



Principles for ICT-enabled Citizen Engagement

Preamble

What are the Principles?

The Principles are a best practice guide for agencies wishing to engage with citizens using Information Communication Technology (ICT) as part of their policy making processes. 'Citizens', in this context, refers to individuals, business, community and other organisations and sectors. These principles are the result of research of existing national and international principles and with input from agency representatives from all levels of Australian government. The principles may need to be updated from time to time with the advent of emerging technologies, citizen demand and from lessons learnt.

What do we mean by engagement?

The OECD¹ has developed a three stage maturity model for government engagement with citizens using ICT:

Stage 1: Information stage

A simple one-way relationship in which government delivers information to citizens

Government ⇒ Citizen

Stage 2: Consultation stage

A two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback on issues defined by government.

Government ⇄ Citizen

Stage 3: Active participation stage

A collaboration in which citizens actively shape policy options, but where government retains the responsibility for final decisions.

Government ⇔ Citizen

It is anticipated that agencies' engagement approaches will vary depending on specific project requirements, their individual progress on the maturity model, resource availability, priorities and constituency expectations.

¹ *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement*, 2003, OECD, available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/9/11/35176328.pdf>

Why do we need the Principles?

ICT has the potential to increase levels of citizen participation in public discussions on the development of government policy. Citizen engagement using ICT also has the potential to further promote a culture of democratic decision-making in Australia.

One example of citizen engagement using ICT is online engagement. Online engagement can include online forums, Web Logs (BLOGS) on nominated discussion topics or e-mail discussion groups. For an existing example of online engagement, visit Queensland's Get Involved website (www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au)

Who are the Principles for?

The Principles have been developed for agencies across the different spheres of government who are considering engagement using ICT as a means of interacting with citizens.

How will Agencies use the Principles?

The Principles are to operate as a guide to matters agencies should consider before undertaking engagement with citizens using ICT.

It is recognised that some agencies have limited resources to engage online. The Principles are aimed at supporting the development of engagement initiatives, rather than mandating specific outcomes.

Other resources

Agencies planning to undertake a process of online engagement will find additional, practical guidance by consulting the Australian Government's Better Practice Checklist for Online Policy Consultation at: <http://www.agimo.gov.au/data/assets/file/33928/BPC12.pdf>

Principles

1 Commitment

Agencies committing to engagement using ICT need to ensure citizens have appropriate mechanisms to communicate and participate effectively. Commitment to engagement using ICT is strengthened through the development of partnerships between governments and citizens.

2 Community Focus

When adopting ICT for engaging with citizens, agencies should facilitate information access, knowledge-sharing and discussion amongst participants and, through this, strengthen community consultation, participation and input into government policy-making.

3 Community Capability and Inclusiveness

Agencies need to seek broad and diverse involvement across all sections of the community, and not exclude citizens without access to ICT or those who face other barriers. Employing methods that are accessible and/or complement traditional means of engagement will assist individuals to participate and will build their capability for contributing to policy development.

4 Mutual Respect, Confidence and Trust

To demonstrate respect and build confidence and trust in online engagements, agencies and citizens should agree on consistent standards for communication when engaging with citizens. Agencies need to facilitate clarity of understanding and transparency of engagement processes by disseminating information, guiding participants' input and explaining how the input will be used in government decision-making. Confidence and trust between the citizens and government will be built by ensuring that engagement using ICT is a two-way and responsive process.

5 Interactivity and Flexibility

Agencies need to promote active engagement and discussion while employing flexible and innovative ICT-enabled mechanisms to take account of participants' diversity of capability, location, and socio-economic circumstances. The 24/7 capabilities of ICT can be used to help participants inform themselves and enable them to provide considered views in their own time and space.

6 Responsibility and Accountability

Agencies need to inform participants at the outset about how their input will be received and used in policy-making. Once a decision has been taken, agencies should indicate how citizen input through online engagement has been used. Agencies also need to be clear about who is responsible and accountable for the online engagement process and any decisions resulting from such engagement.

7 Security and Privacy

Agencies need to implement privacy protection, information security and, where appropriate, identity authentication measures. Agencies should comply with relevant security and privacy legislation.

8 Evaluation and Efficiency

Agencies can maximise the efficiency of online engagement through planning and effective collection, facilitation and processing of participants' input. Agencies need to evaluate the benefits of online engagement by identifying and measuring the impact of online engagement to policy-making.