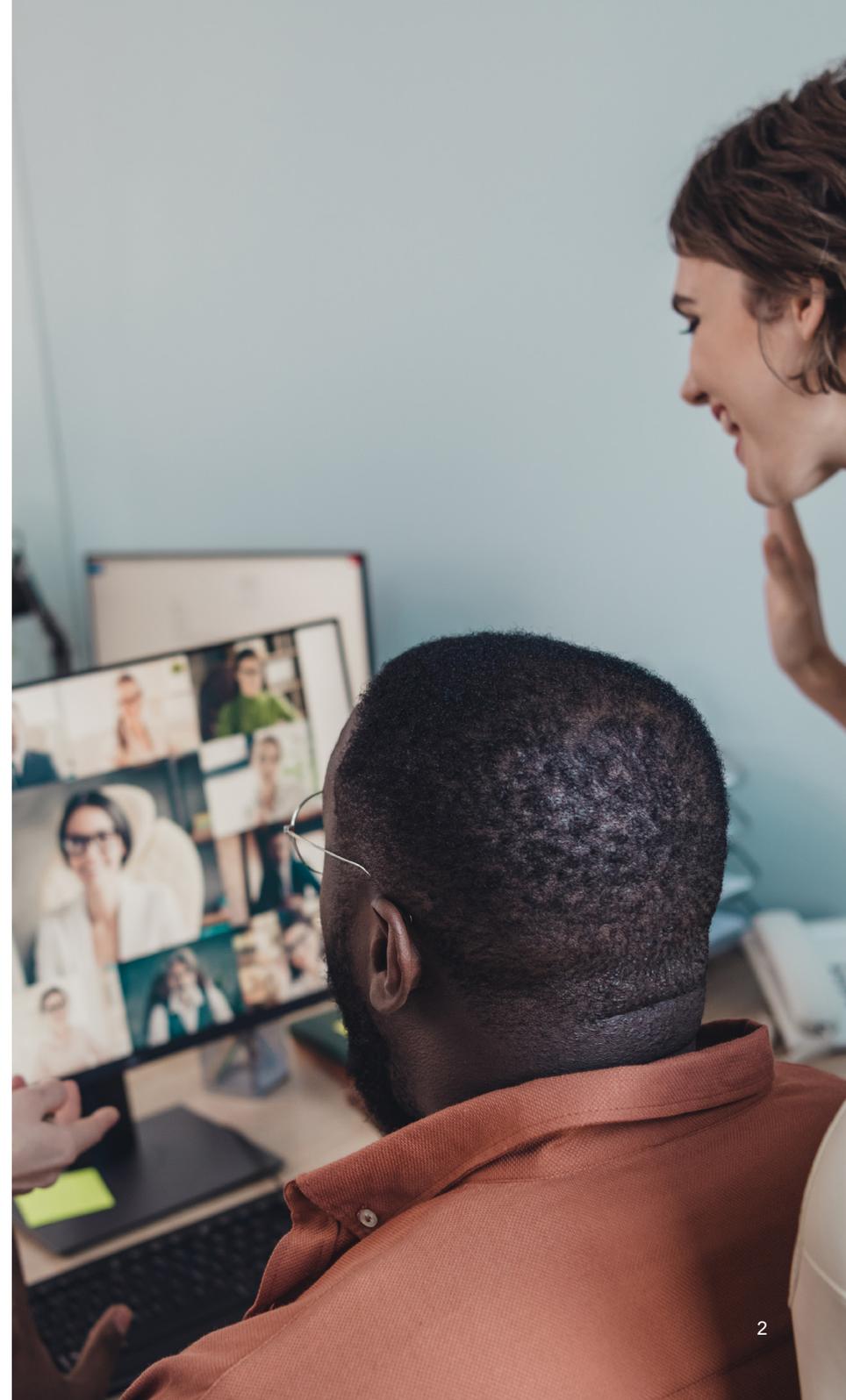


ENGAGEMENT IN THE POST- COVID WORLD

SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT BOTH ONLINE AND OFFLINE

OVERVIEW

3	Introduction
4	Step by step: an overview
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6	How to promote your event: options to consider
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INTRODUCTION

THE NEED TO ADAPT

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses, community groups, councillors and MPs (and more) have had to learn how to engage in new ways. As we enter into a post-COVID environment, it is important to implement blended engagement techniques, applying the digital skills developed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This guidance outlines the steps to follow to help ensure engagement remains consistent, accessible and far-reaching.

WHAT THIS GUIDANCE INCLUDES:

- Understanding the importance of identifying relevant stakeholders.
- Tools to advertise consultation events, whether they are online, offline or hybrid.
- Tools for carrying out consultation events.
- The benefits of blended engagement.
- Advice provided for Towns who are still going through the Business Case stage, and those in project delivery.
- Key tactics to incorporate throughout, regardless of method chosen.

What do we mean by blended engagement?

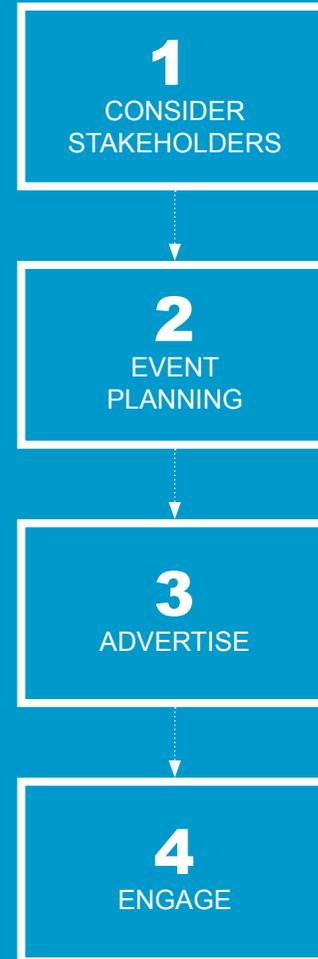
An inclusive approach that enables people to engage with you online, offline or through hybrid events that offer extra flexibility.



STEP BY STEP: AN OVERVIEW

While each project is unique to your Town and your stakeholders, these steps can be applied regardless.

- 1 Consider stakeholders:** You must consider your stakeholder needs and expectations. The first step is crucial as it will help inform the event format, the number of events, the attendees and the best method to host an event.
- 2 Event Planning:** Once you know who you are targeting and how many events you might need, you can choose which approach would best fit these groups and then reflect this in your strategy. This could range from a webinar to a coffee morning.
- 3 Advertise:** Advertising is crucial in order to build the 'buzz' and inform the necessary stakeholders and consultees during engagement.
- 4 Engage:** Once these steps are followed, you are ready to engage, with all factors considered it will give you the best chance to engage with the Town.



STAKEHOLDERS TO CONSIDER

It is important to understand that the number of stakeholders you are consulting may affect the number of events you need to run, and the best engagement option to choose whether that's online, offline or blended.

You should be confident on the stakeholders you want to reach, how you will advertise the event and how you will engage with them.

Find our 'communications and engagement playbook' [here](#) which provides a comprehensive overview of the resources available to you on communications, consultation, community and stakeholder engagement through the Towns Fund Programme.

VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS INCLUDE:



Councillors
(ward/parish/committees)



Journalists



Community groups



Heritage groups



Business Groups



Environmental groups



Members of the public

PROMOTING YOUR EVENT

Advertising your event is crucial to best engage with the identified stakeholders. Listed below are options to consider when planning and promoting your event to secure the highest turnout with target audiences.

The Town Deal Board and project teams should work together to help with the promotional activity associated with a project.



ADVERTISING: OFFLINE

Radio shows, billboards, flyers utilising the public realm.



Things to consider:

Are we reaching the right audience? What time of day is relevant to them? What area are we targeting, and how large is it? What is the cost?



ADVERTISING: ONLINE

Website, digital marketing, mailing list, local press, social media, consultation websites.



Things to consider:

Does this adhere to website and mobile app accessibility? Do we need to consider digital marketing or paid advertising?

**Hybrid approach
to advertising**

=

**Inclusive
engagement**

ENGAGEMENT: ONLINE CONSULTATION IN NEW DIGITAL AGE

The following outlines some tips on implementing an online engagement approach.

These suggestions outline how to inform consultees of your plan, how to consult and a checklist for approach.

INFORMING IN THE NEW DIGITAL AGE ONLINE:

- Webinars
- Virtual consultations: i.e. Teams, Zoom, Facebook Live
- Blogs
- Social media and on your website



HOW TO CONSULT

- Surveys, questionnaires, snap polling
- Digital engagement through workshops, steering groups, webinars, consultation platforms
- Online mapping tools

CHECKLIST:

-  Conduct a run-through with your event team
-  Check your Internet access
-  Send event details and log-in instructions to your attendees
-  Consider alternative methods if there is no internet access

ENGAGEMENT: IN-PERSON POST-COVID

The following outlines options for face-to-face engagement.

HOW TO INFORM YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

- Newsletter drop
- Public meetings
- Local press
- Areas to consult: i.e. libraries, town halls, community centre (need to consider availability and size)



HOW TO CONSULT

- Workshops
- Action plans
- Survey hand outs
- Drop in sessions
- Pop up event in Town
- Interviews/focus groups

THINGS TO CONSIDER IF CONSULTING IN PERSON: POST-COVID CHECK LIST

-  Hand sanitizer
-  Maximum space for ventilation
-  Masks if needed

ENGAGEMENT: HYBRID EVENTS

WHY CARRY OUT A HYBRID EVENT?

As we adjust to new ways of working post-pandemic, hybrid events have become an important way of reaching wider audiences. They provide opportunities for those who don't feel comfortable meeting in person, or who don't have digital tools to meet online. This approach ensures inclusivity for all those who would like to attend and submit their thoughts on the matter taking place. It is important to design the agenda with all participants in mind.

HYBRID EVENTS WORK BEST AS:

- Round table
- Panel in a Town Hall or Council Civic Centre



ENGAGEMENT: HYBRID EVENTS

Considerations for your hybrid event:

AUDIO VISUAL AND WI-FI NETWORK

Benefit: Making sure the camera captures the whole panel or round table is important. This will ensure those attending online can feel like they are 'in the room' and know who is asking or answering questions. Moreover, deciding whether you need one or two microphones is important as depending on how many people are in the room, more than one microphone will avoid voices either not being 'picked up' or having to move the microphone round – consequently wasting time. Ensuring the Wi-Fi in the chosen venue works is important to ensure no connectivity issues take place throughout the session.

VENUE CAPACITY

Benefit: Understanding how many people will attend in person is important as this will feed into what camera/microphone you will need to use. It also will enable you to plan the set-up of your room and consider any potential concerns such as social distancing between attendees.



STRUCTURED Q+A SECTION:

Benefit: By leaving time for those who have dialled in to raise questions, as well as those in-person, you will ensure the goal of 'inclusivity' is met. Towns can ask participants to submit their questions to a particular email address, whereby they state their question, name, and whether they have attended online or offline. This also consequently avoids people speaking over each other when using different platforms.

CHAT FUNCTION ONLINE:

Benefit: Despite a structured Q+A, sometimes online attendees might want to speak throughout. To avoid interference within the session, open a chat forum which will enable those that want to ask questions a space to do so. This also enables Towns to write down anything they might have missed from those attendees online.

HYBRID EVENTS: ON THE DAY

HOUSEKEEPING RULES:

- Explain the structured Q&A format to ensure all participants (online and offline) have a chance to contribute.
- Ask for those online to keep their cameras off and speakers on mute throughout the consultation session, unless they have been chosen to ask a question.
- Remind those online that they can use the chat function on a forum that has been set up.

CHECK LIST:

-  Projector screen for venue.
-  Strong Wi-Fi connection.
-  Check all technology in advance.



BENEFITS OF BLENDED ENGAGEMENT

STRENGTHS OF A HYBRID APPROACH:

Advertising: blended engagement

Expand your reach. Digital and in-person outreach is not only beneficial when consultation begins, but also throughout the project lifecycle. This will help you to continue to reach and engage a wider audience.

If your advertising material is not reaching your target audience, consider tweaking content and marketing approach.

Consultation Plan: blended engagement

A mix of engagement methods allows continuous dialogue. Providing an online platform alongside in-person events enables continuous dialogue.

This will allow you to provide inclusivity, build relationships and consider the needs of your Town as a whole.



ADVICE FOR TOWNS: EVENT ACCESSIBILITY

When planning your engagement event, you should consider accessibility for your stakeholders.

HERE ARE SOME FACTORS TO INCLUDE:

Demographics: Ensure you conduct a full health and safety risk assessment on venues to ensure you can provide a safe environment for all attendees, including the elderly, children, or vulnerable groups.

Geographic Location: People may feel more, or less, comfortable meeting in person, depending on their individual circumstances. This should be considered as part of your event preparation.

Venue accessibility: You should ensure your venue of choice is accessible to all members of the public, and includes a mobility ramp, steps with a handrail and toilet facilities.



KEY THINGS TO REMEMBER:

Regardless of the engagement style you have chosen for consultation events, make sure you allow time for preparation, be transparent with your stakeholders and always maintain the momentum.

- **Planning preparation:** It is important to understand that before you reach the engagement stage, you need to advertise engagement to ensure you have secured the highest number of attendees to these consultation events, which will expand your reach enabling you to best reflect the views of the Town and create the initial 'buzz' before engagement.
- **Transparency:** It is important to be transparent with your choice of engagement. For example, by providing reasons behind why you chose this method creates clear flow of communication and in turn allows the public and stakeholders to feel comfortable.
- **The importance of maintaining momentum:** Whatever method you choose, you can continue the 'buzz' and interest by creating project timelines highlighting achievements and updates. Examples include letters with 'successful case studies', pop up events and meet the team.



USEFUL LINKS

[Communications and Engagement Playbook](#)

[Evidence of Engagement Guide](#)

[DLUHC Stage 2 Business Case Guidance](#)

[Stakeholder Engagement Plan Guidance](#)

[Engaging with Businesses Guidance](#)

[Engaging Younger Audiences Guidance](#)

[Social Value 101](#)

[Guide to Good Community Engagement](#)

[Consultation Top Tips](#)

[Media relations](#)

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Visit the [Town's Fund website](#) for more stakeholder engagement resources

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