

Guidance Note: Inclusive public engagement practices

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This guidance note is intended for individuals and organisations planning public engagement activities. It is designed to prompt reflection and discussion on more inclusive approaches, highlighting practical steps to make engagement activities more accessible, equitable, and meaningful. While not exhaustive, it serves as a starting point for fostering diversity, inclusion, and trust in public engagement.

What does inclusive public engagement mean?

Inclusive engagement is the deliberate practice of designing public participation so that people with different experiences, identities, and abilities can contribute meaningfully. It goes beyond representation to emphasise:

- Active collaboration and involvement
- Respect for different perspectives
- Fostering a sense of belonging
- Building trust and strong relationships

Inclusive engagement also involves identifying and addressing barriers, including social, physical, digital, or systemic factors, and considering how overlapping factors such as disability, socioeconomic status, language, or geographic location may limit participation.

Why is inclusive public engagement important?

Inclusive engagement is important because it:

- Ensures that the voices of those most affected by decisions are heard
- Improves the relevance, quality, and impact of engagement
- Enhances the credibility and legitimacy of engagement activities
- Fosters trust and long-term collaboration between scientists and the wider community
- Helps avoid reinforcing existing inequalities or unintentionally excluding key perspectives

How can you make your engagements more inclusive?

- Co-develop with the community: Collaborate with the community or representatives to plan activities. Avoid assumptions about what the community needs or values
- Consider accessibility of locations and spaces: Choose venues that are physically accessible (e.g., ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, etc.). Consider transportation, signage, lighting, and quiet spaces for those with sensory sensitivities. If accessibility is limited, consider alternative locations or virtual engagement options
- Inclusive digital and online engagement: Ensure platforms are accessible, offer multiple ways to participate, consider connectivity and time zones, and take into account that digital poverty may limit some participants' access

- Make activities and materials accessible: Provide materials in multiple formats (e.g., large print, digital, alternative languages, etc.). Ensure seating, desks, or equipment are suitable for participants with mobility needs. Offer alternatives if some activities cannot be fully accessible
- Use clear and inclusive language: Use plain language and avoid jargon where possible. Provide translation or interpretation where needed. Be mindful of cultural sensitivities in terminology
- Consider timing and scheduling: Schedule events at times that accommodate participants' work, childcare, and cultural needs. Provide advance notice and flexible options to participate
- Feedback and follow-up: Share outcomes with participants to show how their input influenced decisions. Seek feedback on how to improve inclusivity in future engagement activities

Evaluating inclusive engagement

Inclusive engagement is an ongoing process, and it is important to reflect on how effectively your activities reach and involve diverse participants. Consider:

- Collecting feedback from participants about accessibility, inclusivity, and relevance
- Tracking participation trends to see whether different communities are being engaged equitably
- Reflecting on whether all voices were heard, valued, and acted upon in decision-making

Inclusive public engagement is an ongoing process that benefits from reflection, adaptation, and collaboration. By following these practices, scientists and organisations can foster stronger relationships, build trust, and create engagement activities that are genuinely inclusive and impactful.

Further information and resources:

- [NCCPE A starting guide to EDI for public engagement professionals](#)
- [Inclusive Engagement - Definition and Explanation](#)
- [Simon Fraser University Inclusion & Equity in Public Engagement](#)
- [Simon Fraser University Equity in Public Engagement: A Guide for Practitioners](#)
- [NCCPE Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Resource Bank](#)
- [NCCPE MUPI Purposeful Partnerships cards](#)