COMMUNICATING AND ENGAGING DURING DELIVERY

How to maintain momentum, keep a regular drumbeat of communications and keep stakeholders engaged through the Towns Fund programme

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OVERVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

THE STORY SO FAR

Throughout the course of the Towns Fund programme, you have developed detailed Town Investment Plans and are preparing or have prepared Business Cases that justify the investment in each of your Town's selected projects.

Whether you're already starting to deliver your projects or are still working on your Business Cases, it is key that you continue to put communications and engagement at the heart of your respective projects' strategies and visions.

Maintaining relationships with stakeholders and keeping them informed and engaged will be important as you move into delivery, construction and beyond.

This guidance has been developed to help you maintain and progress your communications and engagement from Business Case to project delivery.

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'Interventions supported through the Towns Fund should have the support of the community, through early and ongoing engagement and genuine partnership arrangements'

The Towns Fund Further Guidance,
DLUHC - June 2020

WHY DO TOWNS NEED TO KEEP ENGAGING ACROSS DELIVERY STAGES?

• Projects should be designed with everyone across the community in mind

• Once you move into delivery you should update, inform and consult your stakeholders again.

• It is important to build and maintain relationships, and foster active participation

• Any new engagement should reflect and build upon previous engagement and insights you have learned from earlier on in the Towns Fund programme

• By reflecting this in your stakeholder engagement plan, you will make clear that the views and aspirations of the local community are represented, building trust and advocacy for your projects

• In turn, this reduces the risk of challenges or delays to projects and makes a positive outcome more likely.

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COMMUNICATING DURING QUIET PERIODS

Before delivery starts in earnest, you may not feel you have much to say to communities and stakeholders. But it's important to keep building momentum, trust and relationships throughout the project life-cycle. These relationships will help you when you have an ask to make of the public or stakeholders.

REMEMBER

- Inclusive communications are key to making people feel like they are represented and important to both your Towns Fund projects and the future of your Town.

- It is important to remind stakeholders that project delivery and activities are very much ongoing – even when they can't physically see it!

- Consideration of diverse voices should be at the heart of your planning, as part of the process of creating positive change through projects, as outlined in our **Social Value guidance**.

It is important to keep channels of communication open throughout a project lifecycle, so your stakeholders are regularly updated and engaged. This could include:

- **Thematic / interest working groups or workshops (delivered face to face or digitally) to discuss specific issues:** These include ambassador networks for specific stakeholder or community groups and local businesses, and stakeholder panels, forums or working groups that speak on a range of topics

- **Engagement channels** via established but informal community networks and organisations including cultural societies, religious organisations and sports clubs, providing updates on projects linked into local news stories

- **Digital communications and engagement platforms** that allow people to participate at a time and place that suits them, including resharing previous project-related content, including project and programme websites and social media accounts

- **Opinion polling and market research** to directly reach out to individuals and organisations across your Town and highlight the needs case for projects

- **Community and schools outreach:** offering to visit community groups and schools to run exercises that help broaden understanding about your project or sector can be an effective way of building relationships when you have no project updates. Local media is often interested in this type of activity too, giving you an opportunity to push out your key messages to the press.

- **Spotlight articles:** It's easy to forget the public doesn't see the day-to-day work on the project. People are often interested in the human beings behind projects, so publishing mini-interviews about what the team is up to during this time can increase interest and keep your audiences engaged.
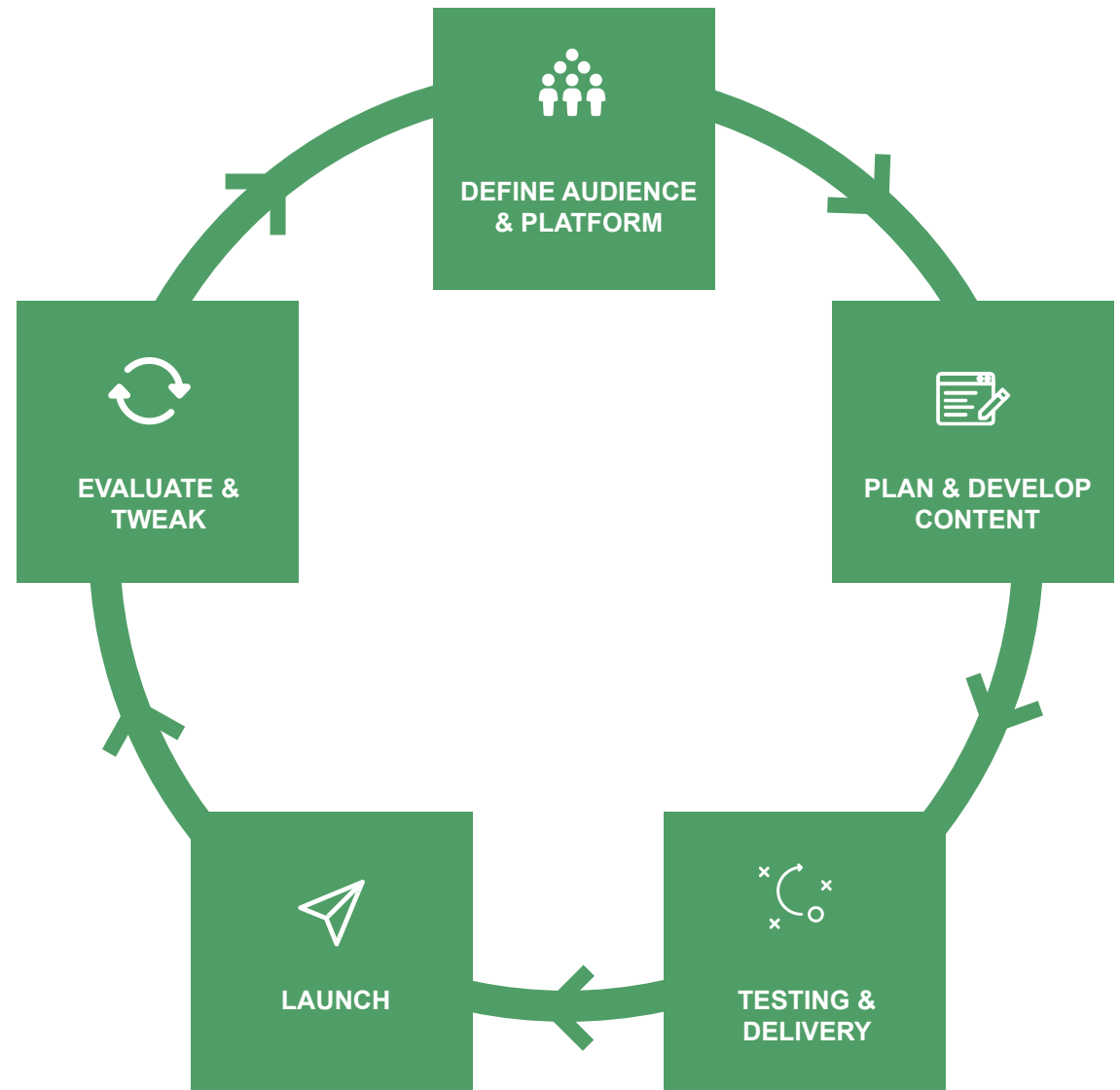
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COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH

A good communications approach should deliver results to all stakeholders.

This is ongoing and iterative, and like our 'wheel of engagement' you may remember from our guide to **Effective Stakeholder Engagement** during Stage One, is a constantly evolving process wherever you are in your Towns Fund journey.

To support your communications approach, you will need to develop a communications plan to help inform the purpose, key messages, frequency and timing and platforms.

Regular evaluation and adaptation is key to a successful communications plan and approach.

DEFINE AUDIENCE & PLATFORM

PLAN & DEVELOP CONTENT

TESTING & DELIVERY

LAUNCH

EVALUATE & TWEAK

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MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

When you first launch your projects there is often a lot of excitement and buzz. To ensure this doesn't dwindle as you reach more advanced stages of project delivery, you can maintain momentum to continue to build stronger advocacy and buy-in.

The following methods can help you achieve this:

Dedicated project websites or social media pages to inform your stakeholders. This will act as the single source of truth, and help mitigate misinformation

Newsletters with 'good news stories' rather than focusing purely on project milestones – e.g. focusing on project teams doing local charity work and volunteering days. You can still keep the stakeholders and public informed even when there is not much to say.

Historic 'fun facts' and local interest stories presented in visual formats such as video bulletins and infographics

Project timelines highlighting achievements and updates throughout the lifecycle of your project

'Meet the team' profiles focusing on the specific skills and personal stories of project team members and their connections to your projects and Town

Pop-up events in the town centre with a dedicated project team

Utilising branding and creative assets for visual association

If you are interested in Place Branding and the benefits it can bring to your Town, you can view further guidance here

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YOUR PROJECT NARRATIVE

Regeneration means different things for different people. It's important to bring the people that are passionate about your Town and local community together through your engagement.

Undoubtedly, there will be differences of opinion from stakeholders around how projects are delivered. This requires a level of conflict management and issue mitigation.

Firstly, it is important to work out the groups that you need to reach out to. Be clear about who you want to talk to, and get to know your different audiences.

It will also be important to find community influencers and leaders who advocate for different groups, and build a relationship with them.

Make sure that you reclaim the narrative for your projects on your own terms.

DO

- Stay true to your Town vision and narrative

- Keep communications clear and consistent in tone, supported by visual or brand association, and regular, meaningful updates will have a big impact and don't need to be too detailed

- Continue a dialogue with your stakeholders during focused engagement periods and then let them know when they will hear from you next

- Organise regular workshops, forums and check in points with stakeholders that have challenged your approach to your projects

- Show stakeholders that their feedback is being listened to, and where possible, taken into account through 'you said, we did' infographics and briefing sessions

DON'T

- Over communicate in saturated news cycle periods or busy times for your Town/clashes with other projects locally

- Stop engaging and allow stakeholders to 'fill in the gaps' and distract from your chosen narrative

- Get drawn into engaging with individual stakeholders on social media

REMEMBER

- Over targeting or focusing on individuals or groups who regularly respond to consultation and engagement activities can lead to the views of harder to reach groups being overlooked.

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STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

There is not a 'one-size fits all' approach to engagement, it requires different approaches during different stages of the project lifecycle. For example, your approach to consulting with parents will likely be different from your approach to consulting with the business community.

There are five different levels of stakeholder participation, which include varying levels of involvement and influence. It is important to understand your stakeholders needs and expectations. In doing so this will help you define the most appropriate engagement and communications approach.

Levels of Stakeholder Participation

INFORM - provide information - tell people what is going to happen

CONSULT - offering a number of options and listening to the feedback you get

DECIDE TOGETHER - encouraging others to provide opinions and options

ACT TOGETHER - form partnerships to carry the action out

SUPPORT INDEPENDENT STAKEHOLDER ACTION - helping the stakeholder do what they want

Local authority / Organisation led   Citizen led

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ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES

Engagement methods should be chosen based on desired goals, which range from informing to encouraging ongoing involvement of the community and stakeholders. The following table is a reminder of, and provides you with, a wealth of engagement approaches for stakeholder participation.

	INFORMING	CONSULTING	DECIDING TOGETHER	ACTING TOGETHER	SUPPORTING STAKEHOLDER ACTION
OFFLINE	• Public meetings • Mail out • Local press • Billboards/posters	• Drop in-in sessions • Roadshows • Pop-ups • Interviews • Focus groups	• Steering group • Co-production • Consensus workshops • Planning for real • Citizen Assemblies • Participatory budgeting • Creative workshops • World cafe • Action planning	• Steering group • Task and finish groups • Stakeholder partnership • Scrutiny panel	• Commissioning • Grants • Access to buildings and spaces • Responding to campaigns
ONLINE	• Website • Digital marketing • Mailing list • Local press • Social media	• Survey • Crowdsourcing • Digital engagement platform • Online mapping tools	• Online polling • Digital mapping activities • Hackathons	• Enabling online advocacy with stakeholder packs and social media content.	• Social media promotion

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ENGAGING WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND HARD-TO-REACH GROUPS

BE PROACTIVE

You need to understand the context of the community to ensure the project responds to stakeholder needs. You should consider the history, demographics, culture and languages and socio-economic context. This will help you to overcome barriers to engagement, and help you tailor your approach and messaging to the audience.

As you finalise project business cases and prepare for delivery, we recommend that you revisit your stakeholder mapping and audits, as outlined in the **Guide to Good Community Engagement**. Upon engaging with representatives you should ask how they would best like to be consulted and communicated with going forward.

You may not be able to deliver every request, but you will be able to identify the most appropriate method for engagement.

> **If you would like further information, you can read this guidance on Engaging with hard-to-reach groups**

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MAKE IT PERSONAL

When planning engagement methods and key messaging for your project, you will need to implement different approaches for engaging different target groups.

Mostly, stakeholders are interested in how will a project impact them and those closet to them. In order to engage different groups, messaging needs to outline the need and benefits of your projects for the local communities that you serve.

Remember: Sometimes the messages you want to shout the loudest, might not be the ones the target groups are most interested in.

Try to avoid sending generic emails. If there are specific 'hard to reach' groups you want to engage, address letters and emails personally to the person you want to reach. Using the targeted messaging for that stakeholder group, you can demonstrate the project's commitment to hearing their opinions and lay the foundations for strong future relationships.

Remember: You get out what you put in – tailor and adapt your communications to connect with hard-to-reach groups. Although blanket messaging might be the easiest in the short-term, it is not the most effective long-term.

You will need to understand your audience needs, and consider the most appropriate method to reach them. Sometimes a letter or email may not be the most effective way of communication. There are some individuals or groups who may prefer a telephone call. By phoning you can:

- Make sure you have the correct person's contact details to continue future engagement activities

- Promote your project and the targeted messaging for that group

- Add personality to your projects, which is easier to portray on the phone

- Build a more personable relationship to demonstrate your commitment to engaging the individual or group

- Discover any barriers to engagement early on in the process

- In turn, this reduces the risk of challenges or delays to projects and makes a positive outcome more likely.

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DIGITAL EXCLUSION

The internet is being used increasingly across all areas of life, but a 2020 ONS report found that 7.5 per cent of UK adults had never used the internet, with the number rising for older age groups and amongst the disabled.

Digital technology offers several benefits, which those who are digitally excluded are missing out on. As you continue to engage across your delivery phase, ensure that project updates and information are not just digital but also include more traditional methods of communication.

To prevent the risk of digital exclusion, it's important to:

- Complement online materials with a print newsletter or posters in public places such as libraries and GP surgeries

- Use local newspapers as a platform to communicate project milestones to the residents of your Town

- Distributing materials by post can be costly on a large scale, but mapping software from the Royal Mail and other providers enables precise targeting of areas where engagement may be lower than average

- Set up a Freepost address and create easy to complete feedback forms. This will also help to increase your response rates

- Use contactable telephone numbers for projects and provide access points in your Town with information to ensure hard to reach groups have the access to get involved in your Town's future and can make their voices heard.

Find out more in our blog on 'Bridging the Digital Divide'

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TOP TIPS

To help inform your engagement, consider these top tips for engaging during delivery:

- **Be clear, engaging and accessible** – avoid over-simplification and stay true to the narrative and vision you have developed for your projects

- **Build on existing engagement** – use existing relationships within your community and previous engagement activities on local projects to involve them with your projects

- **Be flexible** – remember any engagement cannot be 'one size fits all' and you must continue to adapt your approach to suit the needs of the specific stakeholder group you are targeting

- **Stay in touch** – provide regular updates and keep the conversation open

- **Be open** – show stakeholders that their feedback is being taken into account and how your dialogue with them is making a difference to the future of your Town (via reports or a summary of engagement).

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RESOURCES

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Visit the Towns Fund website for more resources

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