audience?
- How large are each of the intended audiences?
- Have you engaged this audience previously? On what? What did you learn?
- How do you think your audience prefers to be engaged?
- How does our audience connect with you now? What are their issues?
- It is important to consider any geographical communities and communities of interest. You should create a specific people or groups that should be invited to participate. As an example, you can see a [list of Forestry stakeholders](#) who were invited to participate in the Forest Tenures project
- Are there other organizations, agencies or partners involved with this issue? For example, consultants, provincial and/or federal government representatives, other local government agencies etc.
- What are the perceptions/concerns/needs of British Columbians? A summary of our current knowledge can enhance the process by ensuring that we consider and/or address any perceptions or concerns that have already been expressed.

Successful community discussion relies on genuine efforts to inform all stakeholders about the process and to address barriers that may impact on the community's active participation. As a few examples, here are a few groups that might form your target audience and some considerations to facilitate their participation?

#### **Older people or people with a disability**

*Consider working with seniors groups to facilitate additional publicity and participation. Schedule meetings during the day. Participants may require assistance with transportation. Venues must have disabled access. Printed material should be appropriate for people with impaired vision.*

#### **Young families, single parent families**

*Consider using local schools and libraries for additional publicity. Connect with service providers to spread the word. Consider providing childcare or children's activities for meetings.*

**People who are unemployed or low income**

*May require assistance with transportation.*

**Youth**

*An innovative 'event based' consultation process is more likely to be successful. Consider using local high schools and youth networks for publicity and participation. This group may also require assistance with transportation.*

**First Nations**

*Consider talking with your Ministry's Aboriginal coordinator the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation to determine how best you can connect with First Nations groups.*

**Rural Areas**

*Brainstorm the unique ways you can connect with people outside of Victoria and Vancouver. Is there a local newspaper, a newsletter or a meeting taking place where you can let people know?*

## Tools Planning

Once you have established your purpose and audience, you can start to think about the tools you might use. Here are some examples of tools that government has used along the engagement continuum (see diagram in the section “Defining the Purpose”):

Goal	Inform	Outreach	Recommendations/Advice	Agreements	Action
<b>Primary Tool</b>	News Releases		Workshops		
	Information Bulletins	Email	Focus Groups		
	Web Sites	Public/small meeting groups	Roundtables	Advisory Committees	
	Info hotlines	Open Houses	One on one interviews	Partnerships	Citizen panel/juries
	Talk Shows	Facebook	Surveys/Polling	Public meetings	Interactive Maps
	Video	Twitter	Public meetings	Summits	Contests
	Flickr		Townhalls	Wikis	
	Documentaries		Blogs		
			Discussion Forums		
			Twitter Townhalls		
			LinkedIn Discussion Forums		

The BC Government has used some tools more often than others. Here is a description of some of them:

**Public meetings** – check out how the [Disability Whitepaper Consultation](#) used open community meetings as part of their process.

**Citizen’s Panel** – the [Digital Services engagement](#) recently used a citizen’s panel as part of their engagement.

**Blog platform** – the blog platform has been a popular tool for getting citizen input recently. Have a look at a recent example at [Area Tenures Blog](#).

**Twitter Townhalls** – these have been used recently as a way to get input from the public. You can [read](#) more about a recent BC Government Twitter Townhall.

**Digital Survey** – the Digital Services engagement recently used a [digital survey](#) to get input from the public, based on a visualized online survey tool called Metroquest. Other, more traditional, survey approaches are often used like the use of Fluid Surveys to ask the public about their thoughts on Speed.

**Social media** – sometimes it is also possible to have the public submit their comments using social media tools like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Have a read of the [BC Government Social Media Guidelines](#) to see the parameters for using social media in government. If you are planning to use social media as part of your citizen engagement initiative, the Citizen Engagement Team will help you develop a strategy for doing so.

For any tool that you want to use, it is important that you coordinate with the Citizen Engagement Team and your Government Communications and Public Engagement (GCPE) Communications Director, prior to launching your initiative.

### Privacy

Because citizen engagement is often about collecting personal information, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act plays a significant role. Depending on the tool you wish to use, a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) may be required. A PIA is the foundation tool/process designed to ensure compliance with government's privacy protection responsibilities.

PIAs are submitted to the OCIO for review and approval. A number of corporate PIAs have been approved for tools such as WordPress, Youtube and FluidSurveys. For pre-approved tools, a corporate [PIA checklist](#) can be completed instead of a full PIA. The checklist is still required to be approved by the OCIO.

Policies, guidelines and tools related to privacy are available on the [Office of the Chief Information Officer's website](#), including a [tip sheet](#) for the use of social media.

Once you contact the citizen engagement team, they can help steer you through the process.

### Dedicating Resources

Resourcing a project is dependent on scope of the project. Some of the skill sets you may need throughout the project are:

- Web development
- Content writing
- Survey development
- Photography
- Videography
- Moderation
- Reporting
- Web analytics
- Policy analysis
- Graphics
- Infographics
- Social Media
- Issues management
- Stakeholder management
- Meeting coordination
- Scheduling
- Meeting facilitation
- Townhall facilitation
- Accessibility planning

The Citizen Engagement Team will assist you with identifying and securing skill sets and resources for your project.

### Managing Risk and Issues

When planning a citizen engagement initiative, there are some general questions to ask about risk:

Who are your most active critics?

How do they contact you now?

What is their message?

How will the media report this?

Are there situations where government employees may be put in danger?

Are there any privacy concerns in the process you have designed? How will privacy be managed?

Are there chances for blockades, protests, online petitions?

Work through some scenarios that could occur during the engagement?

How will you monitor issues and risks?

How will you escalate issues? Who will you connect with?

As with any project that involves the public, your ministry's GCPE office needs to be involved. Make sure you discuss your citizen engagement project with them while planning your project. They can provide assistance in a number of areas and help you mitigate public relations risk.

### Framing the Discussion

Regardless of which tool you use, you will need to provide information to inform participants about the discussion. This information can be presented in a variety of ways, for example:

**HTML Web pages** – If there is an accompanying web site being developed you can frame the discussion under something called “Project 101”. This is a standard for all BC government engagement sites.

**Infographics** – The BC Liquor Policy Review used infographics as a way to explain things like the [history of liquor laws](#) in BC.

**Discussion Guides** – See the Area Tenures [Discussion Guide](#) or the [Coastal Ferries Discussion Guide](#).

**Project Briefs** – See the Skills4BC [Project Briefings](#)

**Research & Reports** – The Ministry of Forests provided some context in the form of [scientific papers](#) that had been conducted previously on the topic of area tenures.

**Data & Maps** – See the way used [BC Liquor used data and maps](#) to present information about liquor licenses.

Selecting the proper approach above will help the community put the issue into perspective, determine their particular interest (if any) in the issue, set realistic expectations and, subsequently, facilitate informed discussion.

### Engaging Leadership

An authentic, visible leadership presence helps bring credibility to your engagement project.

The key is to create specific roles for your leaders involving low-barrier activities that connect them to the community. Customize your leadership strategy and support and promote your leaders' efforts. Be prepared to offer feedback on their contributions, and show them how their participation has impacted the community. Over time members will develop a relationship with the leaders. They will see that the goals of the leaders align with their own goals, which will serve to strengthen the community over all.

See here how [Premier Christy Clark](#) hosted and facilitated the Skills4BC online discussion.

See how [Parliamentary Secretary John Yap](#) hosted the Liquor Policy Review.

There are a number of considerations useful to consider when designing your leader's strategy, including:

- Focusing on consistency – find a method of participation that works for the leader, and make it part of their daily schedule.
- Acting as their partner and support them in their contributions.
- Guiding them through new technology - be prepared to act as a guide.
- Asking them to be promoters, as messages from leaders have a big impact.
- Using the leaders to recognize community members, identify stakeholders and help spread the word.

### Spreading the Word

Some of most challenging work in any engagement is usually spreading the word and making sure citizens know about the engagement. There are a couple of corporate tools that can assist:

#### Posting on GovTogetherBC

GovTogetherBC is a government website where citizens can browse and use keyword searches to find public engagements from ministries across government that are currently open for public comment or to learn about engagements that have closed. When a new public engagement is launched, the GovTogetherBC team publishes a webpage promoting the engagement on the website – this webpage is then generally hyperlinked to your ministry engagement website. The content for these webpages is derived from News Releases or Information Bulletins, or from the content provided directly from the business area responsible for the engagement. GovTogetherBC also promotes open engagements and the outcomes of completed consultations via our Twitter account (@govTogetherBC). When planning your engagement, please contact us at [@govtogetherbc@gov.bc.ca](mailto:@govtogetherbc@gov.bc.ca) to discuss how you can leverage this platform to get the word out about your engagement.

In addition, GovTogetherBC highlights ways British Columbians can help build their communities by volunteering or nominating a member of their community for an award, such as the Order of British Columbia.

As you design your public engagement process, you should also consider how you would like the Ministry leadership to help spread the word. Social Media is one way. Corporate accounts like BCGovNews and govTogetherBC will and should be part of the plan. The citizen engagement team can connect you to resources to help you plan and implement your social media approach.

You should also be sure to read through the [BC Government Social Media Guidelines](#).

Should you wish to stand up a Facebook page or Twitter page (outside of a larger citizen engagement project), please connect with the [GCPE Newsroom Team](#).

There are some other methods to do outreach that have been used as well, such as:

- Direct mail outs and invitations
- Phone calls
- Marketing and advertisements
- Word of mouth
- Internal communications

### What Happens to the Feedback?

Early on, it is important to ask how you will collect, collate and evaluate feedback, information and ideas generated by the citizen discussion and feedback? Meeting notes/minutes, comments on draft plans, feedback forms, attendance records and storyboards are all useful tools for this purpose. However, it doesn't take long before you may find yourself awash in a sea of text.

As example, in 2009, it took six employees six weeks to organize and analyze just 1,100 written submissions to the Water Act Modernization blog, distilling the information so it could inform the next stage of the legislative process. Four years later, the B.C. Liquor Policy Review attracted more than 8,000 submissions – representing a volume of text equivalent to all seven Harry Potter books. To organize this input manually could have taken years. Thankfully text analysis software was then available to assist.

While the new software doesn't replace people, it does allow them to categorize input more quickly and with fewer people than was possible even just a few years ago. As a result, engagement teams are able to spend more time reviewing the ideas from citizens and less time organizing and reorganizing the input. The software also makes it possible to provide real-time feedback on the progress of the engagement.

It is important to have answers to the following when gathering citizen feedback and planning the citizen engagement group.

- What are the upper and lower limits of how much feedback will be received?
  - Is there a different plan should there be a high or low response?
  
- What are the final deliverables?
  - Who is responsible for drafting it?
  - How much time is available?
  - Who resources will be available to support this person?
  - What type of reports will be needed to support the final deliverable? (e.g., demographic or regional breakdowns, opinions on specific sub topics, pull quotes from citizens on particular topics)?
  - Who are the primary and secondary audiences of this report?
  
- At what frequency and to what audiences will you report out on what you have heard so far?
  
- What other capabilities will you need to support reporting (e.g., graphic artist, infographic designer etc)

### Measuring Success

Depending on which tool you are using, the measurement approach may be different.

Before getting into specific metrics, consider the overall goals of your project. Chances are, you're trying to achieve at least one of the following:

- Getting your message out to more people and gaining more exposure
- Building a reputation for your program or initiative
- Building a community
- Garnering rich feedback from citizens

Once you've identified the goals of your project, you can start to think about specific metrics that will show you whether or not you're achieving those goals.

### Tracking Progress

Depending on the tool(s) you use to engage citizens there are a numerous ways to track progress towards your engagement's objectives. Some of the things to consider include:

#### **Web & Engagement Analytics**

Number of visitors

Number of comments

Number of ratings

Average time on site

Number of Face to Face Meetings

Number of participants in face to face meetings

Number of formal submissions

Number of emails received

Document downloads

Top pages most visited

#### **Public Sentiment**

How does the public feel about a particular issue?

Are they positive and negative? What is the percentage?

#### **New Ideas & Solutions**

How many ideas were submitted?

How many ideas will be implemented?

#### **Policy Input**

Number of recommendations stemming from public consultation

Resulting changes to legislation, regulation and policy

### The Analysis

Once you have received feedback and your engagement closes, new work begins. The next step is to begin to analyze the comments for sentiment, trends, ideas or solutions. Every citizen engagement project run through the BC government must include a public report back. Some examples:

During the [Skills For BC project](#) this analysis took place in a number of ways. Throughout the engagement, updates were posted to the site in the form of [Discussion Summaries](#). At the same time, Ministry staff reviewed all comments for ideas and solutions and began a process of implementing and announcing those. The citizen ideas that turned to actions were [posted](#).

Following the Liquor Policy Review, analysis of all face to face meetings, blog comments, emails, and tweets resulted in [73 recommendations](#) to government. These were posted to the web site on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 3 weeks following the

Similarly, the Person's With Disabilities consultation saw an analysis and themes emerge from their discussion. This was posted in a [Disability Consultation Report](#) following the engagement.

### Close out and Lessons Learned

Most engagements are timeframes and actions associated with those. Closing down an engagement may mean also closing down a web site and moving and archiving existing content.

When information is shared or advice is provided online, government must ensure that all necessary records are being captured, retained, filed and managed appropriately in the office recordkeeping system. The Citizen Engagement Team will assist and advise you on best ways to do this.

You will also be required to help document lessons learned from your project. Citizen engagement is an evolving practice and government wants to ensure that it builds and improves upon each experience.

### Feedback to Participants

One thing to consider is how will you provide feedback to participants in the short, medium and long term? Short term feedback could include auto-generated emails to thank participants for adding an idea and ensuring they receive email notice about new comments on discussions they are participating in. Medium term feedback could include updates on the status of an idea (labeling things 'in process' or 'being considered') and providing ongoing summaries of what's been heard to date. Long term feedback is about "closing the loop" and letting participants know how their ideas have been considered in formulating next steps.

The [Skills For BC project](#) was one where government provided a lot of feedback to participants. This was done through newsletters, auto-generated email updates and phone calls. Also, the Premier met with or called contributors to follow up on their ideas and let them know about the solutions and sent a thank you video to all contributors.

### Getting Started

GCPE also has a preferred vendor list available for support in public engagement like face to face facilitation, engagement services, social media training. The citizen engagement team can help you access these resources if and when it makes sense. If you are working in the BC government and you have a mandate or an idea for citizen engagement, please contact [citizenengagement@gov.bc.ca](mailto:citizenengagement@gov.bc.ca) to get started.