Digital community engagement guideline

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# Introduction

The Queensland Government takes a digital-first approach to community engagement and commits to using technology to engage Queenslanders in government policy and decision-making processes.

# Purpose

This guideline provides information and advice for Queensland Government departments to consider when implementing the requirements of the Digital community engagement policy. While there are references to other mandatory obligations which may be relevant in the context of the policy (for example, legislation), departments are strongly recommended to further investigate these obligations considering their own business requirements and seek legal/expert advice where necessary.

# What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a two-way communication process used to collect feedback from the community to assist in the development, implementation, evaluation or review of public policies, programs and services.

Departments undertake community engagement to gather diverse viewpoints and make policy and decision-making processes more transparent.

It encompasses a wide variety of government-community interactions ranging from information sharing to community consultation and, in some instances, active participation in government decision-making processes.

When done well, community engagement can build trust and inform mutual understanding between government and community.

Community engagement should not be used for:

* a voting process—use of polls should not be used for decision making as it will not capture the full scope and depth of community opinions
* public criticism
* predetermined or biased outcomes
* political gain.

## What do we mean by community?

When this guideline refers to the community, it generally means engagement with the people in the geographical community of Queensland.

Departments may also choose to invite feedback from a community of interest, such as:

* people outside Queensland who own property, work in, or visit Queensland and may be affected by the outcome
* target groups of people within the population to increase diversity and ensure representation.

## Participant

Participants include everyone who participated in an engagement activity, whether they provided feedback or not.

## Respondent

Someone who has provided feedback in an engagement activity.

# What is digital community engagement?

Digital community engagement is the use of technology to engage:

* online
* virtually
* offline while in-person or in a place.

Digital engagement can happen:

* in ‘real time’ when people are meeting in a place
* online between face-to-face or virtual events.

Technology can be used during the community engagement process to:

* collect information to inform policy
* promote engagements
* manage information collected through engagements
* track communications and manage relationships.

## Online engagement

Online engagement is the most common form of digital engagement. It is using technology to engage people while they are online through a web or phone application.

People can participate in this type of engagement at any time while online, and opportunities are shaped by the technologies available and community preferences for how they want to be engaged.

Some online engagement technologies can also be used to engage people during offline and virtual engagement.

## Virtual engagement

Technology can also be used to engage people virtually in ‘real time’ even when people are not in the same place, for example, during a video conference or in virtual reality.

When video conference technologies are used to engage people virtually in ‘real time’ while engaging people in person at the same time, this is called a hybrid event.

## Using technology for offline engagement

Technology can also be used to engage offline when meeting in person or while in a place.

For example, it is now common for governments to use QR codes on posters, and technology can be used at kiosks in shopping centres, airports, and bus stops to collect feedback from people in a place.

Engagement technologies can be used to collect feedback offline when engaging with people in a place (such as in a remote community), then uploaded when an internet connection is available.

# When to use this guideline

This guideline is for anyone working for a Queensland Government department who is using technology for community engagement.

# What is included in this guideline?

This guideline provides advice and recommendations to support departments in implementing the Digital community engagement policy.

If you are looking for general guidance, please refer to these resources.

### Community and stakeholder engagement:

* [Marketing Matters](https://marketing.govnet.qld.gov.au/tools-and-resources/engagement.aspx) (Department of the Premier and Cabinet) (Queensland Government employees only).
* [International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)](https://iap2.org.au/resources/iap2-tools/)
* [OECD Guideline for Citizen Participation Processes](https://www.oecd.org/publications/oecd-guidelines-for-citizen-participation-processes-f765caf6-en.htm)

### Digital service design:

* [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1](https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/)
* [Digital service standard](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/digital-service-standard)
* [Principles for the use of social media networks and emerging technologies](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/principles-for-the-use-of-social-media-networks-and-emerging-technologies)
* [Introduction to human-centred design](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/service-delivery-and-community-support/design-and-deliver-public-services/customer-experience-training/human-centred-design/introduction-to-human-centred-design)

### Privacy and information management:

* [Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld)](https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2009-014)
* [Office of the Information Commissioner Guidelines - Privacy principles](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles/key-privacy-concepts/overview-of-the-information-privacy-principles)
* [Right to Information Act 2009 (Qld)](https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2009-013)
* [Information access and use policy (IS33)](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/information-access-and-use-policy-is33)
* [Information security policy (IS18:2018)](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/information-security-policy-is18-2018)
* [Information asset custodianship policy (IS44)](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/information-asset-custodianship-policy-is44)
* [Records governance policy](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/records-governance-policy)
* [Procurement and disposal of ICT products and services (IS13) policy](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/procurement-and-disposal-of-ict-products-and-services-is13-policy)
* [Cyber security resources and guidelines](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/cyber-security/cyber-security-help-and-resources).

# Inform the public about your community engagement objectives

Advice in this section supports policy requirement 1.

When commencing a community engagement, departments should publish their engagement objectives and explain how feedback will be used.

## Who are you engaging?

Queensland is a large and diverse state, and it is not always possible, necessary, or effective to engage everyone simultaneously. When deciding who to engage, departments should consider whether their community engagement will be:

* open—for anyone to participate in
* targeted—to engage a specific segment of the population
* tailored—to engage a representative sample of the population.

Departments may also set objectives for how many people they want to engage and how geographically and demographically representative they would like their engagement to be.

Targeted engagement can also be used to make open engagements more inclusive and increase diversity and representation in an open process.

Diverse and representative feedback benefits the engagement process by ensuring the resulting policies and decisions have taken into account the needs and opinions of the community. When informing the public about engagement objectives, departments must be clear about whether their process is open, targeted or tailored and why they have selected this type of community engagement for their policy-making and decision-making process.

Where departments use established panels, this should be declared on the engagement listing and information provided on how to join the panel.

## What are people being engaged about?

When setting engagement objectives, departments should define each of the key changes being proposed and determine what feedback is being sought, such as:

* which of the changes are open to feedback
* whether they are open to people’s feedback about one or more options
* whether participants will be encouraged to share their views about the problem, issues being addressed by the proposed changes, or potential impacts of the changes being proposed.

It can also help to define the specific decisions that have to be made during the policy-making process, when these decisions will be made and who will make them.

Separating aspects of the policy in this way will help departmental staff determine what is open to influence and the questions to ask during the engagement. Clear questions help to establish participant’s expectations about how their feedback will be considered.

Policy teams should also ensure they have reviewed all relevant feedback previously provided to the department before commencing and drafting questions for engagement.

## When will the community be engaged and why?

Community engagement is usually run to collect feedback during one or both of these stages of policy or decision making:

* To inform the development of a draft policy, program or service (early engagement).
* To seek feedback on a draft policy, program or service (public consultation).

In addition to providing information on the status of policy or decision-making and why feedback is being sought, departments should also share some background about:

* why the government is proposing to make changes now
* how the draft policy has been informed to date
* the types of feedback they are seeking.

If the community engagement is being delivered to meet a statutory requirement for consultation, this should be clearly stated.

A timeline is a simple way to inform people about the stages of the policy-making process. See figure 1 as an example.

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Figure 1: An example of an engagement timeline

A start and end date for the community engagement process should also be stated, and the date after which the department will stop accepting feedback.

If the department plans to engage the community at multiple points in the policy-making process, this should be communicated in the engagement timeline. Including information about what the department will do between these engagements can also help people understand the engagement objectives and the role they can have at various stages in the process.

## How can people participate?

When engaging the community, departments should understand and communicate the level of participation expected and the role they would like the community to play in the process.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum shown in figure 1 defines five levels of participation, each with its own goal and promise to the public. This is a great place for departments to start when describing how people can participate.

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Figure 2: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, International Association for Public Participation

### Participation options

Departments should offer a range of ways for people to participate in every community engagement process. Technology for online, offline, and virtual engagement should also be considered. This helps reduce the barriers to people engaging with government by giving them the ability to choose the engagement method they prefer.

### Depth of engagement

When determining engagement objectives, departments should decide which of the following they would like participants to do when engaging with them:

* share their viewpoint
* respond to specific questions
* consider information, then respond (deliberate individually)
* engage with other participants to:
* exchange and discuss ideas and discuss different perspectives (dialogue)
* find common ground (group deliberations)
* achieve consensus and provide group feedback
* work with departmental staff to define the problem and co-design policy options.

Each of these methods requires a different ‘depth of engagement’ and appropriate methods and technologies should be selected to enable these different types of participation.

### Selecting technologies for engagement

Departments should select technologies based on:

* their engagement objectives and whether they need more than one technology to meet these objectives
* compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (as mandated in the Digital service standard)
* requirements as outlined in the Digital community engagement policy.

There are a variety of digital engagement technologies available to enable different types of participation and the collection and management of feedback and communication with participants.

Departments should define what types of technology they need to meet engagement objectives before looking for software options. It is also recommended that the department’s information and communication technology (ICT) team be involved in decisions about the technologies used for engagement. This is to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Digital community engagement policy and related ICT policies and standards and, if needed, any technical support arrangements are clearly defined between the ICT team and any external parties.

## How can people provide feedback?

When publishing their engagements, departments must let participants know what methods they can use to provide feedback.

For example, departments may decide:

* to accept feedback during workshops
* expect participants to provide submissions by email, through an online form or survey, or hard copy.

Departments should also be clear about how social media will be used during the engagement and whether feedback will be collected if people comment on posts on government accounts or use specific hashtags.

How will you use people’s feedback?

Departments should develop internal policies and procedures for the collection and use of feedback, and to select and set up technologies to enable them.

These policies should match the department’s engagement objectives and detail exactly how feedback will be used during analysis. For example, how will feedback be managed if a participant provides more than one submission.

This information should be published alongside community engagements so that participants understand how their feedback will be used.

Internal procedures for the management of feedback should account for the department’s engagement objectives and requirements 3, 4 and 5 of the Digital community engagement policy.

## Is personal information being collected?

At the start of each engagement, if personal information is needed, departments must ensure that people are informed about:

* what information the department is collecting
* why the department is collecting it
* how the department will use it
* to whom the department may disclose it.

Procedures for collecting and using this information must be communicated to participants in a [collection notice](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles/collection/collection-notices) (also referred to as a privacy statement), and in some cases consent or agreement may need to be sought. Refer to ‘Protect the privacy of participants’ in this guideline and requirement 5 of the policy for more information.

# Use technology to make community engagement more inclusive

Advice in this section supports policy requirement 2.

Technology can hinder or enable inclusive engagement. For community engagement to be more inclusive, digital engagement needs to be easy for people to find, understand and participate in.

## Publish community engagements

To ensure community engagement opportunities are easy for people to find and participate in, department should list community engagements and their objectives on the central listing on qld.gov.au and department websites. This should include targeted and tailored engagements, and engagements that do not include digital engagement methods.

Publishing community engagements increases the transparency of government policy and decision-making and ensures that people interested in these processes can learn about them.

Listing community engagements in a central location on qld.gov.au makes it easier for people to find engagement activities that interest them.

### Make it discoverable online

When listing a community engagement online, departments should carefully consider the naming of a consultation, the URL used, and what search terms people might use when searching for the engagement activity online. This will improve a consultation’s search engine optimisation, making the process more accessible for people to find when searching online.

## Use a variety of methods to promote engagement

Listing a community engagement or using online engagement methods alone is not sufficient to meet this requirement. Departments should use more than one method to promote community engagement, particularly if the process is open.

Departments should promote community engagements online and offline, using marketing methods that help the department meet its engagement objectives. For example, departments may need to use targeted marketing methods to engage people within specific demographics of the population to increase diversity and representation in the community engagement. Refer to [Marketing Matters](https://marketing.govnet.qld.gov.au/tools-and-resources/engagement.aspx) for more information.

### Use technology to target engagement

Teams managing engagement for their department should speak to their marketing teams about their engagement objectives and the best way to reach participants through digital, social, and traditional marketing methods. This is particularly important if the engagement is targeted, or representation is an objective.

Departments will need to adhere to privacy and consent requirements when using personal data through these methods, for example lists established through subscription or for a specific purpose such as a separate project.

### Use social media

Departments should consider the use of social media in their community engagement strategy. Social media can be used during community engagement to promote or report on engagement activities and to encourage participation online. Advertising on social media can also increase the number and range of people participating in an engagement.

Departments will need to adhere to the Queensland Government’s [Principles for the official use of social media networks and emerging technologies](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/principles-for-the-use-of-social-media-networks-and-emerging-technologies) when using social media.

### Use emails and newsletters

Email and newsletter subscriptions are an effective way to:

* promote and increase awareness of policy-making processes
* keep people who have expressed interest in being informed, up to date with community engagement opportunities.

Departments should maintain databases (in accordance with privacy laws and information security obligations, and consistent with the Information Privacy Act 2009) of personal information of people who have expressed an interest in engaging with them and consented to future communications. These databases should include collection notices used, and any consent or agreement provided by participants when their information was collected.

See further below, and refer to the Office of the Information Commissioner’s [overview of the Information privacy principles](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles/key-privacy-concepts/overview-of-the-information-privacy-principles) for more information.

### Promote digital engagement offline

Taking digital engagement to the community promotes engagements to people who may not otherwise hear about them through online channels. Departments are encouraged to promote community engagement offline and to take digital engagement to people ‘in the community’.

For example, community engagement could occur:

* at the site of a proposed change
* at a bus stop
* in a kiosk in shopping centres or markets
* during an event hosted by community groups.

These engagement activities can be staffed or ‘static’ with QR codes on posters, and kiosks and stalls set up with digital devices to provide and collect information without staff.

## Ensure the engagement activity is accessible

During community engagement, departments should provide information about the policy and decision-making process in formats that are easy for people to read and understand.

All online information shared will need to meet Level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. These guidelines are designed to make government information accessible to everyone, including people with different abilities and people who use assistive technology to read information online on their computers, tablets, or phones.

While these guidelines are designed specifically for web content, departments are also encouraged to apply these principles when sharing information during all forms of community engagement. For example, when preparing information to present at workshop, font type and size should be considered as well as screen visibility and readability from a distance. It may also be appropriate to share copies of the presentation with participants with low vision or hearing limitations prior to workshops.

It is important to note that the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines do not cover other critical forms of accessibility for engagement, such as the accessibility of rooms used to host offline engagements such as in-person workshops. It may be appropriate to use virtual engagement technologies to include people who cannot otherwise be in the room and to consider how audio-visual aids can be used during offline engagement methods to make information and activities more accessible.

## Cater to different participation needs and preferences

When designing a community engagement process, departments should consider how technology can be used to make engagement more accessible to people who:

* Speak different languages and may benefit from reading, viewing, or providing content in different languages. It may also be appropriate to include acknowledgements or warnings in another language if content is culturally sensitive.
* Do not have reliable access to devices, internet connections, or data. Some people cannot easily access computers, mobile devices, or reliable internet and are limited to what they can download or access. To ensure that these people are not excluded from community engagement processes, online and virtual community engagement should always be accompanied by offline engagement activities.
* Are less confident using technology for engagement. For example, it may be possible to increase digital literacy by using digital community engagement methods when engaging with people in person during discussions at community engagement events, when visiting libraries, and when speaking to community members in shopping centres. During these engagements, department staff should determine whether it is more helpful to record answers to questions and use digital engagement methods on behalf of participants or to show participants how to use digital engagement tools themselves when engaging with them.
* Have limited availability for engaging. For example, some people who are shift workers may not be able to attend workshops held during the day, and people with young children who work business hours may not be able to attend workshops held in person but may be able to do virtual workshops if held after business hours.

### Engagement preferences and experience design

Departments are encouraged to offer online, offline, and virtual engagement options so that people can choose how they participate based on their capacity, availability, accessibility and technology preferences.

Thinking about each engagement method as an experience can also help to increase inclusion. Departments should consider using human-centered design to understand and cater to different types of participants when designing their engagement process and specific activities.

### User experience and testing

Departments should test all engagement technologies with different users. If more than one technology is used, departments should work with their enterprise architects to consider how these tools integrate with each other to improve the user experience.

### Profile participants and design participant journeys

It may be helpful to work out effective engagement methods to reach different groups of participants.

For example, if you want to reach Michael, a 21-year-old university student, you may use a different method to one you use to reach Ida, a 75-year-old woman who does not have a computer at home.

Departments should consider how accessible and comfortable each group is likely to find each engagement method to reach different participants and cater to various capacities to engage.

## Design user-friendly online engagements

Departments should ensure that online engagement methods are set up to make it easy for the people they want to participate and provide feedback. For example, if the department wants participants to read information before providing their viewpoints, it may be better to share short paragraphs or videos before questions, instead of long documents.

## Design inclusive virtual engagements

When selecting and implementing virtual engagement technologies, departments will need to ensure these tools enable inclusion and meet accessibility requirements. For example, some remote communities may not have reliable access to internet, but they may have facilities that people can use to participate in virtual engagements as a group, or at scheduled times throughout a day.

Departments should also consider their engagement objectives and community preferences for technology to try to reduce barriers to participation.

## Increase inclusion during hybrid virtual and offline engagement

If departments use virtual engagement technologies to enable participation in offline engagements, they should also consider how people online will participate, compared to people offline.

These considerations should include whether people have the same opportunity to:

* see information, speakers, and people in the room
* speak, ask questions, and provide feedback
* participate in activities.

### Provide equitable opportunities to provide feedback and participate in activities

It is also important to consider how best to group participants during virtual and hybrid engagements. For example, it is usual to assign participants to virtual groups and in-person groups. However, it may be beneficial to mix up groups of participants rather than having people speak to the same group members throughout the whole activity.

### Use online engagement technologies during virtual and offline engagement

Departments are encouraged to use online engagement technologies during virtual and hybrid engagements. This can increase the accessibility of both online and virtual engagement and make participation in the process more equitable. It also ensures feedback is collected in digital formats.

## Limit barriers to participation

Community engagement processes should be designed to meet engagement objectives while considering the user experience and whether the methods used will create barriers to participation.

For example, some people may be less likely to participate if they are required to sign into an online engagement technology before they can share their feedback.

Some common barriers limiting useful participation include:

* the length and depth of engagement
* fear of government surveillance
* fear of criticism
* a lack of trust, or indifference.

In an ideal world, everyone who participated in an engagement process would read the information provided before they submitted feedback. The reality is that most people have other commitments, family, work, and hobbies that reduce their capacity to engage.

Departments should consider the commitment they are asking participants to make when planning their engagement objectives and methods.

To cater to varying capacities to engage, try these ways to encourage participation:

* engage early, before consultation
* invite people to sign up for updates
* share a summary of the policy document, with links to more information
* provide information in various formats e.g. include a series of short videos
* provide participation options
* keep surveys short, and limit mandatory questions
* split the policy document into small pieces of content people can quickly read and respond to
* only collect the data needed to meet the engagement objective.

Currently there is no single online engagement technology or single sign-in option for people engaging with the Queensland Government. This means people who participate in community engagement processes may be asked to provide their information more than once and it is not always clear to participants which department is engaging with them.

Not having a single online engagement technology or sign-in option also means that data collected through community engagement is retained by individual departments and not shared across Queensland Government without the consent of the participant. This situation should be explained to participants to reduce concerns about the use of their data, which can create a barrier to participation.

## Identifying unique participants

Sometimes a department may need to identify participants, or the number of participants involved, to meet its engagement objectives.

In this situation, participants should be advised upfront why they need to identify themselves. Understanding why can help them to understand the importance of this engagement and decide whether to engage in the activity.

Departments will need to manage participants’ personal information in accordance with their obligations under the Information Privacy Act 2009 and applicable [privacy principles](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles).

## Anonymous participation

If the identity of participants is not needed to ensure the integrity of the community engagement process, departments may choose to offer the option to participate anonymously.

However, departments should be aware that [anonymous feedback may contain](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles/collection/surveys-and-the-privacy-principles) personal information that needs to be managed appropriately under the Information Privacy Act 2009.

## Fear of criticism

When people’s viewpoints are published online, they are open to debate.

If dialogue is an objective of an online community engagement process, departments will need to:

* publish a moderation policy
* state whether someone will facilitate the discussion and how they will respond to feedback
* nominate moderators or facilitators of the discussion.

A moderator or facilitator can be a team or an individual. Some engagement technologies also offer automated moderation. Departments are encouraged to use these tools and to have a staff member regularly check comments to ensure the moderation policy is being adhered to.

Online facilitation is usually done by a trained community manager or facilitator. Having an online facilitator humanises online engagement and helps to ensure a standard of participation. This can make the process feel safer for people who might otherwise feel less comfortable sharing their viewpoint.

## Lack of trust and indifference

Before participating in an engagement, a person must determine whether their participation in the engagement participation is worthwhile. A potential participant in an engagement is likely to assess whether the engagement is a good investment of their time, whether anyone is listening and if their participation may make a difference.

Where a participant feels that their feedback will be received, acknowledged and considered, they are more likely to participate in engagement activities.

Taking a more personalised approach to community engagement can help to overcome this barrier to engagement.

## Who is listening to feedback and considering it?

Departments should consider letting participants know that a team, or person, like a community engagement manager is listening to feedback. This information can be included in an acknowledgment, or email signature, or used online during online engagement to encourage people to provide feedback.

It may also be appropriate to nominate decision-makers such as an executive or a Minister to provide a statement about their commitment to reading engagement reports.

# Effectively manage and acknowledge feedback received through community engagement

Advice in this section supports policy requirement 3.

The Queensland Government values community feedback as a strategic asset and source of information for policy and decision-making.

## Collecting feedback

Departments will need to manage all feedback collected through the community engagement process in accordance with the:

* [Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld)](https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2009-014)
* [Right to Information Act 2009 (Qld)](https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2009-013)
* [Information access and use policy (IS33)](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/information-access-and-use-policy-is33)
* [Information security policy (IS18:2018)](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/information-security-policy-is18-2018)
* [Information asset custodianship policy (IS44)](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/information-asset-custodianship-policy-is44)
* [Records governance policy](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/information-asset-custodianship-policy-is44).

### Feedback and personal data

Participants in community engagement processes must be informed if their personal information is being collected, by way of a [collection notice complying with the requirements of the privacy principles](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles/collection/collection-notices) under the Information Privacy Act 2009. Consent or agreement from participants may also be required, depending on relevant circumstances. Refer to requirement 5 of the policy for more information.

Departments should bear in mind that participant feedback may be subject to disclosure under the Right to Information Act 2009 (Qld) and the information access provisions of the Information Privacy Act 2009 (Qld) and include advice to this effect in any collection notice to potential participants.

### Use technology to collect and manage feedback

Departments are encouraged to collect all feedback in digital formats, including feedback provided while engaging offline. Using technology to collect data while engaging with someone in-person ensures the quality and integrity of information collected (particularly if devices are used by participants) and shows them that their feedback is valued.

Collecting feedback in digital formats also makes it easier to manage, analyse, report and inform participants about how it will be used.

Departments must ensure that their use of any engagement technology complies with applicable statutory obligations. The Information Privacy Act 2009, for example, imposes conditions on the overseas transfer of personal information, which may be relevant where an engagement technology is hosted or stores information outside Australia.

Departments using the services of third-party suppliers or consultants to collect, handle or manage personal information during a community engagement process should also be mindful of their obligations under the Information Privacy Act 2009 to [take all reasonable steps to bind contracted service providers](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles/contracted-service-providers/contracts-and-other-agreements).

## Acknowledging feedback

When a department receives feedback, it must acknowledge receipt. This includes all digital forms of feedback, including submissions, feedback collected through online and virtual engagement technologies, and feedback recorded during offline community engagement activities.

Where possible, feedback should be acknowledged at the time of receipt through online methods and directly after offline engagements. Receipt may include a confirmation receipt notice or an email acknowledgement if the person providing feedback shares their email address during the community engagement process. In person acknowledgement is acceptable if contact details are not provided by the participant.

## Analysing feedback

Departments should inform participants how various forms of feedback will be used during analysis. For example, comments on social media may be collected with screenshots of the social media post added to a report but this data may not be analysed alongside submissions or responses to surveys.

Departments are encouraged to consider how they will analyse and report qualitative data and whether they will use technology that might support analysis. For example, whether technology will be used to analyse sentiment, identify frequently occurring words, and help the policy team identify key themes in open text responses. These techniques should be qualified and clearly communicated to participants, and decision makers receiving feedback reports. Effort should be made to ensure there is no bias when analysing data.

If multiple methods and technologies are used to collect feedback, it may be necessary for departments to consolidate various sources of feedback for analysis and remove duplicate data.

## Reporting feedback

After an engagement process, all feedback received must be collated, analysed, and reported for consideration in the policy and decision-making process and an engagement report summarising the findings of engagement. This report is to be published and made available on the agency website and the Queensland Government website. Internal reporting is also fundamental to the community engagement process. Internal reports may be generated progressively throughout a policy and decision-making process or at the end of the community engagement. Policy teams should ask their executive, and if necessary, the Minister and Cabinet, what feedback they would like and when they would like reports and account for the responses in the way they collect, analyse and report feedback.

## Storing feedback

All data collected through community engagement must be retained and stored by departments for a set time in accordance with the [General retention and disposal schedule](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/recordkeeping-and-information-management/recordkeeping/disposal-of-records/search-for-a-retention-and-disposal-schedule/general-retention-and-disposal-schedule-grds) issued by Queensland State Archives.

## Sharing feedback

If participants have provided consent, it may also be appropriate to publish submissions and share feedback with other departments. Departments must ensure however, they comply with their obligations under the Information Privacy Act 2009 prior to disclosing, sharing or publishing any personal information.

### Publishing submissions

If the department intends to publish submissions, or quotes from submissions, they must inform participants before collecting this information, including by way of an [appropriately worded collection notice](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles/collection/collection-notices) if information to be published includes personal information. They should be offered the option to remove their name or contact information before submissions are published.

### Sharing feedback with another department

Sometimes feedback is relevant to another department apart from the department who collected it. The [Information access and use policy (IS33)](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/information-access-and-use-policy-is33) encourages the exchange of government information with other government entities where there is a business need.

Departments are required to comply with their obligations under the Information Privacy Act 2009 prior to sharing personal information with another department. If a participant has provided consent for their data to be shared with another department, the department sharing the data should consider whether the feedback can be de-identified, or whether it may be necessary for another department to contact the participant.

## Responding to feedback

Departments may also decide to respond to feedback.

A response can be:

* direct, or general, on online forums or social media
* personalised, if the participant has provided consent to contact them
* in real time, during virtual, hybrid and in-person events
* a general update about the policy and decision-making process
* an engagement report—see policy requirement 4 for more information
* indirect, as an update to a set of commonly asked questions.

### Responding to feedback on online forums

If the department is using an online forum, it will need to have a policy and procedure for how comments will be moderated, and the kind of feedback to which the department will respond.

### Responding to feedback shared on social media

When people comment, tag an account, or message an account directly through social media they expect a response.

The Queensland Government’s social media policy and guidelines apply when departments interact with customers on social media. The social media guideline also highlights the importance of appropriately resourcing this type of engagement.

Departments should have their own social media policies and procedures and communicate what is reasonable regarding responsiveness to followers of their social media account. An automated message acknowledging receipt of a direct message can also be set up for use outside business hours.

It is recommended that departments acknowledge comments on social media posts related to a community engagement process encouraging users to use online engagement methods to provide feedback.

### ‘Closing the loop’

When providing feedback participants should be asked if they would like the department to contact them about the policy-making process, or their feedback. Then, at the end of an engagement process, departments should ‘close the loop’ with participants who have provided this consent.

### Updating participants about the process

As a minimum, departments should email a copy, or link to the engagement report to all participants who request updates about the process to close the loop.

Departments are also encouraged to provide regular emails to participants who request updates about the process.

### Contacting participants about their feedback

If a participant has said that the department can contact them about their feedback, and provided consent, the departments may contact them directly to close the loop. This can be especially helpful if the participant has raised something in their feedback that should be addressed directly, or if departmental staff would like to confirm information.

Some engagement technologies also allow participants to create their own online engagement profile and make it easy to provide automated personalised responses to participants at the end of the process.

# Publish engagement findings

Advice in this section supports policy requirement 4.

To meet this requirement, the engagement report should include information about:

* the effectiveness of the engagement
* the findings of the engagement.

Generating and publishing a report at the end of community engagement makes the process more transparent and demonstrates Queensland Government’s commitment to effective and inclusive engagement.

Where an engagement activity or project has multiple phases, departments may also consider publishing findings at the end of each phase, as well as at the end.

## Reporting on the effectiveness of engagement

Departments should restate their engagement objectives and demonstrate how, and whether, they were met through the engagement process.

The engagement report should include:

* engagement activities—how the department promoted engagement and encouraged participation and feedback
* activity metrics—how many people visited engagement webpages and online engagement platforms, and created profiles or logged in
* participation metrics—how many people registered and participated, and who participated (depending on the identity data gathered)
* feedback—how many people provided feedback, how much feedback was received, and how this feedback was provided.

## Reporting engagement findings

In their engagement reports, departments should restate the purpose of the engagement and the questions they asked.

When sharing engagement findings, each engagement report should also include some, or all of the following information:

* overall sentiment toward the policy being developed, and each of the changes being proposed
* the top three issues raised by respondents
* how people responded to the questions asked
* quantitative data showing the various types of feedback from respondents
* quotes from participants, highlighting different viewpoints, if open text questions were used.

Departments should also consider whether they will respond to these engagement findings in the public engagement report.

# Protect the integrity of the community engagement process and the privacy, confidentiality, and safety of participants.

Advice in this section supports policy requirement 5.

## Protecting the integrity of digital community engagement process

Using technology and collecting personal data are necessary for effective digital community engagement, but the risks must be managed to maintain the integrity of the process.

Departments undertake engagement to improve the transparency of policy making and examine different viewpoints before providing their advice to government. Occasionally these processes attract significant public attention, and sometimes people feel so enthusiastic about their perspective that they try to game, hack, or derail the engagement processes.

Departments are responsible for managing these risks to the integrity of the community engagement process.

### Managing risks when using technology for engagement

Departments will need to assess the technologies being used and reduce the risk of cyber security attacks, or the risk that the participants might try to ‘game the process’. For example, a participant might pretend to be multiple people as an attempt to influence the findings of an engagement process.

Departments should implement risk mitigation measures to deter the intentional manipulation of results. These measures can include, but are not limited to:

* the design and planning of the engagement process
* including a reCAPTCHA field to provide protection from spam and robot submissions
* implementing a time-out feature to prevent multiple submissions being made within a short period of time
* users being required to accept an acceptable use policy before they can submit their responses
* inclusion of a mandatory text field (minimum 30 characters) in all surveys to help agencies determine whether multiple identical responses have been submitted.

While mitigation steps can and should be considered, there is no way (without significantly limiting participation) to guarantee that no manipulation or gaming has occurred. This should not be a deterrent to engagement, but rather a consideration when planning and reviewing engagement methods and outcomes.

Departments should nominate an accountable officer to maintain the security assurance of these systems, particularly systems used to manage feedback and personal data collected through engagement.

When using engagement technologies, where possible/appropriate departments should:

* restrict access to skilled officers
* ensure computers and devices have up-to-date operating systems, software, browsers and security suites
* devices that can be lost or stolen (phones, tablets, laptops) should have remote tracking and wiping software installed where possible.

The [Queensland Government Cyber Security Unit](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/cyber-security) can provide more information.

## Protect the privacy of participants

Departments are responsible for ensuring participants’ data is managed in accordance with the Queensland Government’s privacy, information, and records management requirements including the Information Privacy Act 2009 and the [Information security policy (IS18:2018](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/qgea-policies-standards-and-guidelines/information-security-policy-is18-2018)).

Departments are encouraged to name a data custodian for feedback gathered through each engagement process to ensure that personal data is protected.

### Notifying participants about data collection

Departments need to map out all potential uses and disclosures of data and, where this data comprises personal information, inform participants about all uses and disclosures in a [collection notice complying with the requirements of the privacy principles in the Information Privacy Act 2009](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles/collection/collection-notices). For example, what the department intends to do with personal information after collection, and where a department:

* proposes to take and use photos or video recorded during events
* would like to contact the participant later
* wants to publish submissions, or quotes from feedback.

The collection notice should also reference the department’s privacy policy.

### Seeking consent to use data

Departments will need to collect consent from participants if they:

* take and use photos or video recorded during events
* would like to contact the participant later
* want to publish submissions, or quotes from feedback.

Departments may also need to consider whether they need to obtain consent or agreement from participants, for example, where the Department proposes to use a digital engagement or survey platform, which may involve the overseas transfer of personal information regulated by the Information Privacy Act 2009.

### Privacy impact assessments and management procedures

It is highly recommended that departments also conduct a privacy impact assessment prior to commencing a community engagement process and use it to develop clear procedures for the management of data collected through community engagement.

These procedures should be detailed in the collection notice provided to participants with consent sought as required. Departments are also encouraged to review this privacy impact assessment after all feedback has been received, particularly if a third party is used to collect or analyse the data.

The Office of the Information Commissioner’s [guide to privacy impact assessments](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles/privacy-compliance/overview-privacy-impact-assessment-process) provides more information.

### Storage of engagement data

When using technologies for engagement, departments will need to ensure that they understand which country and companies are hosting this data and their data storage policies and procedures , and bear in mind any restrictions or conditions that may apply such [as limitations on overseas transfers of personal information](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles/transferring-personal-information-out-of-australia/sending-personal-information-out-of-australia) contained in the Information Privacy Act 2009.

Careful attention should be given when exporting data from engagements, and important data stored between technologies for engagement. It is not acceptable for government staff to store data on their desktops or as downloads, or for data to be stored and used by consultants after an engagement has closed.

## Protecting confidentiality

If a participant has stated that they do not want their identity to be known, it is the department’s responsibility to de-identify that feedback.

This is essential when publishing submissions or using data such as quotes provided in feedback in engagement reports. De-identification can require more than just removing the participant’s name and contact details from a spreadsheet or database or redacting it when publishing a submission.

All feedback collected should be reviewed to ensure that open text responses do not contain information that reveals the respondent's identity, of the identity of any other people who have not provided consent to be identified.

All data that is stored after an engagement should be de-identified to ensure that this confidentiality is retained.

Departments should ensure that third party providers also adhere to these conditions of collection when storing personal data.

The Office of Information Commissioner’s [guideline for privacy and de-identification](https://www.oic.qld.gov.au/guidelines/for-government/guidelines-privacy-principles/anonymity/privacy-and-de-identification) provides more information.

## Protecting safety

Departments should do everything within their power to ensure that participant and staff safety is accounted for when managing community engagement processes.

When it comes to digital engagement this means:

* moderating online forums and providing appropriate moderation training to departmental staff
* ensuring staff understand the responsibilities of the roles that they are being asked to perform and provide consent when their personal data is used during community engagement
* if participants are abusive or offensive during community engagement, that appropriate care and support is given to staff to ensure their wellbeing
* protecting privacy.

However, departments have limited control over how participants behave during community engagements and whether they are using their digital devices to film, take photos or record staff and other participants in engagements.

Where staff are asked to perform public facing roles, or if their personal data is to be shared during a community engagement process, this request will need to be made in writing by their manager and written consent provided by staff. Departments should also put procedures in place to ensure the safety of staff during community engagement, and to address issues that may arise after an engagement.

# Copyright

Digital community engagement guideline

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