



Apolitical 5 Minute Listen

Ep 1 - Building Better Relations with Citizens

Transcript

Olivia: Welcome to this five-minute listen. I'm Olivia Bellas, Learning Community Manager at Apolitical. This five-minute listen focuses on building trust with citizens. When citizens trust their governments to act fairly and justly, they tend to participate more constructively in civic life.

Today, we're going to hear highlights from our course, Introduction to public engagement, and hear how learners responded. Let's start off with a project taking place in Paris, the implementation of the participatory budget. This is where ordinary people decide how to allocate part of the municipal public budget. And so in this instance, roughly 100 million US dollars is distributed per year to projects submitted and selected by persons of all ages, and nationalities. It's also an opportunity to develop digital tools to gather constituents' ideas. It reaches people who have not been involved in local democracy before. Whether through a digital or physical meeting these connected people may reach a consensus and therefore build a stronger advocacy group.

We also reached out to some of our course learners for their ideas, asking what are some of the other ways that government can inspire confidence in citizens?

Michelle: Hello, my name is Michelle Grant. I'm a Senior Policy Analyst at Employment and Social Development Canada. Other approaches to inspiring confidence could be to highlight individual stories of real citizens whose lives have been positively impacted by the actions or initiatives the government has put in place. This could be awareness-raising or marketing campaigns. This gives it a tangible element and a realness to the authenticity of what the government hopes to achieve. Seeing is believing.

Puneet: Hello, my name is Puneet. I'm a learner with the Apolitical programme. What are some other ways that the government can inspire confidence in citizens? I believe that the government should be transparent about where taxpayer money is going and how it's being used. The government also needs to ensure that marginalised groups are being accounted for when deliberations are being made.

Olivia: So that last point linking back to participatory budgeting in many ways, it's also worth noting the importance of collaboration, working with partners who will already be working closely with citizens. So another question to consider. Do you think it's important to work with civil society organisations when engaging citizens?

Puneet: Definitely as this can help facilitate trust within the government for citizens can also mean that more groups of citizens can be assisted if public servants can reach those demographics as opposed to the government alone. It also allows for more feedback to be received from citizens as well.

Michelle: *It is important to work with CSOs when engaging citizens because there is likely a higher level of trust, and they may be seen as a more neutral or objective party with less vested interest in the outcome, other than improving societal conditions for the public.*

Olivia: Thanks to Michelle and Puneet, for sharing their voice memos with us, both are learners on the engagement course I'd mentioned. We also heard from Eileen on the same course. She said "it's important to work with civil society organisations because they have direct contact and links to the citizens in the various communities. They can speak and act on citizens' behalf, they can obtain feedback from citizens directly and forward that feedback to government officials. civil society organisations know the needs and wants of the communities. They represent the community at large."

So we can look at what we've heard through three overarching takeaways.

One, enabling citizens to participate in decision-making through open and authentic processes

Two, encouraging citizens to share feedback with the government.

Three, taking action based on the feedback received.

Thinking about these three areas; what one small practical thing can you do to instil trust with citizens?