

In Focus:

Involving people that matter



Why is it important?

By definition, campaigning and influencing cannot exist without the involvement and active engagement of people, whether they are citizens, consumers, service users or specific communities. They provide the force and motivation for change as well as the means by which to achieve it.

Participation is therefore a key foundation of effective policy and campaigning as it centres on enabling people to influence the policy decisions that affect their lives and bring about positive changes to the world in which they live. In essence, participation is about giving people a voice, enabling them to be heard and acting on what they say.

Embedding participation in your policy and campaigning work is essential for five main reasons:

1. **LEGITIMACY** – you will be able to demonstrate your authority to speak on behalf of a particular client group or community.
2. **ACCOUNTABILITY** – you will be able to show that your actions are having a positive impact on your intended beneficiaries and that you are using the limited resources you have effectively.
3. **CREDIBILITY** – you will be able to provide reliable information that is both expert and trustworthy and reflects the realities ‘on the ground’.
4. **EFFECTIVENESS** – the policy changes you are advocating will reflect the needs, interest and priorities of those directly affected.
5. **EMPOWERMENT** – those who are affected by a policy decision will have the opportunity to be actively involved in influencing the decision; their skills to influence policy change will be enhanced.

It is important to note, however, that participation should not be viewed purely as a means to an end, such as more effective campaigns; participation is an end in itself. The right to participate is in fact one of our fundamental human rights. Article 21(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 25 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, for example, states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of their country, either directly or through chosen representatives. Similarly, Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly requires states to allow children to express their views on all matters affecting their lives.

‘Organisations that represent the voices of their community and campaign for change are a vital part of the democratic process, articulating concerns that hold statutory agencies to account and feed into and improve the policy making process.’

HM Treasury and Cabinet Office ¹

‘Advocacy has helped me to be more confident, to live more independently and it has given me the opportunity to work alongside lots of different people... I think its very important for people with a learning disability to be involved and have a say in how services are run.’

Amanda Platt, a service user and campaigner with Speaking Up

‘Wherever we live and in whatever sort of society, one of our basic rights is to be allowed to take a full part in the life of our community. Without participation we cannot experience and enjoy the wide range of rights and freedoms that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights seeks to guarantee. Our participation should be active, free and meaningful. Our views to improve our lives and our community should be heard and answered.’

UN Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) ²

¹ HM Treasury and Cabinet Office, 2007, *The future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration: final report.*

² Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights, undated, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights – In six cross-cutting themes*

What does it involve?

There are a variety of definitions of participation, ranging from the simple to the complex. However, perhaps the most helpful definition is one used by Involve, who define it simply as ‘everything that enables people to influence the decisions and get involved in the actions that affect their lives.’³

In a campaigning and policy context, this can be seen as a two-fold process. First of all, it concerns enabling people – whether they are members, beneficiaries, or other stakeholders – to engage with your organisation’s policy and campaigning work. Secondly, it concerns enabling people to campaign directly and influence policy themselves. These are not necessarily distinct processes. However it is important to recognise that they lead to different types of outcomes.

But what does ‘getting involved’ actually mean? Participation is often presented as comprising different ‘levels’, each of which have different goals and are relevant to different contexts or circumstances. The level of participation that your organisation is seeking in any particular scenario should be determined by what it is you are actually trying to do and the context in which you are working.

‘In the Ban Advocates project we received training to learn how to effectively lobby [government] delegates, by simulating negotiations. This was a funny game for us to play amongst ourselves, each of us taking on the role of the delegates; there was simply nothing we could say when faced with a victim asking how weapons that have such unacceptable impacts on humans can still be used. At that moment, we realised we have the right to ask this question of the delegates.’

Umarbek Pulodov, participant of the Local Voices, Global Ban scheme run by the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund.

LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION	GOAL
1. INFORM	To provide your members/service users/other stakeholders with balanced and objective information about a specific policy issue
2. CONSULT	To obtain feedback on a specific policy issue
3. INVOLVE	To ensure that the problems, needs and aspirations of your members/service users/other beneficiaries are identified, understood and considered
4. COLLABORATE	To develop solutions or agreed course of action in collaboration with your members/service users/ other beneficiaries
5. EMPOWER	To place final decision-making powers in hands of your members/service users/other stakeholders; to enable them to directly engage in policy process or campaigning efforts

Where do I start?

The first place to start when planning how you might embed participation within your policy and campaigning work is to ask two very simple questions:

- **Why does your organisation value participation?**
- **What are your guiding principles for participation?**

These may seem like obvious questions but by asking them you can help generate a shared understanding across your organisation about why participation is important, how it relates to your organisation's wider mission, values or vision, and what you consider to be the defining features of effective participation.

Involve's own principles for good participation (right) can provide a helpful checklist to help you review your existing approaches to participation or think about how you might plan future work.

INVOLVE'S PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD PARTICIPATION ⁴

1. MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

The purpose of participation is to achieve a change in relation to the change identified. It may also make a difference to all those involved in terms of learning, confidence and sense of active citizenship.

2. VOLUNTARY

Effective participation requires participants to choose to be involved. Participation cannot be compulsory.

3. TRANSPARENCY, HONESTY AND CLARITY

about the purpose, the limits of what can and cannot be changed, who can be involved and how, and what happens as a result.

4. ADEQUATE RESOURCES

to manage the process well and deliver on the results.

5. APPROPRIATE PARTICIPANTS –

representative and/or inclusive depending on the purpose of the exercise, with traditionally excluded groups given special support and encouragement when their involvement is appropriate.

6. ACCESSIBILITY

so that no participant is excluded because of lack of physical access to meeting places, timing, appropriate support (eg child care) etc.

7. ACCOUNTABILITY

participatory processes need to be accountable to all those involved. This requires good record-keeping and reporting of both processes and outcomes.

8. POWER

participatory processes should have sufficient power to achieve the agreed objectives. This may require a change in the existing power sharing arrangements.

9. LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

participatory processes should seek to support a climate of mutual learning and development among all those involved.

It is important that within your organisation or team you have a shared framework or set of guiding principles from which to plan and carry out participatory activities.

TIP: Always ensure you have senior level buy-in. Participation needs to be supported and championed at the top for it to be meaningful. Active engagement of senior managers early on in the process can help secure the buy in you need.

STEP 1:

Be clear about purpose

Effective participation is underpinned by being clear about what you are trying to achieve. In each case, it is important to assess whether participation is appropriate and, if so, what level of participation is required.

In a policy and campaigning context, for example, participation might include any or all of the following:

- Informing those affected by a policy or campaign issue
- Consulting on policy/campaign priorities, on a policy position or a course of action
- Involving stakeholders to provide or gather evidence
- Collaboratively developing a plan of action, strategy or policy position
- Enabling those affected to campaign directly on an issue.

It is helpful to distinguish between participatory activities that contribute to discrete and time-bound work, such as the development of a specific campaign or policy project, and participatory activities that relate to more long-term or ongoing work, such as producing a team strategy or providing regular guidance or advice.

TIP: When thinking about purpose, it is important to identify the limits of what can be achieved. For example, there is no point consulting participants on an issue where a decision has already been made or where you have no established access to the decision makers.

STEP 2:

Decide who to involve

Deciding who you need to involve depends largely on the purpose you have identified and the wider context in which you are working. Selecting or identifying the right participants is critical to the success and ultimately the legitimacy of the whole process.

There are two main approaches for identifying your participants:

OPEN – this allows anyone who is interested to participate

SELECTIVE – the numbers, types and actual individual participants are identified as part of the process.

If you follow the path of selecting participants, think about whether you want them to be representative of a specific group or cross section of the public, or whether you want them to hold specific knowledge, expertise or power.

To help you think through who should be involved, carry out a stakeholder analysis. This involves listing all the individuals who have an interest in either your organisation’s work as a whole, or the specific policy/campaign issue you are working on. Questions you might want to ask as part of this process include:

- Who is affected by this issue/by our work?
- Who is influential on this issue?
- Who are the experts on this issue?
- Who are we accountable to?
- Who do we represent?
- What other organisations are affected by or concerned about this issue?
- Who are the decision makers?

Once you have identified your participants, think about how you will recruit them; don’t wait for them to come to you. Even if you are following an open recruitment process, consider who your target audiences are and how you will reach out to them.

It is also important to consider at this stage how you will support people to participate. What barriers might exist for potential participants?

How might you address these barriers? These might range from practical considerations such as timing, location, costs or caring responsibilities through to having a particular disability. Depending on how you plan to involve them in your work, you might also need to consider whether participants need specific training, an induction or ongoing support.



STEP 3:

Select your methods

There are a range of factors to consider when choosing what participatory methods to use. Involve have identified six key factors to consider during the selection process:

1. **NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS** – how many participants is the method suitable for?
2. **ROLE OF PARTICIPANTS** – have they been selected or are they self-selecting?
3. **BUDGET** – how much money do you have?
4. **LENGTH OF PROCESS** – how much time do you have?
5. **TYPES OF OUTCOMES** – what outcomes do you require from the process?
6. **WHAT LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IS MOST APPROPRIATE?**

Glossary of participatory methods

These are just a few examples of participatory methods. Further information on each can be found in the toolkits, guides and online resources listed at the end of this guide.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

A process for creating a vision and a plan of how to achieve it. It works by reflecting on the past to imagine the future.

CITIZENS'

Consist a small panel of non-specialists who cross-examine a particular issue to reach a 'verdict'.

CITIZENS' PANELS

Comprise a large, demographically representative group of citizens. They are used to assess public preferences and opinions.

DELIBERATIVE MAPPING

Involves both specialists and members of the public. Different approaches are used to assess how participants rate different policy options against a set of defined criteria.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Group discussion of 6-12 people that is facilitated and based on a specific issue.

ONLINE FORUMS

Stakeholders can raise and discuss issues online.

OPEN SPACE

Events where an unlimited number of participants identify and discuss a series of issues around a central theme.

OPEN DAYS

One-off days to bring together particular communities or groups. Can be used as a setting for particular activities.

SURVEYS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

A method for collecting information from a large number of respondents. May be online, written or conducted in a face-to-face setting.

USER PANELS/FORUMS

Groups of 10-20 service users who meet on a regular basis to discuss issues of concern to them. They can help identify priorities and lead to early identification of problems or ideas for improvements.

USER ADVISORY GROUPS

Typically include 10-30 service users who meet to inform and advise on decision-making or service design.

USER REPRESENTATION

Users are represented on governance bodies or working groups.

USER-LED MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

User-led committees exist where the majority, or all, of the management committee are service users.

Once you have identified the method(s) you plan to use, identify whether you will organise or facilitate them yourselves, or whether you will require external facilitators or consultants.

STEP 4:

Design and deliver your project plan

It is only at this stage that you can start to pull everything together into a project plan. This should include details of all your planned activities and timescales as well as your agreed budget. Once you have developed a plan, make sure it is agreed by all colleagues involved and signed off by the relevant manager.

Communication with participants throughout the process is critical. They will need to be sufficiently briefed in advance so that they fully understand the purpose of approaches you are using and what role is expected of them. They should also be informed about the outcomes of the process, such as key findings, how your organisation has acted on these findings and what has happened as a result.

TIP: There is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to participation. Even if you have expertise on or enjoy one particular approach, it is not necessarily relevant to each circumstance.

TIP: If your proposals involve making changes to governance arrangements within your organisation e.g changing the criteria for recruiting management committee members, you will need to clarify processes for making amendments to your constitution.

What next?

Research into participatory practice has found that what is needed is not more participation but better participation. This does not mean devoting more time or resources to it, or trying out new approaches because they sound interesting. Effective participation requires careful planning. Above all, it places respect for participants at the heart of the process.

CHECKLIST FOR PARTICIPATION	
Identify purpose of participation and intended outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify and agree types and numbers of participants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decide on process for selecting or recruiting participants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify potential barriers to participation and how you might address them	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify whether participants will require induction, training or other dedicated support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify and agree most appropriate participatory approach(es)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Decide whether you will need to use external facilitator(s) and/or consultants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decide whether you will require specific training or support on using participatory approaches	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decide how to record discussions, deliberations and decisions taken	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finalise the budget	<input type="checkbox"/>
Produce timetable of key activities	
Find suitable location(s) for your activities ensuring they are accessible for all participants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prepare briefing materials and send to participants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Carry out the recruitment or selection process for participants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hold the event(s) as appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Carry out an evaluation of your activities with participants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Write up the discussions, deliberations and decisions taken	<input type="checkbox"/>
Share the findings from the activities with participants, communicate what actions you have taken as a result	<input type="checkbox"/>

TIP: This guide builds on the work of the Count Me In project developed by NCVO Campaigning Effectiveness to promote and support beneficiary involvement in campaigning. To find out more, go to www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/countmein

Putting it into practice

If you have five minutes...

- Join the stakeholder involvement discussion group on the Policy Forum website. Discuss practical issues, share successes and failures and swap tips.
- Sign up to peopleandparticipation.net. Browse their virtual library for useful resources or read some of the case studies to inspire you.
- Sign up to Involve's mailing list. You will receive regular updates on events, training and new publications.

If you have one-two hours...

- Carry out a review of participation within your own team or organisation. Use Involves principles of participation as guide. How participatory are you? How might you want to change or improve what you currently do?
- Using the toolkits and guides at the end of this guide, assess what participatory methods might be most relevant to your organisation and to your work. What budget implications do they have? How might they be integrated within your organisation or team's work?
- If you are interested in a particular method, find out organisations who have used it before and arrange to meet with them to find out more and get their advice.

If you have one day...

- Attend or organise bespoke training for your team on using specific participatory approaches. Contact Campaigning Effectiveness at NCVO to see what support they could provide. Alternatively, you might need to undergo training on working with people with particular support needs. Participation Works, for example, has a dedicated training programme on involving children and young people.

Further reading

Toolkits and guides

People and Participation: How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making

Published by Involve, 2007.

www.involve.org.uk/people_and_participation/

Centre Stage? Making choices about involving users

Published by the Performance Hub, 2008

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/publications/publication.asp?id=8298

Participation Works!

21 techniques of community participation for the 21st Century

Published by the New Economics Foundation, 1998.

www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/doc_1910200062310_PWA4.doc

Hear by Right and the Third Sector: How to measure and improve children and young people's participation

Published by Participation Works, 2007.

www.participationworks.org.uk

Beyond the Ballot: 57 democratic innovations from around the world

Published by the Power Inquiry, 2005.

www.peopleandparticipation.net

Viewfinder: A policy maker's guide to public involvement

Published by the Cabinet Office, 2002.

www.nationalschool.gov.uk/policyhub/docs/Viewfinder.pdf

Further reading

Participation Nation: Reconnecting citizens to the public realm

Published by Involve, 2008?

www.involve.org.uk/participation_nation/

We, the People

Published by New Economics Foundation, 2003

www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/h0yprb553s2c3u55nfyvfs4506102003114907.pdf

Count Me In

Involving beneficiaries and users in campaigning

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/countmein

Online resources

Involve

www.involving.org

Participation Works

www.participationworks.org.uk

People and Participation

www.peopleandparticipation.net

New Economics Foundation

www.neweconomics.org/gen/participation_top.aspx

About Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO

Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO

supports and empowers people and organisations to change their world through campaigning and influencing policy.

We bring together experience and expertise and drive excellence in campaigning and policy work across civil society by providing support, knowledge, tools and resources.

For further information about our work go to www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness

About Forum for Change

The Forum for Change is a network for people influencing policy and campaigning for change across the voluntary and community sector. Membership is free and open to everyone.

To join or for further information go to www.forumforchange.org.uk or email forumforchange@ncvo-vol.org.uk

About In Focus

In Focus guide are produced for Forum for Change members as part of the Policy Skills Development Programme. They accompany the Getting You Started factsheet series and In Practice case study series, all of which can be found at: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness/resources

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