



# Climate change and net zero engagement

## Getting started

Across the UK, public and private sector organisations are planning how to help address the climate crisis and press ahead with decarbonisation. Increasingly, they understand that their citizens and customers must be part of the discussions – and the decisions – that move us towards net zero.

Public engagement is crucial in building towards a just transition; for fostering public trust and support for change; and for taking approaches that respond to people's anxieties, ambitions and lived experiences.

To support you and your organisation on your inclusive climate change engagement journey, we've set out some of the different approaches you can take, and their benefits and limitations.



## What do you want to achieve?

Think about where you're starting from, what you want to achieve, and your priorities along the way. This will determine the engagement approach you should take. You need to be clear what matters to you most.

- Do you want everyone in your area to be able to take part, to weight participation to reflect your local population, or to amplify minority voices which are more seldom heard or most likely to be impacted by change?
- Do you need it to be rapid and cost-effective? Is your priority to enable everyone to contribute fully?
- Do you want many people to engage a little, or a small number to engage a lot?
- Is it important that the process is highly visible to those not directly involved to raise awareness of the issues and how you're tackling them?

All the engagement approaches we outline could be led by a single organisation – a local authority, a community organisation, or an energy provider. But consider whether it could be strengthened by being designed and delivered in partnership with others in your area. This could help emphasise to local people that addressing the climate crisis and decarbonisation is a 'whole system' challenge.

## Identify your engagement approach

We've assessed some of the approaches you could take as part of your engagement strategy. Each has its benefits and limitations, alongside budget considerations.

Organisations often have a range of things they want to achieve from an engagement process, so it's common to see a mixed methodology that combines most or even all these approaches.



1

**Feedback website**

Qualitative and quantitative

**Reach:** 500-1,000 people

**Budget:** Low



With a relatively small budget and limited time, using an online platform such as Commonplace could be the focus of your engagement activity. Ideally, it will be part of a wider engagement programme, with the messages it generates used to feed into more in-depth engagement activity, such as workshops or a citizens’ assembly, jury or panel.

Benefits	Limitations
Cost effective in terms of cost vs number of people reached.	Open access and not based on sampling, so the profile of respondents is unlikely to reflect the profile of your local population. It will inevitably be weighted towards those more interested in the issues and confident in their own opinions.
Open access – anyone can contribute.	No opportunity for people to learn and develop their thinking together, or to be confronted with the views and experiences of others. That can make it easier for policy makers to dismiss it as ‘uninformed.’
Enables you to provide information to help people understand the issues.	People don’t have an opportunity to ask about what they are most interested in or to have specific questions answered.
Respondents can engage at different levels – from a short response on one issue to long responses across several issues – rather than being expected to invest a lot of time and energy in the process.	

# 2

## Series of one-off workshops

Quantitative

Reach: Limited but targeted – 8-10 people per group

Budget: Low - medium



**A series of one-off facilitated workshops with community groups will enable you to reach a wider range of people. You can target your efforts at the specific parts of the population you most want to hear from.**

Benefits	Limitations
Allow you to target specific social groups. This approach can help you engage with people who are seldom heard or more likely to be impacted by change.	One workshop provides insufficient time to take participants on a 'learning journey' where the topic is complex, so there is a risk that their input is of limited value to policy makers. This could mean their contributions may not deliver the impact you want to achieve.
Provides some opportunity for learning and discussion rather than simply inviting individuals to give their initial reactions.	
Allows you to pose follow-up questions and pursue certain lines of inquiry to understand better why people feel as they do.	

# 3

## Pop-up market stall events

Quantitative

Reach: 200 -300 based on 10 pop-up locations

Budget: Low



**Set up in different high footfall locations around the area, pop-up market stall events create the opportunity to reach the public 'where they are' and increases the visibility of your work.**

Benefits	Limitations
Can reach members of the public who would not proactively engage in the topic. You can target specific place where engagement may otherwise be low.	Engagement moments are necessarily short – usually no more than 5 minutes – so it can only capture 'top of mind' rather than in-depth contributions.
Lends itself to creative activities that are highly accessible and can engage a wide range of people.	Little time to provide participants with new information, so their contributions will be based on their existing knowledge.
Creates opportunities for officers to engage people directly, one-to-one. Highly visible and good for awareness raising.	While you can select locations based on data about demographics and footfall in those areas, you cannot control who chooses to engage, so participation may not reflect the shape of the local population.

4

**Co-design panel**

Qualitative

Reach: 10-14

Budget: Medium - high



**Creating a co-design panel with a group of residents to consider and co-design your organisation's response to the climate change challenge enables panel members to understand, discuss and reflect on relevant information so that their input is useful and meaningful.**

Benefits	Limitations
Can bring a range of citizens and their experiences into a design process. A co-design panel can work collaboratively with policy makers rather than just being consulted on a draft, or even a finished product.	Needs to involve a small number of people to work well.
Strengthens the quality and credibility of an organisation's climate action plans.	Depending how the group is assembled and the influence it is seen to have, it may prompt questions about legitimacy – why did these individuals get to take part and not others?
Can be an inspiring process for people to take part in, creating advocates for change from diverse communities.	It may be asking a lot of panel members to input into the details of a design process if they are only being given limited time to learn about the issues first, or to engage fully in all aspects of the topic.
Builds the capacity of policy makers to work with citizens and helps them to see first-hand how citizens can add value to a design process.	

5

Citizens' assembly / jury

Qualitative

Reach: Assembly – minimum 40-50

Jury – 12-24

Budget: High



Online or in-person and run over several sessions, citizens' assemblies and juries give a carefully recruited group of participants time to learn about issues from expert contributors. They deliberate on the issues and reach a conclusion or set of recommendations for action.

Benefits	Limitations
<p>Can be recruited to closely reflect a population, or to amplify groups more affected or usually unheard. This gives outputs credibility if your priority is 'local voice'.</p>	<p>Only includes a small number of people, so not appropriate if your priority is to generate lots of ideas, promote behaviour change or inspire local momentum for action. The group should be seen as reflective of a population but not 'representative'. For example, one or two disabled participants cannot be seen as representative of all disabled people.</p>
<p>Provides the time and resources for learning, reflection, and deliberation so that participants from different backgrounds and knowledge levels can participate meaningfully. Generates recommendations that carry weight even on complex topics.</p>	<p>A 'closed' process which excludes many with contributions to make. It is good to combine an assembly or jury with other approaches.</p>
<p>Can be an inspiring process for people to take part in, creating advocates for change from diverse communities.</p>	<p>Requires significant investment to run a credible process that stands up to scrutiny.</p>
<p>Generates rich outputs communicated in the voices of residents, that strongly resonate with decision-makers. This can help to build momentum behind action.</p>	<p>There must be broad support for the assembly or jury and willingness to listen to its recommendations from those with power to make a difference. Participants invest a lot of their time and energy, so their expectations about influence and impact are high.</p>

Few people would disagree that it is important to engage the public about how we tackle the climate crisis and transition to net zero.

This challenge affects all of us, but we won't be impacted equally - and not everyone will come forward to share their views, experiences, and ideas as freely.

The engagement we do, therefore – whatever our organisation – must be inclusive, accessible, and transparent.



## Get in touch

Contact us if you have engagement project you'd like to explore further.



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