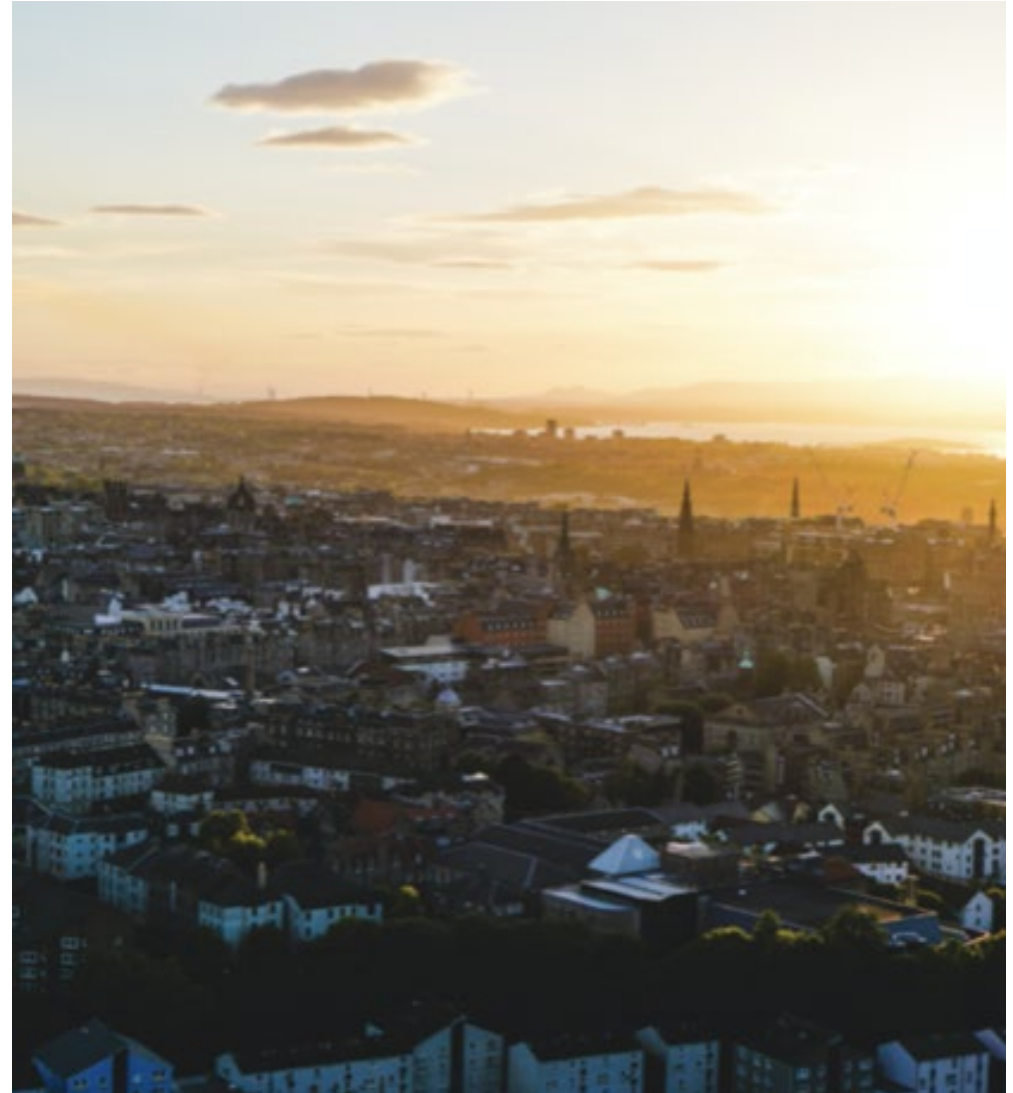


STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN GUIDANCE

This Guidance is to assist towns with preparing a plan for engaging, communicating and consulting with their local community and key stakeholders.

August 2020



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Purpose

This document provides you with initial guidance when developing your approach to stakeholder engagement, and a template that can be followed to establish a stakeholder engagement plan. However, the approach to stakeholder engagement can and should differ according to local objectives, challenges and other specific characteristics of your town.

A shared vision and commitment from a range of stakeholders, showing how they have played (and will continue to play) an active role in the development of your TIP, will go some way to demonstrating that you have secured buy-in from the local community. Establishing a clear and consistent approach to stakeholder engagement at the outset will help to achieve this goal.

Your stakeholder engagement plan can reflect and build on pre-existing engagement with the local community and stakeholders. It should also relate to – and be informed by – a stakeholder and community audit which will provide analysis of the characteristics and stakeholder segmentations within your town. A separate guidance document is available on carrying out a stakeholder and community audit.

Aim

The aim of your stakeholder engagement plan is to ensure that the views and aspirations of the local community are represented in your TIP, demonstrating that the vision and proposed projects have support and commitment from the people they are designed to serve.

Your TIP will reflect your town's specific needs, challenges and opportunities. Equally, you will need to tailor your programme of stakeholder engagement to ensure that the different groups that will be impacted or stand to benefit from the implementation of your TIP are proactively engaged.

Although the approach to stakeholder engagement will differ according to the needs and requirements of your town, a key consideration in every area will be ensuring that communities and the stakeholders that represent them have an opportunity to set out their aspirations and to influence the direction of the TIP at the earliest possible stage – rather than just responding to plans once they have been fully developed.

Your stakeholder engagement plan should deliver genuine engagement, where local views are listened to, carefully considered and wherever possible reflected in the development of your TIP. This will require careful consideration of the important community groups and stakeholders that should be proactively engaged in the process and how to bring them into the discussion, especially if they do not actively participate in local policy making and consultation activity.

Considerations

MHCLG's Further Guidance sets out several considerations to ensure a diverse range of stakeholders are engaged at the earliest possible stage in developing a town vision and TIP.

It emphasises that the

“level and quality of community engagement – what has been done so far and what is planned in the future – will be a key factor when assessing and agreeing the Town Deals.”

Every TIP should include a stakeholder engagement plan that demonstrates how the town will:

Involve: Identify and involve the people/organisations who have an interest in the proposals and developments

Support: Identify and show how you will overcome any barriers to involvement

Evidence: Gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken

Design: Agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose, and demonstrate engagement throughout the project lifetime/Town Deal Fund

Work together: Agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently

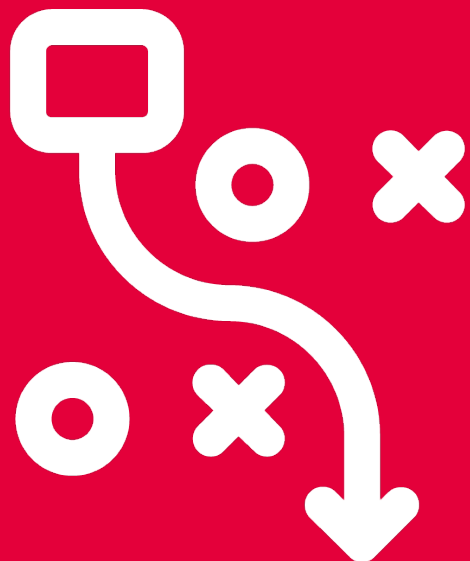
Share information: Ensure necessary information is communicated between the participants and everyone is looped into the information needed to make informed decisions

Work with others: Work effectively with others who are already helping or could help with engagement, for example the voluntary and community sector, social enterprises or relevant public sector bodies

Improve: You may need to consider further developing the skills, knowledge and confidence of all participants

Feedback: How will you feed back the results of engagement to the wider community and agencies affected, and show the impact this engagement has had

Evaluate engagement: Monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and adjust as necessary



DEVELOPING YOUR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN



1 Watchpoints

Below are some watchpoints that can be helpful when you are developing your stakeholder engagement plan.

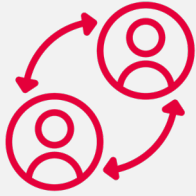
- engage early, listen and provide regular feedback to your stakeholders
- be open about engagement plans, what people can influence and do what you say you will
- use established engagement and communications network and mechanisms, where they exist
- digital first engagement – but not digital only
- be bespoke - different stakeholders require different engagement approaches tailored to their needs
- take a proactive approach to hard to reach groups
- monitor, evaluate, report on and update your engagement approach



2 Stakeholder engagement plan template

Appendix A sets out a suggested template for your Towns Fund stakeholder engagement plan.

It is intended to be guide and can be tailored to suit your town's TIP.



3 Engagement programme

A critical element of an effective engagement process is developing a coherent programme, or timeline, in which stakeholders can influence the evolving TIP at the appropriate point.

The structure of the engagement programme will depend on the nature of your TIP and the specific requirements of the stakeholders in question.

With that in mind, the following table provides a suggested broad outline for a multi-phase programme of engagement, where stakeholders are given the opportunity to influence your town evolving TIP and your town vision and projects from an early stage.

You should undertake a robust risk assessment regarding the proposed stakeholder engagement programme to ensure that the programme can be delivered safely and effectively.

Phase 1: Challenges and opportunities	
Description	Initial open discussion with stakeholders and the local community to gain a clearer understanding of the challenges facing the town, and initial reaction to possible opportunities to address them
Monitoring/ reporting	Feeding back on the learnings from phase one, and explaining how the findings will influence the ongoing TIP development process
Phase 2: Specific options and approaches	
Description	Opportunity to explain the direction of the TIP and any emerging projects or plans that could be undertaken to address challenges identified in phase one
Monitoring/ reporting	Providing feedback on the outcome of phase two engagement and consultation, setting out the final vision of the TIP and explaining how local input has influenced the plans
Phase 3: TIP delivery	
Description	Ongoing dialogue with stakeholders and the local community to keep them informed, engaged and involved in delivering the TIP projects and aspirations of the town
Monitoring/ reporting	Informing stakeholders and local community about the outcome of the TIP development and how they can participate in delivering the TIP

Ongoing engagement and information

Establishing a consistent programme of feedback and reporting to demonstrate to local stakeholders and communities how the TIP is being developed and eventually implemented



4 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Establishing a robust process of monitoring, evaluation and reporting is an important element of your stakeholder engagement plan. This will show how stakeholder engagement will support not just the development of the TIP but its delivery too.

Think about how feedback data will be collected and analysed effectively and efficiently, so that the outcomes can shape the evolving TIP and inform your town vision and projects. It will also be important to track how successful the engagement has been against locally appropriate key performance indicators, so that any issues or underperformance can be addressed. Finally, it will be important to report back to stakeholders how their feedback has influenced your TIP and projects at each stage of their development.



APPENDIX A

Stakeholder Engagement Plan template

Introduction

The 'Introduction' provides the purpose of your stakeholder engagement plan and the context of your town. This is also an opportunity for you to set out the rationale for initiating your Towns Fund bid and to explain the role that the Town Investment Plan (TIP) can potentially play in addressing local challenges and maximising opportunities.

Most importantly this section will explain the role that the local community and stakeholders will play in the development of the TIP and beyond when delivering your projects.

Principles of engagement

It is important that you set out the principles of engagement in order to be clear from the beginning about how stakeholders and the local community can be involved in the developing the TIP, and what they should expect from the process.

The principles should be authentic to your town and should be set in line with the approach to engagement that is deemed appropriate for your local community.



Principles to consider include:

Open and transparent

Being open and transparent about the decision-making process surrounding the TIP, the role that stakeholder engagement can play in the process, and how feedback will be used and responded to

Respectful

Ensuring that all stakeholders are treated with respect throughout the process and they can express their views

Clear and concise

Ensuring that information is made available and communicated in a clear and straightforward way, so that everyone can participate

Proactive

Taking a committed approach to engaging stakeholder groups from across the area, developing bespoke mechanisms to bring them into the process

Inclusive

Ensuring that a wide range of stakeholders can participate and feel included

Objectives, opportunities and challenges

You should set out the objectives of the stakeholder engagement programme with clear aspirations, helping stakeholders to appreciate the scope of the programme and what will constitute a successful outcome.

Your objectives should be considered in the context of the valuable opportunities for your town and the unique challenges that will need to be addressed in the delivery of effective stakeholder engagement.



Engagement strategy

The overarching strategy that you adopt to deliver a meaningful engagement programme can have a genuine influence over the development of the TIP and will include input from a wide range of stakeholder groups.

This engagement strategy should reflect the character of your town and consider the stakeholders that are most critical to the development of the TIP and those that will be most affected by it.

It should also address how you will engage stakeholders and segments of your community that do not ordinarily participate in consultation exercises. This requires consideration of how engagement can inspire them to get involved, while recognising that conventional engagement programmes may not appeal to particular sections of the community.

Engagement approach and considerations

Having established the overarching strategy for engagement, you should develop a coherent and consistent communications, engagement and consultation approach.

The approach you take will be driven by the specific circumstances of your town and the requirements of local stakeholders, but the following are considerations to think about:

Ownership, governance and resourcing

What structures will you put in place to ensure that the stakeholder engagement plan delivers against the objectives and the principles that have been set?

It may be appropriate to establish an engagement steering group that can include both internal and external stakeholders, which is able to ensure that the key objectives of the project are being met and principles of engagement are upheld. This could be a sub-group of the Town Deal Board.

Engagement tactics

Which range of communications tactics will you utilise to ensure that engagement reaches the widest audience possible and elicits active participation?

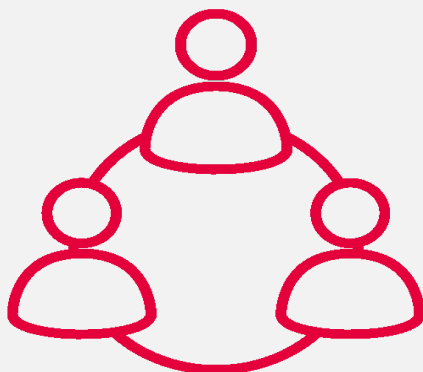
The tactics can reflect and build upon existing structures and approaches that are delivered within the town but should consider additional opportunities to engage more widely. This could include:

- thematic / interest working groups or workshops (delivered face to face or digitally) to discuss specific issues or aspects of your town and TIP
- engagement channels via established but informal community networks and organisations including cultural societies, religious organisations, sports clubs
- digital communications and engagement platforms that allow people to participate at a time and place that suits them
- targeted awareness raising and engagement sessions in high footfall locations – shopping centres, market places, supermarkets, train/bus stations etc. which may generate interest from people who would not ordinarily engage
- opinion polling and market research to directly reach out to individuals and organisations across the town

Communication and engagement channels

Your engagement activity will need a joined-up communications campaign to support it.

Irrespective of whether the engagement strategy is designed to achieve widespread public participation or is focused on select groups of stakeholders, it should communicate the aspirations of the programme and explain how people can participate.



This can be undertaken using a wide range of channels, including:

Engagement hub

using a pre-existing or off-the-shelf digital communications or engagement platform, to both host engaging content and to collate feedback

Media relations

launching the programme in local media, either by promoting the story to local journalists or by placing targeted advertising

Digital communications and engagement tools

creating videos, podcasts, digital newsletters and webinars to help explain the TIP process and the vision for improvement to your town

Social media

using existing social media channels with established followers to promote opportunities to participate in engagement activity and to signpost people to other content – this can be supplemented with targeted social media advertising

Outdoor advertising

this can range from posters on public noticeboards to larger scale advertising on public transport, for example

Newsletter/leaflet drops

effective use of digital techniques will be able to bring new audiences into the engagement programme, but it won't work for everyone and direct mail can play a significant role in reaching non-digital audiences and other hard to reach groups

Existing local authority/partner channels

there are extensive ranges of established channels within local authorities and the partners involved in the development of the TIP, which can be utilised to promote the engagement process (e.g. council newsletters and websites)

Advocacy

the number of people who stand to be involved and engaged in the TIP development process will be significant. It may be possible to develop a 'Town Investment Plan Network' which can actively support and promote engagement with their members

Approach to hard to reach groups

In order to demonstrate a shared vision and commitment from a range of stakeholders it will be important for you to engage stakeholders that do not actively participate in conventional consultation activities.

These groups can be segmented into two sections and consideration should be given to how they can be addressed separately:

Stakeholders with an impediment to engagement

These may include stakeholders with a disability, language barriers or those who face economic or geographic isolation, who may not feel able to actively participate in consultation activity. Having identified communities who face these impediments to engagement, you can develop bespoke plans to engage them directly, by hosting dedicated events, producing targeted materials and amended feedback methods to ensure that they are fully accessible. The key is to engage with stakeholders who represent hard to reach groups about how best to overcome the impediments they face.

The time poor, disinterested and disengaged

Enabling and inspiring people who do not ordinarily engage with consultation programmes is a significant challenge. They may not face a specific impediment to engagement, but are not inspired to participate, do not feel that engagement activity is designed for them or do not feel that they will be able to influence outcomes. The mechanisms used to overcome this challenge will differ from town to town, depending on the nature of the local population, but simple considerations include:

- making the programme as simple and accessible as possible
- making information as approachable as possible
- using communications and engagement mechanisms that people can relate to



Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented a range of additional challenges to organisations undertaking engagement and consultation programmes. As it is extremely hard to predict if and when it will be possible to restart face-to-face engagement safely, a digital first approach is recommended.

You can undertake a digital first programme in such a way that it is engaging and accessible to a wide selection of the population who do have access to the internet and smart phones, and participate in social media. In fact, digital engagement can achieve far greater participation from a broader cross-section of society than traditional consultation and engagement events.

However, it is important to recognise that not everyone in the community will be digitally active. Therefore it will be important to ensure that they are not disenfranchised, and can access the engagement process using physical means – such as writing to a freepost address, and potentially accessing face-to-face engagement events, if that is deemed safe to undertake.



