

Scottish Health Council - Service Change Team

Tips to support effective engagement

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Since the current Scottish Government CEL 4 guidance¹ was issued in 2010, the Scottish Health Council has been involved in over 300 service changes. The development of the tips for engagement is based on a review of the engagement activities that have taken place and the learning gained from these.

Our tips to support effective engagement are designed to:

- Inform engagement activities to involve local people in the development of options for making changes to services, and
- Ensure that the views of potentially affected people and communities are taken account of in decision making.

This information may be of particular interest to those planning or leading engagement within healthcare, and in relation to changes to services. It should be read alongside current Scottish Government guidance to offer practical support in undertaking engagement.

Planning

Involve people in project/steering groups – most organisations ask service users, carers and public representatives to sit on project or reference groups at an early stage in an advisory capacity, acting as a sounding board for testing plans and material throughout the process. Others have set up separate communications and engagement subgroups to lead on the process and involve service users, carer and public representatives.

Use local knowledge – work with service users/groups/organisations affected by proposed changes. Find out the best time, location and method for events or meetings and check for additional support needs (for example advocacy, and

¹ Informing, Engaging and Consulting People in Developing Health and Care Services, The Scottish Government, February 2010, www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/mels/CEL2010_04.pdf

transport requirements). Scottish Health Council local offices can assist with knowledge on local community networks and offer advice for involving seldom heard people and communities.

Communicate early and widely – consider how to engage from early planning stages with all affected stakeholders, including geographic communities, community councils, campaign groups and service users.

Consider early, ongoing engagement and briefings with elected representatives throughout the process. This should be coordinated alongside the engagement with wider public to ensure elected representatives are aware and informed of the activity if raised by constituents, and have the ability to provide feedback directly to the organisation leading the activity.

Work in Partnership – where proposals for change relate to more than one organisation, ensure there is effective working across organisational boundaries with ownership from all relevant organisations.

Informing

Use a variety of methods – consider the best way(s) to reach the communities and people potentially affected by proposed changes. Make full use of all available methods including local media, video and community events/groups. A mixed approach is likely to be the most successful and makes good use of an organisation's existing networks and relationships.

Use social media to build and maintain momentum and to alert people to consultation activities and timelines.

Create and publicise a hashtag (#) for a proposed change so that interested stakeholders can track it on social media.

Make information accessible – use plain language and consider producing Easy Read versions or alternative formats of consultation documents to support communication.

Engaging

Share information in advance – provide information in plain language at least five working days in advance of meetings to enable people to share this with their networks, gather feedback and inform participation. Financial information should be clearly presented in an accessible format.

Engage as early as possible. Early engagement, including during the options appraisal process, brings many benefits when organisations are considering

changes to local services. Proposals will take account of local needs and an open dialogue will encourage engagement with local people.

Encourage wider engagement – ask project/steering group members to share information and get feedback from local groups and networks they represent.

Ensure proper representation if undertaking option development and appraisal. There is no definitive guidance on the right number of people to involve, or the make-up of the various stakeholder groups. However, we recommend a minimum one third of participants representing **service users and the public, with the others representing service specialists, clinicians, management and frontline staff.** If the numbers attending, or proportion of service users and public representatives are small, people may perceive the process to be tokenistic. If the numbers of any one stakeholder group are disproportionate to the others, the process may be perceived to be biased towards any dominant group.

Use mixed stakeholder groups. Mixing stakeholders allows people to hear the perspectives of other groups and individuals. This can help participants to take a more balanced view, which may in turn lead to a greater degree of objectivity in scoring the options.

Hold a pre-meeting for public and service user representatives to brief them on background information and related documents and to explain the option appraisal process.

Investigate how proposed changes may result in transport and access issues for the public, service users and carers, ahead of public consultation. Consider how to mitigate the effects of additional journey times for relatives and carers. If change is likely to result in services being relocated, you may wish to set up a separate group (with representation from other public agencies and transport providers) to address transport and access issues. This is especially important where options involve the centralisation of services.

Carry out and publish an Equality Impact Assessment to demonstrate the potential impact of proposals are being considered such as transport and access. The Scottish Health Council has developed a [flowchart](#) on how the impact assessment and engagement process interact. It may also be relevant to consider proposals in line with the [Fairer Scotland Duty](#), which requires public bodies to evidence how they actively consider the reduction in inequalities of outcome in any major strategic decision.

Consulting

Ensure the consultation title is clear. The title of the consultation should reflect the services and geographical area affected by proposed changes.

Think about the timing of the consultation. Try to avoid holiday periods as some groups may not meet at this time, making it difficult to receive and share information.

Planning of engagement activities during consultation. Consider *who* needs to be involved. A communication and engagement plan should detail all key stakeholders during the consultation including geographic communities, community councils, elected representatives, campaign groups and service users. It should also consider *how best* to involve each stakeholder group to maximise the opportunity for effective feedback.

Provide advance notice of meetings in consultation papers, direct mailing and posters to inform people of when and where detailed information will be available.

Explain *why* changes are being proposed. Consider ways to describe the case for change by comparing the current service provision against proposed future service provision, for example by including an 'at a glance' table, or visuals describing service/patient 'pathways' in the consultation document.

Share consultation materials. Distribute materials widely and ensure these are being shared with appropriate stakeholders. This will help to raise awareness of the consultation.

Identify a named contact who can provide additional information and receive feedback on the consultation.

Create a dedicated webpage to host all consultation materials. This helps promote transparency and provides a platform for publishing up-to-date information.

Plan for public meetings.

- Give members of the public the necessary information to prepare for the meeting. Check suitable times with stakeholders – for example, whether afternoon or evening meetings, or both, are desirable. Avoid any clash with large events which may limit attendance at public meetings.
- Ask public representatives who have been involved in the planning groups to attend the public meetings. Public representatives who have been involved in the option appraisal and earlier engagement can explain their role in the process and give their perspective on the proposals. This may help reassure other participants that the process has been robust and transparent (even if the actual options and/or decisions are not popular).
- Consider including provisional times and venues for public meetings in the consultation paper to gauge interest and get feedback.

- Ask people to register in advance for meetings so that they can inform you of support needs – for example, if they require alternative formats, hearing loop systems and signers.
- Consider how to gather and evaluate feedback on the process and the proposals.
- Ensure appropriate staff, service experts and clinicians including Board members, attend public meetings to answer questions and hear public views.
- Consider decision makers attendance at public meetings to hear public views (such as NHS Board or Integration Joint Board members).
- Listen to, and act on, feedback received about the format of meetings or materials.
- Appoint an independent Chair who has no vested interest in any of the proposals and is skilled in facilitating and chairing meetings.

Feedback and decision making

Feed back to those involved – It is important that the people that took part understand how their feedback will contribute to the decision making. This should be stated as part of the communications used throughout the process. Once the engagement and consultation process has concluded, stakeholders and interested parties should receive feedback on the following:

- results of the consultation process
- final proposals and next steps
- how views were taken into account in developing final proposals
- reasons for not accepting any widely expressed views
- how any potential negative impacts might be negated (for example, transport), and
- outline plans for implementation (if applicable).

Ensure the decision-making process is clear – it is important that the governance for decision making is clear and that the public understand **where** decisions will be made and **when**:

- For a major service change, the final proposals, along with report from Scottish Health Council, should be submitted to Minister for approval.
- Provide timescales, where possible, for the implementation of change proposals.

Provide regular updates during implementation – provide regular information regarding the implementation of the service change. Also, continue to listen to and seek views from people and communities affected by the change proposals.

- Consider the use of websites, social media and newsletters to keep people informed of progress.
- Consider seeking feedback from service users to help to evaluate the implementation of new models.

The **Scottish Health Council** can provide advice on approaches to evaluation. Our toolkit for supporting the evaluation of public involvement and participation in health services can be found [here](#).

Further resources

The **Scottish Health Council's** [Participation Toolkit](#) provides tried and tested tools for good engagement.

The **Scottish Health Council** has developed a [guide to e-Participation and Social Media](#) to support online communication and engagement.

The [National Standards for Community Engagement](#) are good practice principles designed to support and inform the process of community engagement.

[VOiCE \(Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement\)](#) is a planning and recording tool that helps individuals and organisations to plan and deliver effective community engagement.

The **Consultation Institute** website provides useful information on [identifying stakeholders](#).

Option appraisal animation. Short animation explaining [what an option appraisal is](#), and how it fits with the wider engagement process

Benefits of early engagement. Short video focusing on work in NHS Highland on the [benefits of early and ongoing engagement](#).

If you would like further information on any of the information provided, please contact the Scottish Health Council Service Change Manager, Daniel Connelly.

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