



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

FEBRUARY 2025

This toolkit provides practical guidance, resources, and best practices to support Scottish Borders Council colleagues in delivering effective and inclusive community engagement. Covering key principles, engagement methods, evaluation frameworks, and accessibility considerations, it equips colleagues with the tools needed to foster meaningful participation and build strong relationships with communities.



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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Scottish Borders Council (SBC) recognises that effective community engagement is fundamental to delivering services that are efficient, inclusive, and reflective of the needs and aspirations of our communities. Our Community Engagement Strategy sets the framework for this commitment, emphasising a shift from a traditional "top-down" governance model to one that is co-designed with communities. This toolkit builds on the principles outlined in our Engagement Strategy to provide practical guidance for our colleagues, enabling consistent and meaningful engagement practices across the region.

Community engagement ensures that voices from all corners of the Scottish Borders, from town centres to remote villages, are heard and valued. By fostering two-way conversations, we aim to empower individuals and communities, supporting them in shaping the future of their local areas while building trust and transparency in decision-making.

Why Engagement Matters

Community engagement is more than a statutory obligation; it is a cornerstone of effective local governance and community development. As highlighted in the Community Engagement Strategy:

- Engaging with communities allows the Council to **understand the unique needs**, challenges and opportunities within different localities. Without this understanding, service delivery cannot truly align with what communities require.
- By involving residents in our decision-making processes, **we empower our communities** by fostering a sense of ownership and partnership, encouraging active participation in shaping local policies and projects.
- Collaboration with community members can uncover **innovative solutions to challenges**, leveraging the lived experiences and insights of residents.
- Transparent and inclusive engagement strengthens relationships between the Council and its communities, **fostering mutual respect, trust and cooperation**.



Our Goals

Aligned with the principles outlined in the Community Engagement Strategy, our goals for community engagement are to:

1. Place the needs and priorities of **residents at the heart of all decision-making processes**.
2. Ensure engagement methods are **accessible to all**, including marginalised and harder-to-reach groups, and reflect the diversity of the region.
3. Transition from consulting on pre-defined plans to **co-creating solutions with communities** from the outset.
4. **Leverage digital tools and platforms to enhance engagement opportunities** while maintaining face-to-face methods for those who prefer them.
5. Commit to an iterative engagement process, regularly evaluating methods and outcomes to **enhance future practices**.
6. **Provide clear, accessible information about decisions, actions, and opportunities** for involvement to build trust and understanding.

This toolkit will equip staff with the tools and knowledge needed to achieve these goals, bridging the gap between strategic intent and practical application. By doing so, SBC reaffirms its commitment to being a community-led council that listens, learns and acts in partnership with its residents.

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SECTION TWO: KEY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Aligned with the National Standards for Community Engagement

Effective community engagement is underpinned by a set of guiding principles that ensure inclusivity, transparency, and mutual respect. These principles are based on the National Standards for Community Engagement, which provide a structured framework to ensure engagement is meaningful and leads to positive change.

The National Standards outline seven key areas: Inclusion, Support, Planning, Working Together, Methods, Communication, and Impact. This section aligns with these standards to ensure that Scottish Borders Council delivers engagement that is consistent, fair, and effective.

1. Inclusion and Support

Engagement must reach all members of the community, including those who are traditionally marginalised or harder to reach. Identifying and understanding key stakeholders involved in community engagement activities is crucial. This includes local residents, community groups, businesses, and community councils. Understanding stakeholders' needs and potential impacts from the early planning stages can greatly reduce negative impacts and foster positive engagement. This involves:

- Proactively addressing barriers to participation, such as language, accessibility, and digital exclusion.
- Ensuring that diverse voices, including minority and opposing viewpoints, are heard and respected.
- Using multiple methods to connect with various groups, from younger tech-savvy residents to those less familiar with digital tools.
- When engaging with young people, it is important to align with the Youth Engagement Listen to Learn (YELL) Strategy, which provides guidance on involving young people in decision-making processes and emphasises the importance of listening to their voices.



2. Planning

Engagement must be well-planned, with clear objectives, realistic timelines, and appropriate resources to ensure success.

- Clearly explain the purpose of engagement, which decisions that will be influenced, and how input will be used.
- Provide timely updates on decisions and actions resulting from community feedback.
- Allocate appropriate time, budget, and staff capacity to ensure effective engagement.
- Be upfront about limitations, such as budget constraints or statutory requirements.

3. Working Together

Community engagement should be a partnership rather than a one-way consultation, fostering collaboration between SBC and the people it serves.

- Work with residents to co-create solutions from the outset, where possible.
- Agree on the decision-making process. Include clear governance and accountability structures so that all parties understand their roles.
- Build relationships with local organisations and stakeholders to enhance engagement efforts.

4. Methods

Engagement activities must be designed to ensure everyone can participate.

- Engagement should be tailored to whether the goal is to inform, consult, involve, collaborate, or empower (as outlined in Section 4).
- Offer hybrid options for in-person and digital participation.
- Provide materials in multiple formats, such as large print, braille, or alternative languages.
- Choose venues and platforms that are convenient and welcoming to all.
- Continuously assess whether engagement methods are working and be prepared to change approaches if needed.

5. Communication

Effective communication ensures that engagement is transparent, two-way, and meaningful.

- Provide clear, jargon-free materials ahead of engagement activities so participants can make informed contributions.
- Avoid technical terminology and make materials easy to understand.
- Ensure that all input is acknowledged, summarised, and acted upon in a timely manner.
- Share regular updates on engagement outcomes and how feedback has shaped decisions.

6. Impact

Community engagement should lead to tangible outcomes that reflect the input received. It must be measured, evaluated, and continuously improved.

- Clearly communicate what has changed as a result of engagement and provide a rationale where feedback cannot be implemented.
- Ensure ongoing dialogue with communities so they see the long-term benefits of engagement.
- Regularly review engagement processes, participation rates, and community satisfaction.
- Invest in training and upskilling staff to ensure they can deliver high-quality engagement.



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SECTION THREE: ENGAGEMENT PLANNING CHECKLIST

Planning is a critical step in ensuring that community engagement is effective, inclusive, and achieves its objectives. This checklist provides a step-by-step guide to help staff design and execute successful engagement activities.

Step 1: Define the purpose

- Clearly articulate why engagement is being undertaken.
- Identify the specific decisions, projects, or initiatives that require input.
- Establish the desired outcomes of the engagement process (e.g., gathering ideas, raising awareness, co-creating solutions).

Step 2: Understand the community

- Identify the target audience or stakeholders (e.g., residents, businesses, community groups).
- Consider the unique characteristics and needs of the community, including language, culture, and accessibility.
- Map out key partners and local organisations that can support the engagement process.
- Early communication with key stakeholders is essential to ensure they feel informed and included in the engagement process. Examples of positive engagement include using local suppliers, offering volunteering opportunities, and providing discounted or free services.

Step 3: Choose the right methods

- Select engagement methods suited to the purpose and audience, such as workshops, surveys, or social media campaigns.
- Use a mix of in-person and digital techniques to ensure inclusivity.
- Refer to the "Engagement Methods" in Section 4 for detailed guidance on available approaches.

Step 4: Plan logistics

- Determine the timeline for the engagement process, including key milestones and deadlines.
- Secure suitable venues or online platforms for activities.
- Allocate necessary resources, including staff, budget, and materials.
- Ensure accessibility by providing options like large print, translations, or physical adjustments.

Step 5: Develop communication materials

- Prepare clear and engaging materials to inform participants about the engagement process.
- Use plain language and avoid jargon to ensure accessibility.
- Highlight how community input will be used and the potential impact on decision-making.
- Ensure that the engagement plan explicitly references our Engagement Strategy and/or the YELL Strategy to reinforce alignment and avoids being perceived as a standalone document.

Step 6: Promote the engagement

- Use multiple channels to reach the target audience, such as social media, newsletters, and local networks.
- Tailor messages to different demographics to maximise participation.
- Engage with community leaders or influencers to help spread the word.

Step 7: Facilitate engagement activities

- Create a welcoming and inclusive environment to encourage participation.
- Use skilled facilitators to guide discussions and ensure all voices are heard.
- Provide clear instructions and materials to participants.

Step 8: Collect and analyse feedback

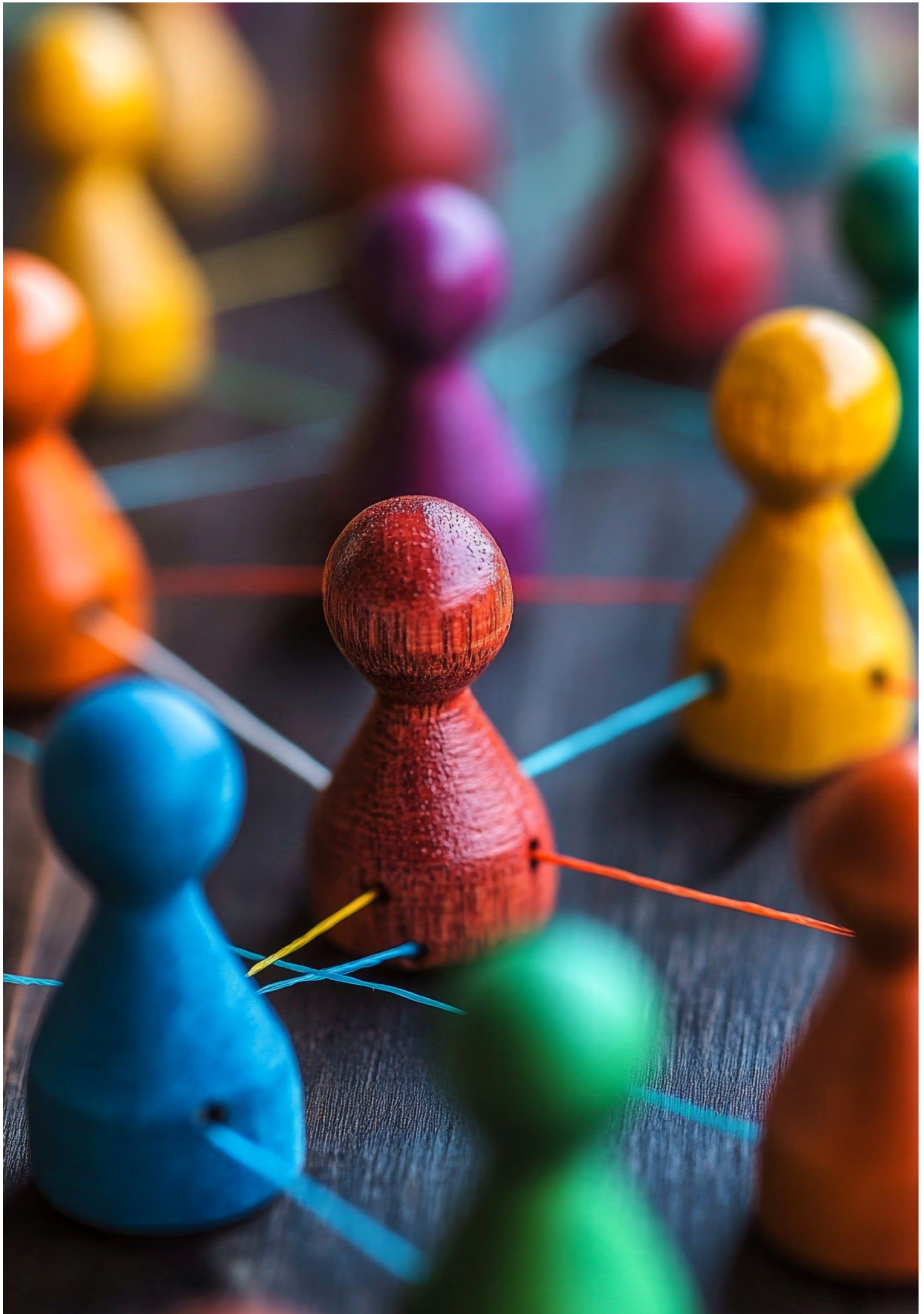
- Use tools such as surveys, notes, or recordings to capture feedback accurately.
- Organise and analyse data to identify key themes, concerns, and suggestions.
- Ensure feedback is anonymised to protect participant confidentiality.

Step 9: Report back

- Clearly outline the decision-making process used and explain how community input influenced the final outcome. Ensure that a rationale is provided if certain feedback could not be implemented
- Provide updates on next steps and opportunities for further involvement.

Step 10: Evaluate and reflect

- Assess the effectiveness of the engagement process using metrics such as participation rates, diversity of voices, and achieved outcomes.
- Identify lessons learned and areas for improvement.
- Incorporate feedback into future engagement practices.



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SECTION FOUR: CHOOSING THE RIGHT ENGAGEMENT METHOD

Selecting the appropriate engagement method is crucial to achieving meaningful participation and outcomes. This section provides a matrix and to guide colleagues in choosing the most suitable methods based on the purpose, audience, and desired outcomes of the engagement.

How do I use the matrix guide?

- 1. Identify the purpose of the engagement.**
Determine whether your goal is to inform, consult, involve, collaborate, or empower the community.
- 2. Understand the audience that you would like to engage with.**
Consider the needs, characteristics, and preferences of the people you aim to engage.
- 3. Select the most appropriate method(s) for your engagement.**
Use the suggested methods as a starting point, tailoring them to fit the specific context of your engagement.
- 4. Plan for engagement success.**
Refer to Section Three for guidance on planning logistics and ensuring accessibility.

PURPOSE	AUDIENCE	SUGGESTED METHODS	CONSIDERATIONS
Inform	General public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sheets, posters, and newsletters • Social media campaigns • Exhibitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure materials are accessible and visually engaging. • Use plain language to avoid jargon.
Consult	Specific groups or communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community surveys • Focus groups • Public meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailor questions to the audience. • Provide multiple ways to respond (online, in-person, written).
Involve	Diverse stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Community mapping • Place Standard Tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate small group discussions to encourage contributions. • Provide tools for visual engagement.
Collaborate	Local organisations and leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roundtable discussions • Participatory budgeting • Citizen panels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish clear roles and responsibilities. • Encourage co-creation of solutions.
Empower	Local residents and community leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens' assemblies • Asset Transfers • Place Standard projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support and training for participants • Ensure transparency in decision-making processes

Examples of method use:

EXAMPLE ONE

SBC is launching a new recycling programme and needs to inform the public

Purpose: Inform

Suggested methods:

- Develop an information sheet detailing the new programme, including start dates, accepted materials, and collection schedules.
- Create social media posts with key information and visuals to raise awareness.
- Host an exhibition in community spaces and/or at local events showcasing how the programme works, using interactive displays and examples of recyclable items.
- Ensure accessibility by providing materials in multiple languages and formats (e.g., large print).

EXAMPLE TWO

SBC needs to consult on a proposed change to local transport routes

Purpose: Consult

Suggested methods:

- Design a survey with clear, focused questions about the proposed changes.
- Distribute the survey both online and as printed copies available at libraries and community spaces.
- Organise public meetings/ drop-in sessions in affected areas to present the proposed changes, provide context, and gather verbal feedback.
- Use a feedback wall or comment box at meetings for those who prefer written input.

EXAMPLE THREE

SBC is refurbishing a local play park

Purpose: Involvement

Suggested methods:

- Facilitate workshops where residents can brainstorm ideas for improvements (e.g., new play areas, walking paths).
- Use community mapping techniques to visualise existing assets and areas needing change.
- Engage schools or local youth groups to encourage participation from younger demographics.
- Combine all input into draft designs and share these with residents for further feedback before finalising plans.

EXAMPLE FOUR

SBC is aiming to reduce community carbon footprints

Purpose: Collaboration

Suggested methods:

- Host roundtable discussions with local environmental groups, businesses, and residents to identify key priorities.
- Develop a participatory budgeting exercise where participants can vote on how funding should be allocated (e.g., for solar panels, tree planting, or community workshops).
- Create small working groups to take ownership of specific initiatives, such as awareness campaigns or infrastructure changes.

EXAMPLE FIVE

SBC wants to develop a community-led housing project

Purpose: Empower

- Organise a citizens' assembly where a representative group learns about housing needs and challenges.
- Facilitate deliberation sessions where participants can debate solutions and reach consensus.
- Use the Place Standard tool to assess the proposed site and identify community priorities.
- Ensure ongoing communication with assembly members and the wider community to maintain transparency and trust.

Tips for engagement success

- Combine methods for a more comprehensive engagement process
- Use feedback loops to ensure participants feel heard and valued
- Adapt methods as needed based on participant feedback and emerging challenges
- When selecting engagement methods for young people, refer to the YELL Strategy for guidance on creating safe and inclusive spaces, facilitating the expression of their views, and ensuring their voices are heard and acted upon.



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SECTION FIVE: FACILITATION AND DELIVERY BEST PRACTICE

Effective facilitation and delivery of engagement activities are critical to ensuring meaningful participation, fostering trust, and achieving successful outcomes. This section provides a framework to help our colleagues effectively implement engagement activities.

ENGAGEMENT STAGE	KEY ACTIVITIES	BEST PRACTICES
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define purpose and outcomes. • Identify stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose suitable engagement methods (see Section Four). • Engage with local leaders early to build support. • Ensure materials are accessible and inclusive.
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate engagement activities • Encourage participation and manage discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use skilled facilitators who can navigate group dynamics. • Set clear expectations for participants. • Be prepared to adapt methods as needed.
Feedback Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record participant input • Use surveys, notes, and digital tools to capture feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure anonymity and confidentiality. • Regularly summarise input to confirm understanding.
Follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse feedback • Report back to participants • Communicate next steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share a summary of findings in plain language. • Clearly explain how feedback has influenced decisions. • Provide ongoing updates as projects progress.

Examples of effective facilitation and delivery:

EXAMPLE ONE

SBC wishes to facilitate an open workshop, with a focus on traffic management in a local town.

Preparation

- Make clear the purpose and outcomes ahead of the meeting. In this case, it is to improve traffic flow and safety in a busy town.
- Ensure residents, local businesses, schools, and local transport organisations are all invited and given the opportunity to present their views.
- Bring maps of the local area, data on traffic incidents, and potential solutions to provide participants with visual aids.

Setting the stage

- Welcome participants with refreshments and an introductory presentation explaining the workshop's purpose.
- Consider using an icebreaker activity, such as asking attendees to mark their travel routes on a large map.
- Set ground rules for discussion to ensure respectful and productive participation.

Facilitating the engagement

- Divide participants into small groups to discuss specific aspects, such as pedestrian crossings, parking, or bus routes.
- Provide facilitators for each group to guide discussions and capture key points on flipcharts.
- Use interactive tools, such as stickers or pins, to prioritise areas of concern on a communal map.

Collecting feedback

- Summarise each group's discussion points during a full group session to validate findings.
- Use a feedback wall where participants can add final comments or suggestions.

Follow-up

- Analyse all input and compile a report highlighting common themes and proposed actions.
- Distribute the report to participants and publish a summary on the council's website.
- Provide updates to relevant stakeholders/committees as actions are taken to implement changes.

EXAMPLE TWO

SBC has funding to allocate for local initiatives and wants to engage the community by hosting a participatory budget event.

Preparation

- Determine the funding amount and parameters for project eligibility.
- Invite proposals from local residents, groups, and organisations.
- Develop clear criteria for project selection and funding allocation.

Setting the stage

- Organise a public event where shortlisted projects are presented.
- Set up presentation areas for each proposal, including visuals or demonstrations where applicable.
- Create voting mechanisms, such as ballot boxes, online platforms, or mobile voting stations.

Facilitating engagement

- Allow project leads to pitch their ideas in small group settings or on stage.
- Facilitate discussions among attendees to answer questions and clarify details about the proposals.
- Use facilitators to guide conversations and ensure all voices are heard, especially from underrepresented groups.



Collecting feedback

- Tally votes to determine community priorities.
- Use feedback forms or exit surveys to capture participant opinions on the process.

Follow-up

- Announce the winning projects through multiple communication channels.
- Provide updates on the implementation of funded initiatives.
- Share a final report detailing the event outcomes, participation statistics, and next steps.

Tips for facilitation/delivery success

- Adapt methods and facilitation styles based on participant needs and group dynamics.
- Continuously evaluate and address barriers to participation.
- Ensure that engagement activities lead to clear, actionable insights and build trust within the community.
- When facilitating engagement activities with young people, it is important to follow the guidance provided in the YELL Strategy, which emphasises the need for safe and inclusive spaces, appropriate information, and meaningful participation.

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SECTION SIX: SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1: ST. ABBS PLAYPARK UPGRADE

The St Abbs Playpark Upgrade consultation was conducted to ensure that the local community had a direct influence on the design and development of their playpark. Recognising the importance of inclusive and meaningful engagement, this initiative aligned with Scottish Borders Council's commitment to co-designing community spaces with residents.

Community Engagement Process

The project aimed to collaborate with the community to design a playpark that met local needs and aspirations, while also fostering a sense of ownership and pride among residents. A key objective was to involve as many community members as possible, ensuring that the final design reflected the desires of children, parents, and other park users. Accessibility and inclusivity were at the heart of the engagement approach, with efforts made to reach diverse groups through multiple communication channels.

To gather initial feedback, a survey was designed with clear, focused questions about playpark preferences. This was made available both online and in print, ensuring that those without digital access could still participate. Surveys were distributed at key community locations, including post offices, schools, and community hubs, where they could easily be accessed by a broad range of residents. The survey was also shared at community council meetings, allowing face-to-face discussions and providing residents with an opportunity to voice their opinions and ask questions.

Once the survey results were collated and analysed, the community was presented with an initial design concept based on their input. This draft design was then circulated for further feedback, enabling residents to refine and improve the final layout before work commenced.

Throughout the process, local leaders and community council members played a crucial role in ensuring that engagement efforts were effective and that residents remained informed at every stage.



Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The engagement process resulted in significant participation from the local community, with a broad demographic contributing feedback. The input gathered influenced key aspects of the playpark's design, including equipment selection, layout, and accessibility features. By ensuring that residents had a voice in shaping the park, the project fostered greater trust and confidence in the council's commitment to meaningful engagement.

A key lesson from the consultation was the importance of clear and ongoing communication. Providing residents with updates and ensuring transparency in decision-making helped to maintain interest and participation throughout the project. Additionally, offering multiple methods of engagement, including both digital and in-person options, was instrumental in reaching a wide audience. The success of this initiative demonstrated that when communities feel heard and valued, they are more likely to take pride in and maintain shared spaces for future generations.

CASE STUDY 2: PEEBLES HIGH SCHOOL PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

The Peebles High School (PHS) Participatory Budgeting (PB) project was an initiative designed to empower young people by giving them a direct role in decision-making. The project allowed students to decide how a portion of funding should be allocated, offering them a hands-on experience in democratic processes and financial planning. By placing decision-making power in the hands of students, this engagement effort aligned with SBC's goal of fostering youth participation and leadership within the community.

Community Engagement Process

In January 2022, the Student Parliament Group at PHS was awarded £4,000 from the Tweeddale Community Fund to run a Participatory Budgeting project. With additional match funding from Friends of Peebles High School, students had over £5,000 to allocate to projects that would benefit their school community. The challenge was to ensure that all students had the opportunity to participate in a fair and transparent manner.

The engagement process began with an open call for project ideas, allowing every student within the school to submit a bid detailing how the funds should be spent. The project was widely promoted through school bulletins, year group teams, and social subject classes, ensuring that students were well-informed and encouraged to participate. A total of 36 bids were received, with proposals ranging from outdoor seating and shelters to improved lunchtime menus and upgraded toilet facilities.

To ensure an inclusive and democratic decision-making process, the Student Parliament Group carefully reviewed all submissions, using a structured scoring matrix to assess each proposal's feasibility, impact, and alignment with school priorities. Following rigorous discussion and evaluation, 17 projects were shortlisted and categorised based on their cost. The entire school was invited to vote on which projects should receive funding, with 585 students participating in the final vote. The winning projects included the renovation of school toilets, the installation of new bleachers, and more outdoor seating areas.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The project successfully demonstrated the power of participatory budgeting as a tool for civic engagement, providing students with practical experience in governance, financial decision-making, and teamwork. By involving students in every stage of the process, the initiative fostered a sense of ownership and accountability among participants. Many students expressed that they valued the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their school's development and gained valuable skills in collaboration, leadership, and problem-solving.

A key lesson from this initiative was the importance of structured and transparent decision-making. The use of a scoring matrix and facilitated discussions helped to ensure that all proposals were evaluated fairly and that the process remained inclusive. Providing students with clear guidance and support throughout the engagement process enabled them to navigate the complexities of budgeting and project selection with confidence.

Engaging young people in decision-making not only enhances their skills and confidence but also strengthens community trust in youth-led initiatives. The success of the Peebles High School PB project serves as an example of how participatory budgeting can be effectively implemented in schools, ensuring that students are active contributors to shaping their learning environment.



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SECTION SEVEN: EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Evaluating community engagement activities is essential to ensure their effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and demonstrate the value of engagement to stakeholders. This section provides a structured framework and matrix for evaluating engagement activities.

EVALUATION ASPECT	KEY QUESTIONS	METHODS AND TOOLS	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who participated? Were key stakeholder groups represented? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance records Surveys or feedback forms Stakeholder mapping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High participation rates from target groups. Balanced representation of demographics.
Engagement Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were participants able to contribute meaningfully? Was the environment inclusive and welcoming? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observation during activities Feedback forms Facilitator notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive participant feedback. Evidence of active participation and discussion.
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What outputs were produced (e.g., ideas, feedback)? Were outputs clear and actionable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting minutes Summaries of feedback Visual records (e.g. maps, charts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-quality, actionable outputs. Clear alignment with engagement objectives.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What changes resulted from the engagement? Were participant ideas incorporated? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-engagement analysis Reports on project progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tangible changes linked to engagement feedback
Process Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What worked well? What could be improved? Were there any barriers or challenges? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debrief sessions with facilitators Directly involve community members and stakeholders in evaluation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified lessons learned Adjustments to future engagement plans

EXAMPLE OF ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION

SBC would like to arrange a workshop to identify community assets and areas for improvement.

Set clear evaluation objectives

- Define success for the workshop. Ensure community participation, actionable feedback, and a clear understanding of local needs.
- Establish criteria to evaluate success, such as participation diversity, quality of outputs, and actionable outcomes.

Participation

- Record attendance, noting representation from different demographic groups (e.g. age, gender, cultural backgrounds).
- Use a pre-event survey to capture participants' motivations and expectations.
- Ensure outreach efforts successfully targeted underrepresented groups.

Engagement quality

- Assign facilitators to observe and document discussions to ensure all voices were heard and respected.
- Use real-time feedback tools, such as sticky notes or digital polls, to gauge participants' understanding and engagement.
- Distribute post-event feedback forms to gather insights on inclusivity and the clarity of the workshop process.

Outputs

- Analyse the maps and notes created during the session to identify key themes, challenges, and opportunities.
- Summarise actionable recommendations, ensuring they align with workshop objectives.
- Include visual representations of findings (e.g., annotated maps, charts) in the final report.

Outcomes

- Track immediate actions taken, such as prioritised projects or new initiatives inspired by the workshop.
- Review long-term impacts by following up on the implementation of recommendations.
- Compare outcomes with initial workshop goals to measure success.

Process improvement

- Host a debrief session with facilitators to discuss what worked well and identify any challenges faced.
- Ensure that evaluation is participatory. Community members and stakeholders should be directly involved in reviewing engagement outcomes, identifying challenges, and suggesting improvements for future engagement
- Analyse participant feedback to refine methods for future community mapping exercises.
- Document lessons learned and incorporate them into updated engagement guidelines.

Example of Evaluation Findings

Successes

- 50 participants attended, representing a diverse cross-section of the community.
- Participants identified 10 priority areas for improvement, with three actionable projects initiated immediately.
- Positive feedback highlighted the workshop's inclusive atmosphere and clear facilitation.

Improvements needed

- Enhance outreach to engage more younger participants.
- Provide additional pre-workshop materials to help participants better prepare.

Follow-up

- Share the evaluation report with participants and the broader community.
- Provide regular updates on the implementation of prioritised projects.
- Use lessons learned to design future workshops with improved processes and outcomes.

Tips for Effective Evaluation

- Ensure that the process is transparent for all involved. Share evaluation criteria with participants at the start of the engagement.
- Use a mixture of evaluation methods. Combine quantitative (e.g. attendance rates) and qualitative (e.g. participant feedback) data.
- Treat evaluation as a tool for continuous improvement rather than just measuring success.
- Ensure that the evaluation framework aligns with the principles and goals outlined in the SBC Engagement Strategy and the YELL Strategy, and that the feedback collected is used to improve future engagement practices.



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SECTION EIGHT: ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Ensuring community engagement activities are accessible and inclusive is essential to reaching diverse groups and enabling meaningful participation. This section provides best practices, key considerations, and tools to create an environment where everyone has the opportunity to engage.

Equity over equality

Recognise that different groups face different barriers and may require tailored approaches to ensure fair access to engagement opportunities.

Diverse representation

Strive to involve a range of perspectives, particularly those from underrepresented or marginalised communities.

Removing barriers to participation

Recognise that many individuals face multiple, intersecting barriers to participation (e.g., a disabled person who is also digitally excluded, or a non-English speaker from a rural area). Engagement must consider and address these overlapping barriers to ensure full inclusion.

Clear and simple communication

Use plain language, visual aids, and accessible formats to ensure all participants can understand and contribute.

Flexibility in methods

Offer multiple ways for individuals to engage, such as online and in-person meetings, surveys, focus groups, and drop-in sessions.

Common Barriers and Solutions

BARRIER	CHALLENGE	SOLUTION
Physical Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Venues may not be wheelchair accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use fully accessible venues and provide transport options.
Digital Exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some participants may lack internet access or digital skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer phone-based engagement and printed materials.
Language and Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some individuals may not speak English as a first language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide translations and easy-read documents.
Cultural and Social Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some groups may feel disengaged or mistrustful of institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with community leaders and trusted intermediaries.
Time and Availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work, childcare, or other responsibilities may limit involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer sessions at varied times and record online content.

Best Practices for Accessibility and Inclusion

Venue and Event Accessibility

- Ensure venues have step-free access, hearing loops, and accessible toilets.
- Provide seating arrangements that accommodate various needs, including quiet spaces.

Inclusive Digital Engagement

- Use captioning and transcripts for online meetings.
- Ensure websites and online surveys comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).
- Offer telephone-based consultations for those with limited digital access.

Providing Interpretation and Translation

- Offer materials in multiple languages relevant to the local community.
- Use sign language interpreters for those with hearing impairments
- Provide audio-described materials for visually impaired participants.

Engagement with Specific Groups

- Older adults: Consider offline engagement methods such as postal surveys and telephone discussions.
- Young people: Refer to the YELL Strategy and Toolkit. Use social media, gamified engagement, and informal settings.
- Disabled communities: Consult with disability advocacy groups to tailor approaches.
- Ethnic minority communities: Partner with cultural organisations to foster trust and participation.

EXAMPLE OF MAKING AN ENGAGEMENT EVENT INCLUSIVE

Scottish Borders Council is hosting a consultation on new public transport policies.

Steps to ensure inclusivity:

1. Planning Stage

- Identify the communities that will be affected by the policy changes.
- Choose an accessible venue with step-free access and multiple transport links.
- Offer digital participation for those unable to attend in person.

2. Communication and Outreach

- Make promotional materials available in multiple languages and formats if required (easy-read, large print, braille).
- Engage local disability groups and ethnic minority organisations to spread the word.
- Provide a helpline for participants to ask accessibility-related questions in advance.

3. Event Delivery

- Offer live interpretation services, including British Sign Language (BSL).
- Provide quiet spaces for neurodiverse participants who may need breaks.
- Use audience response systems and anonymous feedback tools for those hesitant to speak in public.



4. Follow-up and Feedback

- Offer multiple ways for participants to share feedback (online, postal, or in-person follow-ups).
- Summarise key findings in an accessible format and share them widely.
- Continue engaging with communities on how the feedback is being acted upon.

Tips for Inclusive Engagement Planning

- Choose accessible venues and provide transport options.
- Offer digital and offline engagement methods.
- Provide interpretation, translation, and alternative formats.
- Engage with community leaders to improve trust and outreach.
- Plan events at different times to accommodate varying schedules.
- Ensure feedback mechanisms are accessible and inclusive.
- Follow up with participants to share how their input has been used.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

SECTION NINE: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is community engagement, and why is it important?

Community engagement refers to the process of involving individuals, groups, and organisations in addressing issues that affect their wellbeing. The level of engagement can vary, from simply informing people about decisions to actively collaborating with them. It ensures that people have a voice in decisions that impact them, builds trust between communities and local authorities, and improves service delivery by tailoring it to real community needs.

How do we decide which engagement method to use?

The best method depends on the purpose of engagement, the target audience, and available resources. Use the engagement matrix (Section 4) to determine whether informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, or empowering is the most appropriate approach. Combining multiple methods (e.g., online surveys alongside in-person workshops) can improve accessibility and participation.

How can we encourage more people to take part in engagement activities?

- Use clear and jargon-free communication.
- Offer incentives where possible (e.g., refreshments, travel reimbursement).
- Work with community leaders and trusted organisations to spread awareness.
- Use multiple channels, such as social media, posters, and local events, to reach a diverse audience.
- Make engagement convenient by providing digital and in-person options.

How do we ensure that engagement is inclusive?

- Choose accessible venues with facilities for disabled participants.
- Provide materials in different formats (e.g., large print, easy-read, translated versions).
- Use interpreters, including British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters if needed.
- Offer various participation methods to cater to different needs and abilities.
- Be proactive in reaching out to underrepresented and marginalised communities.

How do we handle conflicting opinions in engagement sessions?

- Establish clear ground rules for respectful discussion.
- Use skilled facilitators to mediate discussions and ensure all voices are heard.
- Focus on shared goals and areas of common ground.
- Where necessary, use breakout groups to allow for more constructive dialogue.
- Summarise and validate feedback to ensure all perspectives are acknowledged.

How do we measure the success of engagement activities?

Success can be evaluated based on:

- Participation levels and diversity of attendees.
- Quality of feedback received.
- Changes or decisions influenced by community input.
- Satisfaction levels among participants.
- Follow-up actions taken in response to engagement. Refer to Section 7 on evaluation frameworks for a more detailed approach.

How do we deal with engagement fatigue in communities?

- Avoid overloading the same groups with repeated engagement requests.
- Ensure previous engagement feedback is visibly acted upon before initiating new consultations.
- Use varied and engaging formats to keep participation fresh and meaningful.
- Work with local groups who already have established relationships within the community.

What should we do with the feedback collected?

- Analyse and summarise key themes.
- Share findings with participants and the wider community in accessible formats.
- Explain how feedback has influenced decisions or actions.
- Where feedback cannot be implemented, provide a rationale for why.
- Keep participants updated on progress to maintain trust and transparency.

How do we engage people who are typically hard to reach?

- Identify barriers to participation (e.g., digital exclusion, cultural mistrust) and tailor approaches accordingly.
- Work with trusted community leaders and organisations to facilitate engagement.
- Use culturally appropriate methods and materials.
- Offer flexible engagement options, including informal settings and one-to-one conversations.

How can technology support engagement?

- Online surveys and social media polls can increase reach and accessibility.
- Virtual meetings via Zoom or Microsoft Teams offer flexibility.
- Digital mapping tools can help visualise community concerns and suggestions.
- Interactive platforms like Mentimeter allow real-time participation.
- Ensure digital tools complement, rather than replace, in-person engagement.

What role do local businesses and organisations play in engagement?

- Businesses and local groups often have established relationships within communities and can act as partners in engagement.
- They can help disseminate information, host engagement sessions, and provide additional resources.
- Engaging businesses can create economic opportunities linked to community initiatives.

How do we handle negative or disengaged participants?

- Listen actively and validate concerns.
- Maintain a neutral and professional stance.
- Where appropriate, offer alternative ways for them to provide feedback (e.g., written submissions).
- Ensure follow-up communication so participants feel heard and valued.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

SECTION TEN: RESOURCES

This section provides an overview of resources, guides, and tools that colleagues can use to enhance their community engagement practices. These resources offer additional support, frameworks, and methodologies to ensure engagement is inclusive, effective, and aligned with best practices.

Key Resources and Guides

SBC Engagement Strategy

A comprehensive approach to community engagement that emphasises a shift from a traditional 'top-down' governance model to one that is co-designed with communities.

Access online: [Engagement Approach](#)



Youth Engagement Listen to Learn (YELL) Strategy

A 'how-to' guide written by local young people to support agencies in the Scottish Borders in involving young people in their work.

The strategy toolkit is for young people, professionals, and decision makers to use. It sets out the young people's ambitions for the future, the ways in which young people aged 12 – 25 can currently get involved and guidance for any person looking to engage with young people in Scottish Borders- being particularly mindful of the need to engage with those who have quieter or seldom-heard voices.

Access online: [UNCRC YELL Strategy | Scottish Borders Council](#)



National Standards for Community Engagement

A widely recognised framework that outlines best practices for planning, implementing, and evaluating community engagement. The framework provides clear principles and practical guidance to support consistent and meaningful engagement efforts.



Access online: [National Standards for Community Engagement](#)

VOiCE Tool (Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement)

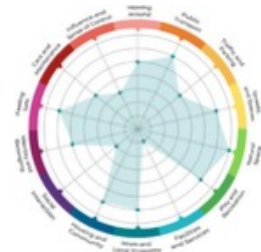
A free online tool to help plan, monitor, and evaluate community engagement activities. It offers step-by-step guidance for setting engagement objectives, capturing progress, and evaluating outcomes.



Access online (requires account creation): [VOiCE](#)

Place Standard Tool

A tool designed to help communities, public agencies, and others evaluate the quality of a place and identify areas for improvement. It facilitates structured conversations about a place, helping to prioritise actions based on community feedback.



Access online: [Place Standard Tool](#)

Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC)

Provides resources, training, and support for community development and engagement, and offers workshops, guides, and case studies to support capacity-building in community engagement.



Access online: [SCDC](#)

Engage Scotland

A resource hub specifically for arts and cultural organisations looking to engage with communities. Shares examples of creative engagement methods and tools to connect with diverse audiences.



Access online: [Engage Scotland](#)

You can get this document on audio CD, in large print, and various other formats by contacting us at the address below. In addition, contact the address below for information on language translations, additional copies, or to arrange for an officer to meet with you to explain any areas of the publication that you would like clarified.

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