

Wheels for Wellbeing Guide to Accessible Consultations

Inclusive consultations and engagement are important:

- They let local communities have their say and help ensure people won't be unnecessarily negatively affected.
- They help ensure all [equalities obligations](#) are met.
- They help ensure that local infrastructure serves the needs of the people who live and work nearby.

Poorly-managed and exclusionary consultations antagonise and divide communities: It is essential to make consultations and engagement inclusive.

Making consultations and engagement inclusive:

1. Use best-practice guidance and standards on all schemes

- Initial designs should always follow or exceed current national and best-practice guidance, to avoid consultees becoming frustrated and wasting time identifying design flaws which should never have reached the consultation stage.
- Poor initial designs risk becoming poor permanent designs if small but important issues are missed in a drive to resolve major issues and as tensions rise between communities and authorities.

2. Provide clear information – what are the project aims, what will happen, when and where.

- Include information on temporary disruption, so people can plan ahead to make journeys when their usual route is closed.
- Provide all the information about a project – with simple formats and full detailed options, so people can make informed comments.
- Provide clear access information and contact details regarding all consultation and engagement.

3. Use a range of accessible formats: In print, online and in person.

- Remember that not everyone has internet access, and not everyone can make written responses. Printed and in-person consultation are essential for inclusion.
- Make your website and documents accessible, including for screen readers and other accessibility software. [Government guidance](#), more [detailed access guides](#) and [contrast checkers](#) all help.
- Ensure in-person events are in accessible locations, with accessible toilets, good walking, wheeling and public transport links and Disabled parking (consider options for on-site visits).
- Provide interpreters (BSL, different languages), captioning and alternative format materials – audio-visual, braille, large print, easy-read, different languages according to local potential need.

4. Ensure people have accessed, understood and been able to respond to consultations.

- Ensure local demographics are proportionately represented in responses – including by proactively seeking responses people from under-represented groups.
- Provide a range of ways to respond – from a simple sad or smiley face on a board to detailed written or spoken evidence.

5. Ask open questions: Start a conversation.

- Open questions
 - Gain more information than closed questions – they provide solutions.
 - Allow a community to develop a project with meaningful ongoing input.
 - Foster collaboration and compromise by avoiding creating divisive yes/no “sides”.

Example closed question: “Do you want a bus stop?” (yes/no answer)

Example open question: “We’re considering installing a bus stop here. What would you say we should think about?” (start and keep a discussion going)

6. Learn from the experts – and pay them!

- Under-represented socio-demographic groups including older people, low income groups, Disabled people and BAME communities are less likely to find and respond to consultations – and are more likely to be negatively affected by schemes. To offer genuine engagement make sure these groups are compensated for their time and/or costs in consulting e.g. travel expenses
- Different demographic groups and different local contexts create specific issues, which local user and activist groups will know more about than local authorities and planners.
- Commission [access consultants](#) for expert input on ensuring environments are accessible for Disabled people.

7. Include on-site consultations

- It’s easy for local people to forget issues they’re used to dealing with – going on-site and talking through schemes can help people notice problems they’re familiar with but which need to be resolved.
- Visualising impact of scheme from plans is hard – especially where tiny features like gradient changes can be critical for accessibility.
- On-site consultations ensure people can fully understand schemes, while raising particular features or problems which may otherwise be missed.

8. Co-produce: Use what you’ve learned, revise and discuss.

- Consultation feedback must be used to improve proposals: Consultation should be a conversation and partnership that produces real, tangible results, and never a tick-box exercise.
- Failure to engage local communities meaningfully and/or failure to implement responses will lead to resentment and resistance to schemes.

9. Pilot, evaluate and refine

- Ideas which work on paper don’t always work as well in practice. It’s easy for both planners and consultees to overlook potential problems at design stage. Trial, evaluation and adjustment of projects is essential to ensure that permanent schemes are as good as possible.

10. Include space for issues you didn’t know needed thinking about.

- We all ask the questions we think we need answers to: There will always be questions we’ve missed!
- Inclusive consultations leave room for people to raise issues that haven’t been addressed elsewhere.

Is there anything else you’d like to talk about?