



Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada

Guidelines on public engagement 2023



Health Canada is the federal department responsible for helping the people of Canada maintain and improve their health. Health Canada is committed to improving the lives of all of Canada's people and to making this country's population among the healthiest in the world as measured by longevity, lifestyle and effective use of the public health care system.

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Overview

Introduction

These guidelines provide staff at Health Canada (HC) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) with detailed information and guidance on how to execute public engagement activities.

Public engagement is an important part of the democratic process and allows HC and PHAC to fulfill key responsibilities. It enables us to:

- foster information exchange and knowledge sharing to improve the understanding of health issues and build relationships among interested and affected parties
- facilitate discussions between HC and PHAC and individuals, groups and organizations, external to the Government of Canada, to provide opportunities to shape government policies, programs, services and regulatory initiatives
- consider the feedback and perspectives of individuals and groups in the development or assessment of government policies, programs, services and regulatory initiatives in order to inform decisions
- enable informed decision-making that ultimately fulfills the mandates of HC and PHAC and improves the health and safety of Canadians

Our Open Government initiative is focused on making government more accessible to everyone, including providing opportunities for citizens to participate in decision-making processes. Public engagement processes, including public consultations, are designed to allow the public and stakeholders to participate in conversations and be heard. Online and virtual engagement has changed the nature and scope of how we engage the public. The use of social media channels, as well as online and virtual engagement tools provide new ways for people in Canada to learn about health issues and to interact with us. This shift offers expanding opportunities for engagement and also creates expectations that we will engage more widely.

All people in Canada, and the groups and organizations that represent them, have an interest in matters of health. As a result, HC and PHAC conduct a broad range of public engagement activities on a variety of health issues. The input obtained during public engagement guides our discussions and informs our decision-making on policy and program development, service delivery, and statutory and regulatory initiatives.

The guidelines reflect the commitment to our responsibilities as outlined in the:

- Cabinet Directive on Regulation (section 4.1)
- Policy on Communications and Federal Identity
- Aboriginal Consultation and Accommodation - Updated Guidelines for Federal Officials to Fulfill the Duty to Consult

The Privy Council Office (PCO) provides oversight and guidance on public engagement practices across the Government of Canada. The Head of Communications for each federal department or agency is responsible for the oversight of public engagement within their

institutions (Treasury Board Directive on the Management of Communications). The Public Engagement Unit (cpab.consultations-dgcap@hc-sc.gc.ca), Communications and Public Affairs Branch (CPAB), provides advice and support on all aspects of public engagement at HC and PHAC. (See CPAB roles and responsibilities: Services to support public engagement).

Purpose

The guidelines aim to strengthen public engagement at HC and PHAC by providing staff with guidance that:

- promotes effectiveness and best practices
- allows for flexibility to address varying needs for conducting engagement

The guidelines also serve to foster a culture of public engagement across both organizations as we continue to enhance our engagement practices and leverage new technologies and innovative opportunities to engage with people in Canada.

The guidelines include:

- a definition, continuum and principles of public engagement
- a step-by-step process guide to help staff plan, develop products, implement, analyze, report on and evaluate public engagement activities

We encourage staff to use the guidelines whenever they undertake these activities.

Scope

The guidelines provide guidance to staff on how to conduct effective and consistent public engagement. It's important to understand the differences between public engagement and public opinion research (POR). Public engagement is an activity involving a two-way discussion and exchange of information. Public opinion research is an environmental analysis activity where the objective is one-way data collection of opinions, attitudes, perceptions, judgments, feelings, ideas, reactions or views.

If the activity that is to be undertaken is POR, the approach is different than that for public engagement as per the Directive on the Management of Communications and is out of the scope of this document. Additionally, if the input that is being sought to inform decision-making is through an established external advisory body (EAB), the Health Canada Policy on External Advisory Bodies and the Public Health Agency of Canada's Policy on External Advisory Bodies will apply.

The guidelines can also be used to guide discussions and engagement activities with Indigenous groups, including First Nations, Inuit, Métis and their respective organizations. In these cases, it is important to distinguish between:

- discussion and engagement activities which take place for statutory, policy and good governance reasons and that are described in these Guidelines, and
- consultations which the Crown is obligated to undertake pursuant to the common law duty to consult under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* ("duty to consult").

- The duty to consult isn't the subject of these guidelines, and references to "consultation" elsewhere in these guidelines aren't meant to refer to the duty to consult.

The duty to consult doesn't apply in every case and only arises when there is proposed Crown conduct that could have an adverse impact on potential or established Indigenous or treaty rights (which rights are or would be recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*). In a case where the duty to consult may be in question, advice should be sought from Legal Services. If the duty to consult may apply, HC and PHAC may seek assistance from Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC). Where the duty to consult is confirmed, the process set out in the Aboriginal Consultation and Accommodation - Updated Guidelines for Federal Officials to Fulfill the Duty to Consult will apply.

We are committed to:

- supporting greater inclusion and diversity in public engagement processes
- taking action to ensure that the voices and experiences of marginalized and under-represented communities are represented, considered and included

To assist departments and agencies to implement and better integrate gender-based analysis plus (GBA Plus), Women and Gender Equality Canada offers guidance and resources on their [website](#). In addition, the Health Portfolio has a Sex-and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) Policy. The Health Portfolio has added "sex" to Gender-based Analysis Plus to highlight the biological (sex-based) factors that need to be considered in the health context. Both terms refer to the same analysis. This policy advances equity, diversity and inclusion, through the integration of intersectional SGBA Plus into the development, implementation and evaluation of all initiatives. At its essence, SGBA Plus recognizes the complexity of each individual and takes a "whole-person" approach to understanding how different aspects of a person's identity can interact to affect their experience of a government initiative. SGBA Plus promotes an awareness of biases at both the individual and institutional level and underscores the importance of engaging early and throughout the policy lifecycle to ensure government initiatives reflect the diversity and complexity of all people living in Canada.

Definition of public engagement

Public engagement activities vary in how they are conducted, but most will include the key elements outlined in the following definition.

Planned two-way discussions with individuals, organizations or groups, external to the Government of Canada, designed to gather input, clarify information and foster understanding among those interested and affected by an issue, decision or action and to better inform HC and PHAC's decision-making.

Public engagement participants can include, for example:

- 2SLGBTQI+ community
- academics
- business and industry
- caregivers
- consumers and consumer groups

- general public
- health care providers
- Indigenous Peoples and groups
- international-multilateral organizations
- non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations
- other government departments
- parents
- patients and patient groups
- persons with disabilities
- people with lived and living experience
- provinces and territories
- racialized communities
- regulatory and professional associations
- researchers and research organizations

Although “public engagement” and “consultation” are sometimes used interchangeably, “public engagement” has a broader meaning than “consultation,” and reflects a wider variety of interactions and outcomes. The range of engagement activities is outlined in Figure 1.

A continuum of public engagement

Public engagement may consist of a wide variety of activities that range from informing the public to engaging in dialogue. A “continuum of public engagement” shown in Figure 1 depicts 4 levels of increasing engagement including some examples of engagement approaches. The continuum outlines what is involved at each level and helps staff consider the most appropriate level(s) of engagement to use depending on the objectives. This continuum doesn’t reflect a level of engagement that’s referred to as “empower” or “partner.” The goal of empowerment and partnerships is to share decision-making. The guidelines focus on public engagement where, although there is the opportunity for involvement and influence in decision-making, the final decision rests with HC or PHAC. Therefore, the level of empowerment or partnering is beyond the scope of these guidelines.

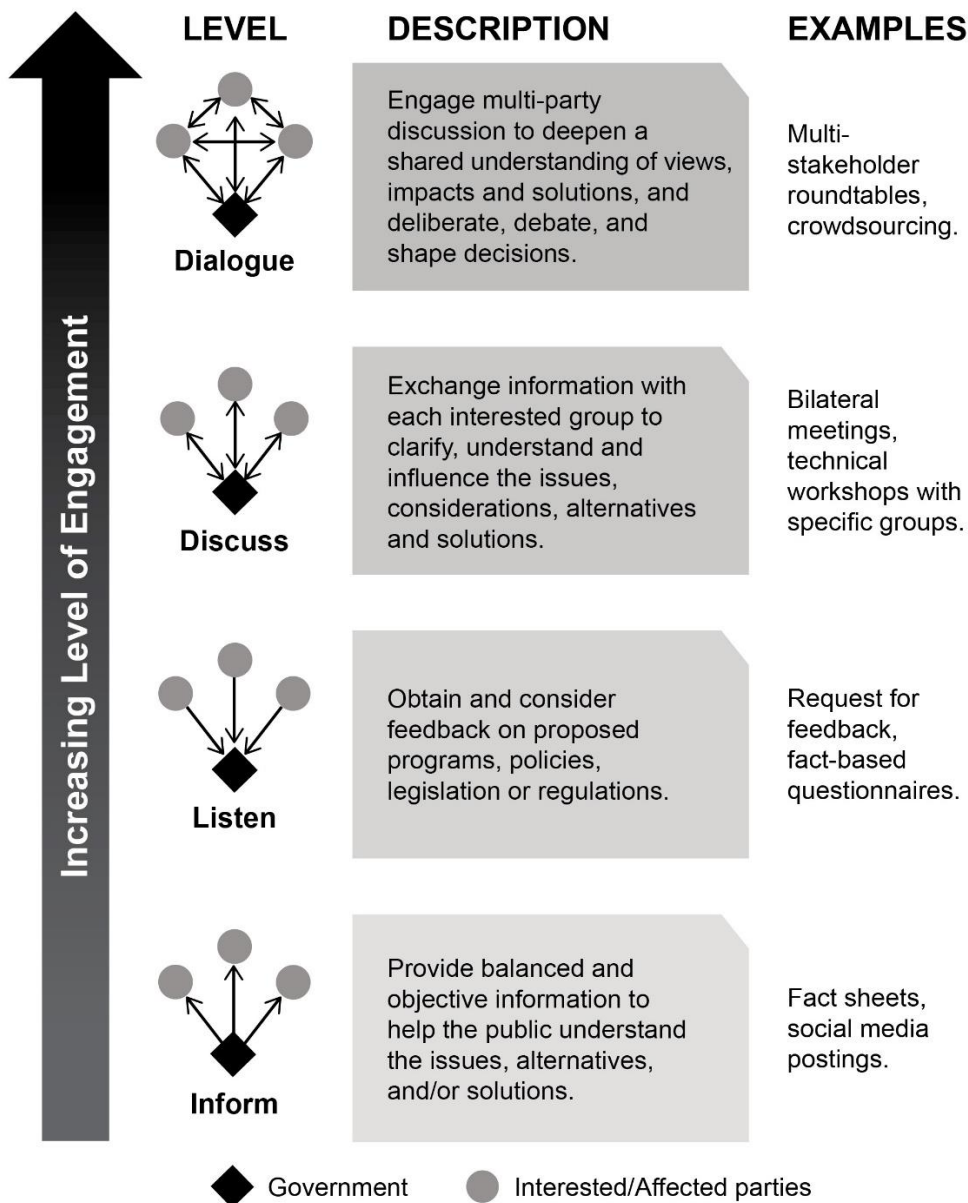
The levels of public engagement aren’t necessarily sequential. Public engagement can consist of 1 activity or a series of activities depending on the complexity of the issue, potential impact and the diversity of stakeholders who may participate.

As a general guideline, the greater the potential impact on interested and affected participants, the higher the level of engagement recommended. In addition, highly technical issues of narrow relevance to informed stakeholders may require a focused and detailed engagement at the dialogue level. Issues that have the potential to impact a broad range of stakeholders, and have diverging points of interest, may require larger engagement activities to inform, listen and discuss.

Different types of participants may require different levels of engagement. While some groups may be ready and willing to engage in dialogue with each other, others may need more information first or prefer simply to communicate their views directly to decision-makers. Before

planning your public engagement approach, it's important to undertake an assessment of the individuals and organizations who have a stake in the issue, including their knowledge of the issue and preferred methods of engagement. Identify and map key stakeholders in order to plan public engagement approaches appropriate for each audience.

Figure 1. A Continuum of public engagement



Principles of public engagement

The guidelines are based on the principles that guide our engagement activities, ensuring that they are meaningful, effective and consistent. These principles are fundamental to establishing successful public engagement.

Open and inclusive: Engagement activities are designed and promoted to provide the opportunity for all interested participants to express their views and have their input considered. Engagement activities are available to participants through a variety of channels and formats to ensure there are no barriers to participation. Feedback is sought from a wide variety of groups, including specific populations (for example, racialized communities, 2SLGBTQI+, persons with disabilities), across gender and age groups, official language minority communities, and from a variety of geographic locations.

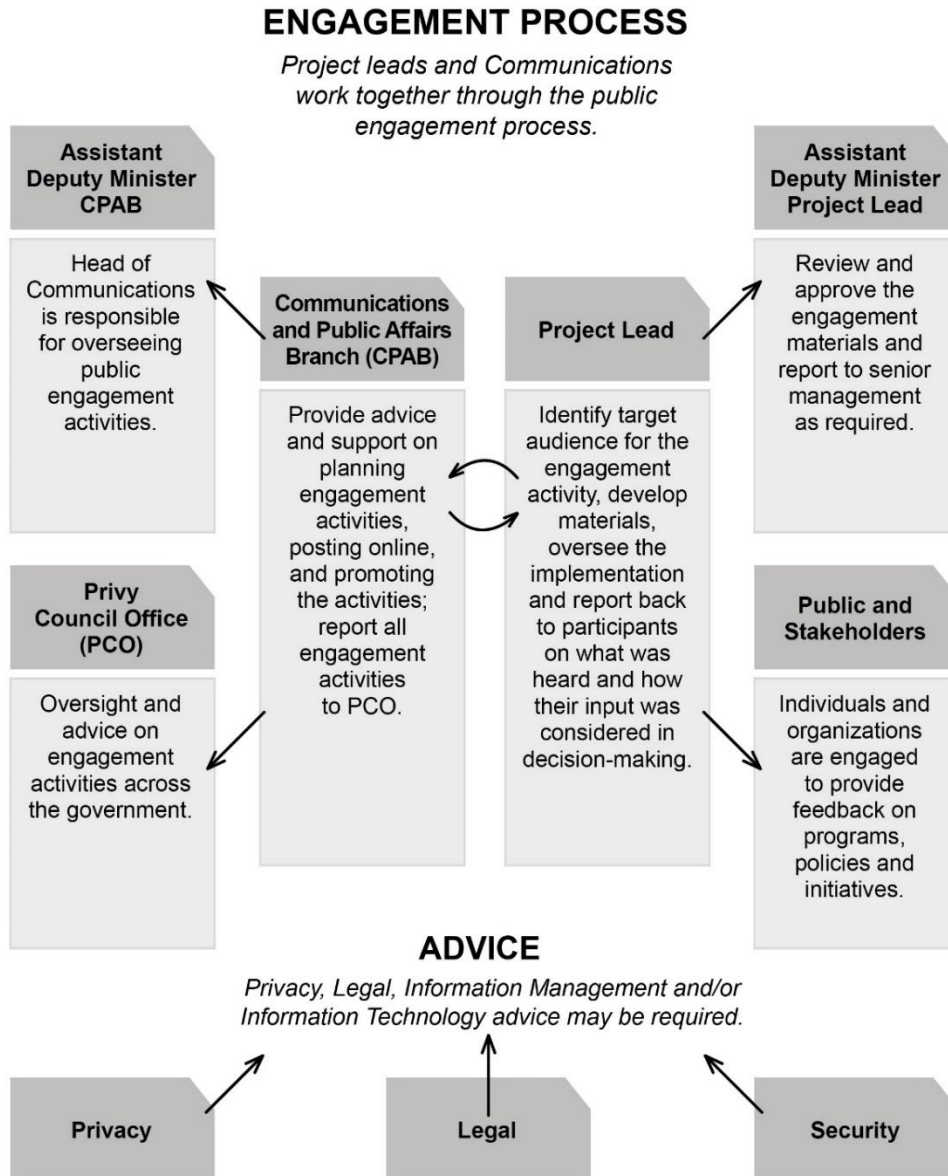
Timely and transparent: The purpose, scope and objective(s) of engagement activities should be clearly communicated and planned with adequate timelines to provide participants with sufficient time to participate. The results of engagement activities, and how input was considered in decision-making, should be made available to participants through different channels, in easy to access formats, and in a timely manner.

Relevant and responsive: Engagement activities are participant-focussed. The materials developed to facilitate engagement activities are appropriate to meet the objectives. This may involve:

- adapting the approach based on feedback from participants in the early stages of engagement activities
- regularly applying best practices and lessons learned to public engagement planning and implementation

Partners in public engagement

Figure 2. Partners in public engagement

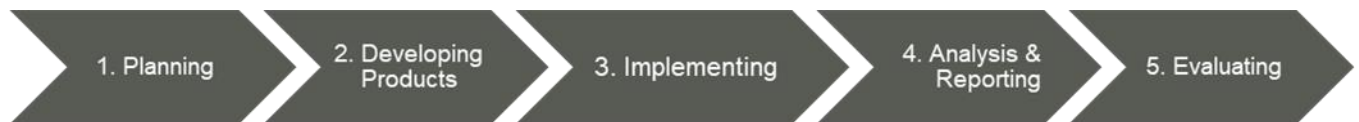


Public engagement process

Public engagement process

A public engagement process generally involves 5 main steps including planning, developing products, implementing, analysis and reporting, and evaluating. This process guide describes the 5 steps, including key questions and considerations as well as best practices, when conducting an engagement activity.

Figure 3. 5 steps of public engagement



Engagement activities vary and the process needs to be flexible in order to respond and adapt each engagement activity to changing circumstances such as new information or emerging priorities.

Step 1: Planning

Key questions:

- What is the purpose of engagement?
- Have the appropriate participants been identified?
- Are there important timelines to consider?
- What is the most appropriate engagement approach?
- How will feedback be analyzed and considered in the decision-making process?
- Are there funds available to support this activity?

1.1 Identify the key issue

Planning is the most important step in the public engagement process. It's important to begin with a clear understanding of the policy, program, service or regulatory initiative that you are seeking to engage on with the public and stakeholders.

Consider the following questions when identifying the key issue:

- What is the nature and scope of the issue?
- Is there a decision to be made or an action to be taken?
- What are the motivating factors for the decision to engage the public (for example, information sharing, policy development, and statutory or regulatory requirements)?

Defining the key issue will allow you to decide whether a public engagement activity is appropriate or required and, if so, why. Some common triggers for public engagement include:

- to inform program or policy development

- to contribute to key government priorities or commitments
- to fulfill statutory and regulatory initiatives or requirements
- to foster information exchange, knowledge sharing or relationship building

1.2 Understand the context

Understanding the broader contextual environment will help to define the scope of the engagement process and the type of approach needed. Examining the background and context helps to identify strategic considerations, opportunities and risks that might affect the engagement activity. Some questions to consider include:

- Is there a departmental or agency requirement or commitment to engage with the public (or stakeholders) on this issue?
- What is the level of the public's knowledge and understanding of the issue?
- What is the level of public and media interest and potential participant reactions (that is, what they may propose, their perspectives on the issue, and potential sources of conflict)?
- Are there potential impacts and risks associated with the issue?
- Are there regional, political, social, economic, Indigenous and international factors to take into account?

1.3 Clearly define the purpose, objectives and expected outcomes

Successful public engagement requires a clear definition of purpose, objectives and expected outcomes.

The **purpose** should set out the problem or issue that needs to be addressed. It is a broad, brief statement of intent that provides an overarching vision for the engagement. Some key questions to help you determine the purpose include:

- Why are you engaging with the public?
- Will the input be used to inform the development of a policy, program or regulation?
- What change(s) do you anticipate as a result of the engagement?

Objectives are specific strategies or steps taken to achieve the purpose and should be timely, clear, realistic, relevant and measurable. They provide focus to the engagement activity and a basis upon which to evaluate the activity at its completion. Some key questions to help you determine the objectives include:

- What are you trying to achieve by engaging with the public?
- What information and feedback do you need to know, and why?
- How will the feedback be analyzed and used to achieve the purpose?

Outcomes are what you aim to achieve with the engagement activity. They need to be realistic, appropriate to the issue, and have a clear link to the purpose and objectives.

1.4 Identify the budget and resources available

During this step you determine if there are any potential costs associated with the public engagement and plan a budget accordingly. It's important to determine this early so that you can make adjustments if necessary. The costs and resources required will vary for each

engagement activity depending on your needs and engagement approach. Some items to consider include:

- development of engagement documents and translation
- remuneration or honoraria for participants, as needed
- in-house or third-party support for:
 - moderation or facilitation services
 - leveraging available online and virtual engagement tools and platforms (for example, M365, Webex and Zoom)
 - analysis or reporting

In-person events come with a number of additional expenses:

- logistical arrangements such as rental of venue, meeting rooms and technical needs (for example, audio visual, simultaneous interpretation, IT equipment)
- printing of documents, tent cards, name badges and signage
- hospitality (for example, meals, refreshments)
- travel and accommodation for participants or staff, if required

In addition to the budget available, you will need to identify how much staff time may be allocated to the engagement activity, so that you can have a full understanding of the resources required.

Obtaining approvals for any travel and hospitality may be necessary. For information on the requirements and approvals for travel and hospitality, consult the Government of Canada's Directive on Travel, Hospitality, and Conference and Event Expenditures and contact your branch financial authority for guidance.

See step 1.9 (Plan the logistics for in-person engagement) and step 1.10 (Plan the logistics for online or virtual engagement) for further information on logistical arrangements.

1.5 Initiate public engagement support and services

Public engagement activities require collaboration and coordination between the relevant areas of the department and the agency. The program or policy area initiating the engagement activity is the project lead. Early in the planning stage, the project lead should contact the Public Engagement Unit (cpab.consultations-dgcap@hc-sc.gc.ca) within the Communications and Public Affairs Branch (CPAB) to inform them of the activity and to obtain guidance, advice and support as needed (see Figure 2 Partners in public engagement). Depending on the activity and the specific needs, the relevant functional specialists (Privacy or Legal Services) can also be contacted for assistance if required.

In addition to CPAB's Public Engagement Unit, the branch provides a range of services you may access to support the implementation of your public engagement activities. Depending on the scale and intended reach of your public engagement activity, you may require the services of the Media Relations and Social Media teams, Creative Services, Regional Communications and Digital Communications. The strategic communications advisor for your branch serves as your first point of contact for accessing these services and can assist you in coordinating the various elements for the roll-out of the initiative.

See [Services to support public engagement](#) for a list of CPAB areas that will guide and support your engagement activities.

Some public engagement issues (that is, broad horizontal issues impacting multiple departments) will require or benefit from coordination with other government departments or agencies and they should be engaged early in the planning stage.

1.6 Identify the target audience

For effective engagement to occur, it's important to identify and engage the individuals, groups and organizations that are interested in and affected by the policy, program, regulation or service under discussion. These are the individuals and groups who will make a meaningful contribution to the engagement activity.

Some questions to ask when identifying the target audience include:

- Who is directly interested in or affected by the issue, whether economically, socially or otherwise?
- How informed on the issue are various potential participants and groups?
- Are there factors such as age, gender, geography, ethnicity or language, which are especially important in this issue?

When designing the engagement process, it's important to ensure open, transparent and inclusive participation. The identification of potential participants should not only involve individuals or groups known to have a general interest in the issue, but it should also include those who could potentially influence the outcome or decision either directly or indirectly. You should seek input from participants with a broad range of perspectives and experiences, including diverse interest groups. You should pay attention to reducing barriers to participation through accommodation and support to participants so as to promote greater accessibility and demonstrate openness and inclusiveness.

When engaging people with lived and living experience or specific target populations, it's important to do your research and be sure your verbal and written communication, engagement materials and approaches are appropriate, non-stigmatizing, and conducive to active participation.

The [Consultation and Stakeholder Information Management System \(CSIMS\)](#) is a tool that staff can use when planning consultation and engagement activities. It is a web-based system that combines a public-facing stakeholder registry with a central repository of information about current and past HC and PHAC public engagement activities. Staff who are planning engagement activities can use the system to help plan their activity, search for potential participants, and communicate information to them. For further information and to set up your user account contact the CSIMS team at CSIMS-External@hc-sc.gc.ca.

1.7 Establish timelines

The timelines for the activity, including start and end dates and any important deadlines, need to be communicated clearly. Adequate timelines should be given to allow participants reasonable time to prepare, provide input and, in some cases, consult others within their organizations. Time needs to be allotted for HC and PHAC to consider the input received in the decision-making process.

The time required to undertake an engagement activity depends on a number of factors including the approach selected and the complexity of the input required from participants.

Many engagement activities have a fixed timeline or a deadline established by legislation, regulations, or previous government commitments. In these cases, a key planning challenge is to allocate the available time to optimize the value of the engagement process.

Some questions to consider when establishing timelines include:

- Is there a fixed timeline or established deadline imposed by legislation, government commitments or other established agreements?
- How much time is required to consult internally and with other departments (if required), develop and finalize materials and organize logistics?
- What is the appropriate amount of time to allow for participants' input?
- How long will it take to consider the input, do analysis and report the results both internally and externally?

1.8 Choose the appropriate engagement approach

There are a variety of public engagement approaches to consider when planning your engagement activity. These approaches can include requests for general feedback via email, online questionnaires, online discussion forums, in-person discussions, and workshops. Your objectives, budget, target audience and timelines determine the best approach for the engagement activity. When considering the use of online and virtual platforms or tools, explore options available internally first as these will have been carefully vetted to ensure they meet accessibility, official language, IT and security requirements.

Useful tools at this step:

- [Figure 1. A continuum of public engagement](#)

Common Approaches to Public Engagement

Approach	Description	Benefits	Challenges
In-person discussion session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants attend a group session involving presentations and discussions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for open dialogue among participants and decision-makers. • Effective for gathering input on preliminary options or ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More costly and time-consuming than alternatives. • Subject to availability of participants at a specific time and location.
Virtual discussion session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants attend a group session involving presentations and discussions via videoconference. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for open dialogue among participants and decision-makers. • Effective for gathering input on preliminary options or ideas. • Opportunity to gain perspectives from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More difficult to build relationships with/between participants than with in-person sessions. • May be less effective than in-person alternatives in situations where there

Approach	Description	Benefits	Challenges
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participants from regional or remote areas. Minimizes resource requirements and costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is not a positive relationship with the audience.
Online interactive platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants join an online discussion forum to discuss issues and share their views with others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to gain perspectives from participants from regional or remote areas at their convenience. Flexible approach which can be designed and adapted based on objectives and adjusted throughout the engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time consuming to design, implement, moderate, and monitor. Requires planning and resources to summarize and analyze feedback.
Online questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to participate is posted online or emailed to targeted participants with a link to the questionnaire. Participants complete the questionnaire and submit it directly online. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity to gain perspectives from participants from regional or remote areas at their convenience. Flexible approach which can be designed and adapted based on objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time consuming to design, deliver and monitor. Participants cannot benefit from hearing the different perspectives of others. Requires planning and resources to summarize and analyze feedback collected.
Request for feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A draft document or proposal is posted online or emailed to target audience and participants are asked to provide general feedback by email. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost-effective way to receive detailed, meaningful feedback on drafts or proposals. Specific information can be obtained in a controlled manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants cannot benefit from hearing the different perspectives of others. Requires planning and resources to summarize and analyze feedback.
Hybrid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A combination of in-person, online, and virtual approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides the widest variety of engagement options for stakeholders, fostering diversity, inclusion and broad participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most time consuming and resource intensive as planning and execution will be required for in-person, online and virtual events/approaches.

You may need multiple engagement approaches, including hybrid, to address the needs of different participants. If there is a broad range of potential participants, or they are widely

separated geographically, you may need to design your engagement approach to ensure broad participation. For example, discussion sessions across a variety of regions can be combined with a request for written submissions via email. Alternatively, you may use different approaches for participants with subject matter expertise as opposed to those with a more general interest.

Making the information available to the participants and the public through a variety of channels in easy-to-access formats ensures the engagement activity is open, inclusive and transparent.

Using social media channels to promote the engagement activity can broaden its reach and help to ensure it is easily available to potential participants. HC and PHAC use a range of social media channels including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to communicate engagement activities.

When planning the engagement approach, consider and anticipate the type and volume of input and information that may be received. You may receive more or less feedback than you anticipated, or you may not receive the information you were seeking. Therefore, the approach for the engagement needs to be planned, monitored and adapted (as necessary) to maximize participation, ensure objectives are met and enable effective analysis.

1.9 Plan the logistics for in-person engagement

Planning an in-person public engagement activity requires many details such as arranging for the venue, transportation, accommodations, hospitality, facilitators, translation, technology requirements and accessibility. It is helpful to consult with others who have been involved with the preparation of similar engagement activities in order to gain from their experiences.

The costs to participants, the department and the agency should be minimized. For example, the location and timing of engagement activities should be selected to minimize travel for participants and staff. Identify opportunities for virtual presence or online engagement approaches to facilitate participation.

See [step 1.4 \(Identify the budget and resources available\)](#) for further information on potential expenses associated with the logistics of planning the engagement activity.

1.10 Plan the logistics for online and virtual engagement

Planning an online and virtual public engagement activity includes identifying your objectives and the target audience, and considering the type of feedback you are seeking. Then you can choose the tool and approach (meeting, webinar, discussion forum, share a story, questionnaire, etc.) to help meet your objectives. It is helpful to consult with others who have been involved with the preparation of similar engagement activities in order to learn from their experiences.

The costs to the department and the agency can be minimized by collecting feedback through the use of CPAB's online and virtual tools. Consider reaching out to CPAB early on to discuss, plan and explore options for implementing your engagement activities.

Regulatory initiatives with a public comment period (that is, *Canada Gazette*, Part I) should also be planned in collaboration with CPAB. This will ensure that you are supported in preparing to post your activity online (including the development of consultation profile pages and submitting consultation activities in CSIMS) and that the necessary communication products are developed.

See [Services to support public engagement](#) for a list of CPAB areas that will guide and support your engagement activities.

1.11 Plan for analysis, reporting and evaluating

Before the engagement activity begins, plan how the feedback received will be analyzed, considered in decision-making and reported. For example, if you are expecting a high volume of input you may need additional resources to undertake the analysis. It is also important to decide how and when to report back to participants and decision-makers, and to consider how the engagement activity will be evaluated.

When choosing the most appropriate approach for reporting back, consider:

- whether the report should be posted online for the public or sent out to participants by email
- what information should be included to demonstrate how the feedback received was considered in decision-making
- how you might be able to summarize the feedback received based on themes
- when the report should be shared

Identify what will be evaluated so that when the engagement activity ends you will be able to measure whether the objectives were met and identify any lessons learned.

See [step 5 \(Evaluating\)](#) for further information on how to plan ahead for evaluating the process and the outcomes of your engagement activities.

Step 2: Developing Products

Key questions:

- Do the engagement documents clearly outline the objectives, approach and timelines of the activity?
- Do the engagement documents present a clear and complete picture of the issue(s) to ensure participants can contribute effectively?
- Are the engagement documents available to participants through a variety of channels in easy-to-access formats?
- Are the final engagement documents and communications products provided in an accessible format, in plain and inclusive language and in both official languages?

2.1 Develop engagement activity documents

In most cases, supporting engagement documents will need to be developed prior to implementing an engagement activity. These may include backgrounders, issue papers, draft policy proposals, regulatory proposals, discussion guides, technical documents, questionnaires and online consultation profile pages. These documents should provide sufficient detail about the issue(s) so that participants can effectively contribute to the engagement activity.

Depending on the engagement document(s) being developed, relevant information can include:

- a clear statement of the objectives and the engagement approach(es)
- which issues are and are not part of the discussion

- what decisions have been made to date
- how the participant's input will be considered in decision-making

When developing documents for engagement activities, attention should be paid to the target audience to ensure there are no barriers to participation. This can be achieved by ensuring documents for the general public are:

- written in plain neutral language and avoid unnecessary technical jargon
- prepared in a manner that meets accessibility requirements
- written using inclusive, non-stigmatizing language
- provide all of the information needed to be able to participate in a meaningful way
- identified as being from the Government of Canada
- available in both official languages through a variety of channels, and in easy-to-access formats

CPAB can provide guidance, advice and support in the development of engagement documents. See [Services to support public engagement](#) for a list of CPAB areas that will guide and support your engagement activities.

2.2 Develop communication products

It may be necessary to develop communication products (for example, media lines, news releases, Qs and As, social media posts) to promote the engagement activity and prepare to respond to questions. Communication products should be developed in collaboration with CPAB in plain and inclusive language that should be easy to understand. Staff should take into account the necessary internal approval process and timelines required for these documents. Communications strategies should take into account all interested and affected organizations, groups and individuals.

See [Services to support public engagement](#) for a list of CPAB areas that will guide and support your engagement activities.

Step 3: Implementing

Key questions:

- Has the target audience been informed of the opportunity to participate in the engagement activity?
- Has the purpose and scope of the engagement been clearly communicated to participants?
- Is the information available to participants through a variety of formats, channels or tools?
- Have specific individuals been assigned to monitor, capture and preserve the input received, whether written or verbal?

3.1 Informing the public

Once the engagement activity approach has been chosen and designed and the products have been developed, the initiative can be launched. As per the [Policy on Communications and Federal Identity](#) (section 6.3) and the [Directive on the Management of Communications](#) (section

6.42), it's important to ensure that information about public engagement activities is posted on the Government of Canada's web presence so that Canadians and interested stakeholders are informed about opportunities to participate in these activities, including how and when. CPAB's Web Communications team can guide you through this process. See [Services to support public engagement](#) for a list of CPAB areas that will guide and support your engagement activities.

If the engagement activity is open to the public, it must be submitted through the [Consultation and Stakeholder Information Management System](#) (CSIMS). This ensures that stakeholders registered in CSIMS will be notified by email that there is an opportunity to participate in an engagement activity on a topic that interests them. In addition, all public engagement opportunities are published on the Government of Canada website, [Consulting with Canadians](#). The Public Engagement Unit tracks and maintains an up-to-date list of all HC and PHAC public engagement activities, which must be submitted to the Privy Council Office (PCO) to update the [Open Government Registry for consultations](#).

See [step 2.2 \(Develop communication products\)](#) for information about the development of communication products to help inform the public.

3.2 Communicate clearly with the participants

Engagement activities will be most successful when the following is clear to participants from the outset:

- the objectives and the engagement approach
- which issues are in the scope of the discussion
- which related issues or areas are not in the scope of the discussion
- what decisions have been made to date, and which decisions are to be made
- how the participant's input will be considered in decision-making

If the scope of the discussion and the options are not clearly defined, participants may spend their time discussing issues or options which are not relevant to the engagement activity. When the scope is clearly defined, organizers can more easily refocus the discussion when needed.

3.3 Monitor the activity

During implementation, your public engagement activity should be monitored to ensure it is meeting the intended objectives. Be ready to adjust course based on feedback received or to organize additional activities that consider new input or explore particular issues more deeply. This will be facilitated by building flexibility into the process. Keep a record of any suggested changes that were made to the activity in order to enable continuous improvement.

Step 4: Analysis and reporting

Key questions:

- Have I documented the details on all engagement activities (that is, approach, locations, number of participants)?
- Have I documented the feedback to demonstrate that participants have been heard?
- Have I considered how to analyze the feedback?
- How will I inform decision-makers about the results of the engagement?

- What is the best approach for sharing the report with the participants and the public?

4.1 Analyze the feedback

It is important at the planning stage (see [step 1.11, Plan for analysis, reporting and evaluating](#)) to consider the analysis and reporting requirements. The goal of the analysis is to align and summarize the feedback collected in a concise manner. The analysis should identify what was heard, themes that emerged, overall similarities or differences in feedback between types of participants and also reflect the importance placed on various issues or ideas by participants.

For smaller-scale engagement activities, it may be possible to analyze the feedback simply by reviewing it and taking notes. For larger engagement activities with more feedback, however, a systematic approach will be needed and more time will be required to manage and analyze the volume of feedback. In some cases, data analysis software tools can be used to organize and analyze feedback. It is important to ensure that the analysis is objective and balanced.

4.2 Report to decision-makers

It is important to provide decision-makers with an objective, accurate assessment of the engagement activity, including contributions by participants. Reporting formats vary widely, but the key is to provide a clear and concise picture of the most important participant concerns and positions, as well as any underlying themes, trends, or important highlights. If contentious issues are raised, they should be noted.

4.3 Report back to participants and the public

The extent of reporting back should be proportionate to the size, complexity, and potential impact of the engagement activity. A report including a brief overview of the process, a summary of the input received, how the input was/will be considered in decision-making, and an outline of next steps should be made available in a timely manner.

More comprehensive reports may include in-depth information such as replies to specific questions in a summary format, or in the case of a regulatory initiative, a Regulatory Impact Analysis Statement (RIAS).

Reporting back demonstrates openness and transparency by informing participants that their contributions were heard and considered by decision-makers. To be as open and transparent as possible, some reports may be made available to a wider audience, such as the public, by posting the report online, while others may only be shared with participants by email or by other means, as appropriate.

4.4 Ensure appropriate record keeping

All information shared or collected during an engagement activity should be documented, organized and archived. A proper strategy for tracking and archiving all records will help ensure that they are available to serve as a point of reference or lessons learned for other colleagues who may be undertaking similar engagement activities. These records will be useful in responding to information requests from senior management.

Step 5: Evaluating

Key questions:

- Was the engagement approach selected effective in addressing the purpose, objectives, budget, and target audience?
- Were the timelines adequate?
- Was a summary report completed in a timely manner?
- What should, and should not, be repeated in the future, and why?

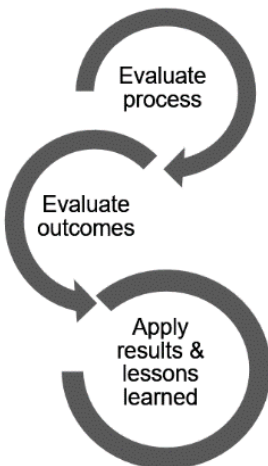
5.1 Evaluate the engagement process and outcomes

The **process** and **outcomes** of an engagement activity should be evaluated in order to determine its success and to enable continuous improvement. Ideally, during the planning phase you put some thought into how you might evaluate the activity to determine its success (see [step 1.11, Plan for analysis, reporting and evaluating](#)).

When you are evaluating the **process**, you are determining how well steps 1 to 4, that is Planning, Developing products, Implementing, and Analysis and reporting, actually worked. Some considerations include:

- whether the engagement activity was effectively planned
- whether the information was clearly communicated, and participants were able to effectively provide their input
- whether the timelines were adequate
- if a reporting back process was put into place

Figure 4. Evaluate the process and outcomes



Evaluating the **outcomes** is a more in-depth process than assessing the process. You are examining how the engagement activity impacted the decision. Some considerations include:

- whether the objectives and expected outcomes were met
- whether the necessary feedback was received
- how the feedback was considered and its impact on decision-making

5.2 Identify and apply lessons learned

Evaluation of the public engagement activities can help inform and improve future engagement plans. The assessment should examine:

- what worked, what did not work, and why
- how the engagement process was tailored for the issue and the audience
- whether resources were allocated efficiently
- how the input was considered in decision-making

Evaluation should be built into the initial planning and should be an on-going process, allowing staff to assess the effectiveness and impact of the activity throughout the engagement effort.

See [Services to support public engagement](#) for a list of CPAB areas that will guide and support your engagement activities.

References and related documents

These documents may be useful in supporting your public engagement planning and implementation:

- [Aboriginal Consultation and Accommodation - Updated Guidelines for Federal Officials to Fulfill the Duty to Consult](#)
- [Access to Information Act](#)
- [Cabinet Directive on Regulations: Policies, guidance and tools](#)
- [Canada's Youth Policy](#)
- [Health Canada's Policy on Providing Guidance on Regulatory Requirements](#)
- [Health Canada Policy on External Advisory Bodies](#)
- [Official Languages Act](#)
- [Policy on Communications and Federal Identity](#)
- [Directive on the Management of Communications](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada Interpretation Policy](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada's Policy on External Advisory Bodies](#)
- [Privacy Act](#)

The [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\)](#), an international organization advancing the practice of public participation, also provides useful resources on public engagement.

Services to support public engagement

Communications and Public Affairs Branch (CPAB) provides services to support the planning and implementation of public engagement activities. This table outlines the services offered by various teams in CPAB.

Group	Services
Public Engagement, Research and Analysis Division, Public Engagement Unit: cpab.consultations-dgcap@hc-sc.gc.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance and advice on engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ process ○ planning ○ stakeholder mapping workshops ○ approaches ○ development of documents and questionnaire design ○ contracting • Support for the use of online engagement tools (for example, questionnaires, online interactive platform) • Publish consultations in Open Government Registry for consultations and Consulting with Canadians • Advice and support on the Health Canada Policy on External Advisory Bodies • Building capacity in public engagement (information sessions, tools, templates)
Public Engagement, Research and Analysis Division, Stakeholder Registry (CSIMS) Team: CSIMS-External@hc-sc.gc.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support internal user/external stakeholder use of CSIMS, including new user accounts and technical assistance • Guide internal users on how to use CSIMS to engage with stakeholders, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ advice on how to invite stakeholders to e-consultations, webinars, town halls, and technical consultations ○ assistance getting stakeholders into CSIMS • Provide information sessions and on-request training sessions to internal users
Strategic Communications Directorate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance, advice, coordination and services that support effective communications to Canadians • Determine the communication products that will be required to support a public engagement activity and collaborate with the project lead to develop them (that is, communication plans, news releases, media lines, Q&As, social media posts)
Digital Communications: web.communications@hc-sc.gc.ca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide step-by-step guidance on the process for publishing online • Offer guidance and advice on the development and preparation of documents to be published online, including consultation profile pages • Liaise with CPAB Public Engagement Unit to ensure new consultations are published on Consulting with Canadians, and in the stakeholder registry (CSIMS)

Group	Services
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate the web publishing of the opening and closing of consultations and their associated documents on Canada.ca
<p>Social Media: (Contact Strategic Communications)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance and advice on how to publish engagement opportunities on social media channels • Liaise with Creative Services for images, videos and other creatives that are to be used with social media posts • Manage and monitor all social media channels
<p>Creative Services creative.services-creatifs@hc-sc.gc.ca</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional designs for print and electronic communication products and as well as video production services that may be used in the development of public engagement documents • Provide advice on contracting with external production and design companies and ensure compliance with Treasury Board guidelines and regulations

Glossary of terms

For the purposes of the Guidelines on public engagement, we use these meanings for these words:

Term	Definition
Consulting with Canadians	A Government of Canada website that informs Canadians of open and closed consultations hosted by Government of Canada departments and agencies.
Continuum of public engagement	The 4 levels of increasing public engagement approaches to inform decision-making.
Consultation and Stakeholder Information Management System (CSIMS)	CSIMS is a web-based, centralized stakeholder registry for HC and PHAC. The registry can be used to broaden the reach of public engagement activities through distribution to stakeholders who have self-registered to stay informed of consultation and survey opportunities. For more information, please consult the CSIMS FAQs .
Dialogue	To engage in a multi-party discussion to deepen a shared understanding of views, impacts and solutions, and deliberate, debate and shape decisions.
Discuss	To exchange information with each interested group where there is an opportunity to clarify, understand and influence the issues, considerations, alternatives and solutions.
External advisory body (EAB)	Established by the Minister of Health or the department/agency to provide advice on specific medical, scientific, technical, policy or program matters within the scope of its mandate. All members are external to the federal government and provide advice as a group, and not as individuals or representatives of organizations.
Evaluation	An assessment of a public engagement activity to determine whether the objectives were met and to identify lessons learned.

Term	Definition
Honoraria	A gratuitous payment. Should not be used as an alternative or replacement for salary, wages or contractual payments. There should be no expectation of receiving an honorarium by the recipient, and the use of honoraria payments should be the exception rather than the rule. The operational authority approving each honorarium payment is responsible for determining the appropriateness of each payment and amount, and ensuring that each decision is well documented. Honoraria are not to be paid to public servants or other public officials already receiving salary for the conduct of public business.
Hybrid	When a combination of in-person, virtual and online approaches are taken for public engagement.
Indigenous consultation	As defined in <u>Aboriginal Consultation and Accommodation - Updated Guidelines for Federal Officials to Fulfill the Duty to Consult</u> , the duty to consult is an obligation of the government as a whole. In <i>Haida, Taku River and Mikisew Cree</i> , the Supreme Court of Canada held that provincial and federal governments have a legal obligation to consult when the Crown contemplates conduct that might adversely impact potential or established Aboriginal or Treaty rights.
Inform	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to help them understand the issues, alternatives and solutions.
Online engagement	Any form of engagement that takes place over the internet where people are not meeting. Examples include online questionnaires and posting consultation documents online and inviting people to review and provide input by email.
Outcomes	Examining how the public engagement activity informed the decision-making on policies, programs and initiatives.
Public	Refers to any individual or unorganized group that is interested in or affected by, or has the potential to be affected by, an issue, decision or action.
Public engagement	Planned two-way discussions with individuals, organizations, or groups, external to the Government of

Term	Definition
	Canada, designed to gather input, clarify information and foster understanding among those interested and affected by an issue, decision or action and to better inform HC and PHAC's decision-making.
Public engagement approaches	A broad range of strategies, methods and techniques used to facilitate a variety of interactions with the public for the purpose of information sharing and to inform decision-making.
Public opinion research (POR)	As defined in the <u>Directive on the Management of Communications</u> , public opinion research is the planned, one-way systematic collection, by or for the Government of Canada, of opinion-based information of any target audience using quantitative or qualitative methods and techniques such as surveys or focus groups. Public opinion research provides insight and supports decision making. The process used for gathering information usually assumes an expectation and guarantee of anonymity for respondents. Public opinion research includes information collected from the public, including private individuals and representatives of businesses or other entities. It involves activities such as the design and testing of collection methods and instruments, data collection, data entry, data coding and primary data analysis.
Stakeholders	Individuals, groups or organizations external to the Government of Canada who have a specific interest in, have some influence on, or are affected by, a given policy, program, regulatory initiative or service of a specific Government of Canada department/agency, namely HC or PHAC.
Target audience	The intended audience, that is, the individuals, groups or organizations of the public engagement.
Virtual engagement	An engagement approach that allows for dialogue but does not take place in-person. This includes videoconferences (for example, MS Teams, Zoom, Webex).