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# Running a local, place-based engagement on climate action: A how-to guide

Delivered for Innovate UK's Net  
Zero Living Programme by:

involve

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# Introduction

The UK Government has committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. This goal will require active participation from all sectors of society. With around a third of the UK's emissions depending on sectors which are shaped at least in part by local authority practice, it is vital for local authorities to deliver solutions for and with their communities.

This how-to-guide is part of the broader Net Zero Living Programme funded by Innovate UK. The Programme has supported over 50 local authorities to develop innovative, place-based approaches to net zero. Involve and partners (Ipsos, Quantum, and Forum for the Future) have been supporting 25 projects to provide support on visioning and citizen engagement.

As outlined in the report [Citizen Engagement on Net Zero: Towards a framework for local government](#), engaging the public to explore place-based visions for the future of their local area is key to helping to create climate action, while also giving people agency in the transforming their communities.

Within this, visioning and participatory futures methods provide innovative ways to engage the public in imagining and planning for sustainable futures, especially where the question requires imagining alternative possibilities for climate action and new pathways.



# What is participatory engagement?

Participatory engagement is the process by which individuals and communities actively take part in decision-making and policy development that affects their lives.

It bridges the gap between Local Authorities and citizens, ensuring that diverse voices and perspectives shape the actions and strategies of local governance. The form of engagement we are exploring goes beyond traditional methods of local engagement: surveys, public forums and consultations. While these are important and have their place, public engagement is increasingly being recognised as a key means by which the public sector can innovate, build trust, and help create more engaged and empowered citizens.

## Importance of participatory engagement:

- **Inclusivity:** Ensures diverse community needs and interests are reflected in decision-making.
- **Transparency:** Builds trust by making processes open and accessible.
- **Effectiveness:** Leads to more informed and relevant policies that better address local issues, particularly for complex challenges.
- **Empowerment:** Provides citizens with a platform to influence and shape their communities.

From start to finish, these processes can last between 3-5 months, depending on the method you use, but what you do with the findings should be long-term.



# Why does this work for climate action?

Climate change is complex, multi-faceted, and impacts people differently, from how we heat our homes, to communities' resilience to flooding, to the cost of living. In these conversations, we are talking about all aspects of climate action, not just the transition to net zero; this includes adapting to climate change and improving resilience of communities to withstand current and future impacts.

The action needed to combat or mitigate the impacts of climate change across these topics will impact individuals, households, and communities. If policies aimed at climate action are built on citizens' experiences and priorities, instead of a top-down approach, this can result in greater trust and public acceptance of the changes they might need to make.

Participatory engagement can help deliver this, directly involving communities in understanding and guiding recommended policies, with local authorities listening and responding to their perspectives. They can create a direct line of communication between citizens and local governments, both empowering people's voices and allowing key actors locally to provide context and understanding for what is and is not in their power to change.

Engaging communities in these conversations, building visions for the future, can create greater trust, and allow local government representatives to make more effective and acceptable climate policies which have greater backing behind them, moving away from the historic approach of 'decide, announce' defend.'

# How-to guide objectives

## What is this guide?

The objective of this guide is to support local authorities in developing and running local, place-based citizen engagement on net zero and other climate-related topics. To achieve this, this guide provides practical advice for setting up, designing and delivering continuous engagement with members of the public. It includes tips, checklists and case study examples to inspire the engagement process.

## Who is it for?

This guide is primarily for local government representatives who are looking to understand practical considerations for engaging the public on climate action but can be useful for wider decision-makers who are thinking about this, too. You don't need to be an expert, or have previous experience with these methods, to use this guide.

## When should I use it?

This guide is best for when you are already on the way to engaging the public. You will have secured the funding, and have a purpose. This guide is for the 'What now'?

## What does it cover?

From our work on the Net Zero Living Programme, we brought together learning and practices from asset-based community development, an approach focusing on what is working in local areas (appreciative inquiry), and citizen research, integrating these with deliberative research to develop two novel practices for climate conversations on climate action. They are designed to:

- work locally and start with what people think is important to them and their communities
- be designed with deliberative principles at their core
- be forward looking using asset-based visioning to think forward and enable bigger change
- take less resource than a citizen assembly or similar

In this guide, we will be sharing learning specifically from the resultant futures and visioning methods of engagement: citizen visioning and conversation starter (don't worry, these are defined later in this guide).

# Self-assessment framework

Start with understanding where you are, and how engagement will support what you are trying to achieve.

The following success factors show how we will understand where local authorities are in their participatory engagement journey. These factors have helped inform the development of this report. You can find the full matrix [here](#).

## 1 Context and strategy

It's important that your engagement is tailored to your local context, and that it is integrated into your decision-making around climate change and net zero. This factor will help you explore how far this context for engagement is in place.

## 2 Clarity of purpose and scope

The success of your engagement depends on there being clear goals and scope for your participatory engagement. This factor will help you explore the parameters for engagement, including what you are aiming on learning, who you are engaging in the community, and a reminder of the importance of independent advice and facilitation.

## 3 Responsiveness, accountability and commitment to act

Similar to having clear purpose and scope, it's important that your engagement has an established plan to respond to citizen feedback, aiming to ensure accountability and integration of findings and recommendations into broader strategic planning.

## 4 Transparency, equity and inclusion

Ensuring your process is clear, inclusive, and fair is vitally important. This factor will allow you to explore how your process is conducted, who is included, and how inclusive and accessible the process is. Considering these helps to ensure that diverse groups, especially those impacted by climate change, are engaged.

## 5 Adequate time and resources for engagement

To underscore all the other success factors, you will need to ensure there is sufficient resource to run participatory engagement processes. This includes time, funding, and technology, alongside the availability of support structures like resource libraries and networks to facilitate engagement processes.

# What is citizen visioning?

As noted when discussing the **How-to guide objectives**, this is one of two future visioning methods used as part of the Net Zero Living Programme.

## What is it?

A group of local people, reflective of your population, come together across 3 to 4 sessions to develop a vision, weigh up routes forward, and agree on a set of recommendations or pathways in answer to your research question.

## When is it appropriate?

If you have projects on climate action in delivery, but they are currently not centrally coordinated or are not feeding into a vision across the place.

There is a lack of engagement by citizens in setting the agenda in your area.

## Outcome

A shared vision for your place that responds to local needs and priorities with buy-in from wider actors.

A set of recommendations where citizens have agreed trade-offs.

# What is a conversation starter?

As noted when discussing the **How-to guide objectives**, this is one of two future visioning methods used as part of the Net Zero Living programme.

## What is it?

Supporting local residents to be 'conversation starters', who speak to family, friends and neighbours following engagement events to learn about their priorities for the future as a new way of working that embeds issues in communities. Conversations with the wider community feed back into workshops to support the development of recommendations.

## When is it appropriate?

You may struggle to engage those most impacted by climate change, or those who are typically less engaged.

You want to gather communities together more widely to feed into decision-making.

## Outcome

A deep understanding of your local community's priorities and needs to inform decision-making.

# Why are these approaches good for climate change conversations?

We know that participatory engagement is particularly useful for questions on climate action. So why do these methods work particularly well?

- **Starting with place, not climate:** These approaches put people and place at the forefront, rather than starting with climate action. This draws on other approaches, which you can read about [here](#). Citizen visioning and community conversations create space for participants to imagine the future of their own communities, exploring first what matters most to them, then build climate in.
- **Driven by communities:** Meaningful participatory engagement driven by communities can create decisions that are collaborative, creative, and have the buy-in of local residents. They can create more nuanced and informed perspectives and recommendations than other, more traditional forms of engagement (such as statutory consultations), as well as drawing in groups who don't always engage. More than that, methods like community conversations facilitate the creation of informed publics, equipped with the tools to have conversations about climate change.

## Do neither of these approaches work for you?

Explore a range of different methods of participatory engagement [here](#) and [here](#).

For more information see some additional guides here: <https://lce.org.uk>



# Introducing the process of engagement



# Introducing the process of engagement



# Overview of the process of engagement

## Communication and evaluation

### Stage 1

1 month

#### Deciding what to do

- Why are you engaging the public (purpose), what will you be engaging the public on (scope), who are you looking to engage and when in the decision-making process is this happening (reach)? The [self-assessment matrix](#) can be helpful in organising where you stand on these issues.
- Consider a co-design approach, embedding local knowledge from local resident groups, businesses, and organisations to all stages of design; and an advisory group to bring a range of perspectives. These can be used from the outset to co-design the engagement goals and approach, then onwards throughout the process to promote community ownership.
- Deciding on your engagement approach based on what you need to do, your local context, what budget you have available, and how long you have. This should include a plan of impact and continued influence of the engagement in future decision-making, and considering what success looks like.

*For example: What form of engagement would work best for you?*

#### Citizen visioning

- Projects on net zero/climate change are in delivery, but there is a lack of coordination across the local area.
- Lack of engagement by citizens in setting the agenda.

#### Community conversation

- You struggle to engage the most impacted by climate change.
- You want to gather communities together

#### Something else?

- Resources in databases like these may be able to help you <https://lce.org.uk>.

### Stage 2

1-2 months  
(depending on  
size of  
engagement)

#### Recruitment and design

- This will include creative design considerations, including developing discussion guides, establishing content for presentations, and ultimately designing how workshops will flow and what participants will discuss and when.
- This will also include practical decisions, including whether to host face-to-face or online, engaging relevant actors (both for expert input and engaging relevant decision-makers to be involved in the engagement), resourcing independent facilitators, and methods of recruitment.

# Overview of the process of engagement

## Communication and evaluation

### Stage 3

1-2 months  
(depending on  
size of  
engagement)

#### Running the engagement

- The practical running of your engagement events is of course an important and fast-paced period in the project lifecycle.
- During this, you will need to consider practical things like whether venues are working, keeping in touch with participants between sessions, and data management during busy fieldwork periods.
- You'll also need to think about whether materials are working as planned or if they need adapting to the needs of participants, impartial facilitation, and ongoing learning throughout engagement events.

### Stage 4

Immediate-term  
after  
engagement;  
long-term into  
future

#### Closing the feedback loop

- This stage is the culmination of the engagement itself but should not be the end of the engagement's role. This will be where the plan on the impact or legacy of the project, noted in Stage 1, comes into play.
- Analysis and reporting of findings.
- At this stage, you will think about how findings from the engagement will be used, including keeping participants informed and engaged, ensuring the findings from the engagement are effectively integrated into decision-making (along agreed-upon parameters), and are transparently and consistently considered in the long-term.

This continues into the future, with findings from the engagement being considered and used, and conclusions from the engagement influencing the local authority/local decisions in ways that have been committed to the communities involved.

### Stage 5

Long-term

#### Embedding engagement

- This is a continuation of Stage 4's impact or legacy of the project.
- This stage is cyclical; it marks both the end of the project itself, and the continued role that engagement overall will play in the local authority's decision-making.
- The success of this stage depends on multiple factors, including the continued ability to invest in engagement, and the utilisation of the findings and recommendations from the engagement projects.

# Stage 1: Deciding what to do



# Stage 1: Deciding what to do

At this stage, you will have completed the self-assessment matrix, evaluating where you are starting and what you are aiming to achieve through participatory engagement.

This stage is exploratory, allowing you to scope out purpose, objectives, and goals; identify who you want to engage, even at a high level; and decide what type of engagement may work for you.

The following section outlines this in steps, including highlighting key considerations, to think about, and deciding what form of engagement you may want to take. We walk through the checklist on the right in the following pages.

## Checklist for stage 1

- Establish purpose, define objectives and identify decision to feed into
- Map your community to understand what you currently know about views on the issue from past engagement, and conduct early-stage engagement with key actors and influencers such as an advisory group, and those with lived experience
- Decide which type of engagement works best for you
- Determine what public(s) to engage, how many participants and ensure inclusivity
- Develop an outline plan of the engagement
- Develop your business case (you can find information on this [here](#))
- Engage relevant actors early, to help with design, and to act as expert speakers in workshops. Some actors will also be decision-makers who may be taking recommendations forward
- Decide what outputs will be useful, plan how you will make sure they have an impact, and on what.
- Obtain resources (for example, funding and facilitators).
- Develop the research questions of your engagement.

# Stage 1: Deciding what to do

## Step 1: Deciding the what, why, and when

The questions shown here can help you decide what type of engagement is appropriate for the issues on climate action you want to explore in your community. Involving an advisory group and mapping your community at this stage can help ensure the engagement will be relevant to your local community and situation.

After deciding on the what, why, and when, develop questions to guide your engagement. These questions should align with your engagement goals and be relevant to your community as well as your local authority's net zero and climate ambitions.

<b>Why citizen engagement?</b>	Reflect on the purpose of involving citizens in decision-making processes. Consider the benefits of diverse perspectives and building stronger community ties, alongside how engagement can inform policy development.
<b>What questions are you looking to answer?</b>	Consider the specific issues or topics your engagement seeks to address. Are you trying to gather insights on community needs, preferences or experiences?
<b>What are you looking to learn?</b>	Determine the tangible outcomes or information you wish to understand from the engagement. This could include community opinions, ideas for solutions or feedback on proposed initiatives.
<b>Who are you looking to engage? (Participants)</b>	Identify the demographics, community groups or local actors that are essential to include in your engagement efforts
<b>Who are you looking to engage? (Advisory group)</b>	This should include internal and external parties critical to the success of your engagement (for example, council members, local businesses).
<b>What kind of impact are you looking to have?</b>	Envision the change or benefit your engagement initiative aims to create within the community. Is it policy influence, increased awareness or empowerment?
<b>What role will citizen engagement play in the local authority's actions in the future?</b>	Determine how the insights and data gathered from the engagement will be integrated into local authority plans and actions. Engage actors and decision makers in the local authority and outside it who will be involved in the feedback loop for engagement, ensuring there is a clear path for recommendations after the engagement is over. Early engagement helps ensure recommendations are relevant and increases the likelihood of them being actionable for decision-makers.
<b>What stage in the decision-making process are you in?</b>	Clarify at what point the engagement is happening relative to decision-making timelines. Is it exploratory, developmental or evaluative?
<b>How does this align with what you're already doing?</b>	Ensure coherence between the engagement initiative and existing projects or objectives of the local authority to maximize impact.

# Stage 1: Deciding what to do

## Step 2: Ensuring your business case works

The purpose of this guide is not to make a business case for your engagement. However, below are some key points to consider.

1. Strategic case: Aligning the engagement with broader strategic goals, such as climate declarations and net zero targets.
2. Economic case: Evaluating the value public engagement brings to residents and businesses and assessing options for cost-effectiveness.
3. Commercial case: Addressing skills gaps for external service procurement and efficient delivery.
4. Financial case: Demonstrating budget availability and additional funding needs, including costs for various engagement activities and external providers.
5. Management case: Ensuring there is adequate capacity and expertise for effective project management and governance.

See [here](#) if you would like more information about building a [business case](#).

## Minimum viable product: What can be done for different levels of funding

Below are examples of citizen engagement approaches and their associated cost range. For more detailed information about the costs of engagement, please refer to [Involve's Knowledge Base](#).

- Delivering a citizen visioning process will cost between £75,000 - £150,000
- Delivering a community conversation process will cost between £30,000 - £100,000

These costs are dependent on multiple factors such as the number of participants, number of groups engaged, amount of deliberation time, number of days, face-to-face/online platforms, communications, follow-up activities, number of facilitators, and other variables.

# Stage 1: Deciding what to do

## Step 3: Decide what kind of engagement would work best

It is important to select an engagement method that aligns with your engagement's goals, and the local area's context and needs. We have included some examples below for what might work for different scenarios. These are not exhaustive: for example, citizen visioning could be used across situations where developing an inspiring citizen-led vision will support galvanising action.

Consider the following scenarios to help you decide what your engagement could be:

- If you have a project in delivery, an area of work in development, or a wider piece of work which lacks coordination, a common vision, and engagement by citizens → Citizen visioning
- If you struggle to engage those most impacted by climate change in your local area, and/or to gather communities together → Community conversation

If your local authority is at a different stage or scenario, there are other engagement strategies that can be best suited to your situation (for example, citizen assembly, citizen jury, public dialogue and standing panel). For more information on other types of engagements, see [Involve's Knowledge Base](#) and the [LCE Resource Hub](#).

# Stage 1: Deciding what to do

## Case study: Deciding on an engagement approach

**A coastal city local authority chose the community conversation approach for the following reasons.**

**Reaching vulnerable citizens:** This method effectively engaged hard-to-reach citizens in the local community, who are likely to be most impacted by climate issues. The local authority previously struggled to engage these citizens, so a community-led approach through conversations was deemed best suited.

**Combating climate fatalism:** The community conversations provided a solution-oriented method to help combat climate fatalism within the local area, fostering a sense of agency and empowerment.

**Building on past initiatives:** The method complemented past initiatives, notably a Citizen Assembly on climate mitigation, by extending citizen engagement on climate adaptation.

“

It [engagement approach] was to ensure that we had people who were furthest away from the conversations as part of our commitment to climate justice. So, there was a desire to get people whose voices wouldn't normally be heard.”

# Innovation: Planning for impact

Key to successful participatory engagement is ensuring that the work has an impact: helping to shape the work being done by local authorities and other key actors in the community. It is important that engagement is conducted with purpose, and plans for the continued legacy of recommendations, visions, and actions from participatory processes are outlined and understood from the start of projects. Communication and evaluation should be embedded throughout the process, and continue afterwards.

Quantum, working with Involve and Innovate UK, carried out impact workshops with local authorities funded under Innovate UK's [Net Zero Living Programme](#). These workshops explored:

- How to get the most out of the process and outputs of citizen engagement, including understanding how the findings will 'dock' and be taken up with the local authority, wider partners, and the community.
- To maximise the potential influence and impact, or legacy, of the engagement process.

**An example agenda for these sessions is as follows:**

Introduction to engagement process.

What is the vision/ recommendation aiming to inform?

Who will love, loathe, or should know about the findings?

Opportunity map: what strategies, plans, or policies can be influenced?

Who is on board, who decides, and who influences?

How can wider action be maximised?

Get the message right to structure recommendations that stick.

Check you have planned your feedback process to participants.

# Stage 2: Recruitment and design



# Stage 2: Recruitment and design

## Rules of thumb

- Always keep accessibility and inclusivity at the top of your mind, constantly considering how you're removing barriers to participation, from recruitment approaches to how you design materials.
- When designing materials and activities, start with local priorities, assets, and issues. Frame engagement around what matters most to the community in their specific place.
- Information should be clear and accessible. When reaching out to the public, make sure communications are jargon-free and easy to understand.
- Make sure you are considering pathways for feedback and action, ensuring the team who are delivering the engagement, and actors/decision-makers involved have a clear understanding of how citizen input will be used and that they may need to act differently.

## Checklist for stage 2

- Design: materials (discussion guides; activities; slide decks), checking accessibility of these.
- Decide role of experts, and who to engage as experts
- Recruitment: decide method of recruitment, and whether contractors will be used.
- Recruitment: decide quotas (that is, number of people from different demographic or attitudinal groups).
- Practical considerations around where to engage: face-to-face? Virtually? Hybrid? How to support different people for different approaches.
- Reach out to relevant actors and decision-makers.
- Establish timelines and deadlines

# Stage 2: Recruitment and design

## Recruitment

A robust recruitment approach is vital for successful citizen engagement. By this point, you should have decided who you want to speak to, whether that is a group that is roughly reflective of the local area, or you are targeting a specific group in your local area. As part of this, it's also important to consider budgeting for paying participants for their time.

Landing on the best and most appropriate recruitment approach can be challenging, and often, the approach you decide on can require iteration and amending depending on how successful it has been. For both of these, it should be noted that when used alone these can make it harder to reach beyond the people you would normally hear from. However, if implemented as two-phases with the methods explained below, these can be incredibly helpful.

### Methods for recruitment may include:

- Sortition: This aims for a representative sample by giving, in theory, everyone an equal chance of participation. The

approach often uses stratified sampling to mirror the demographic makeup of the community, with a population divided into subgroups (such as, age, gender) and random samples then being drawn from each group.

- **Community-based recruitment**: Often used alongside other methods of recruitment, this method includes recruiting participants from community groups, social media, attending meeting-places for relevant publics (for example, a food bank), and/or on-the-street recruitment via pop-up stalls.
- **Recruiter or stakeholder databases**: Professional recruitment agencies are likely to have regularly-updated databases of individuals who have previously expressed interest in participating in research. Similarly, if your engagement aims to speak with specific groups who may use a particular service in the community, you may be able to use databases to contact them in that context. It is important to ensure consent is in place for you to do so. You can also partner with local umbrella bodies and NGOs, such as tenant groups, who already have trusted relationships and networks within the community.

# Stage 2: Recruitment and design

## Recruitment (continued)

- Free-find methods: This may include on-street/face-to-face and social media-based recruitment, if the aim is to recruit participants from a particular space or area. Social media approaches may use forums or community pages; free-find may include putting up flyers or having booths at events or in busy areas of interest to the engagement. This method can be an effective way of reaching potential participants who are less likely to participate in engagement events like this but can also be more time-consuming and less effective than other methods.
- Snowballing: Often used in line with other methods of recruitment, this method is especially useful when the public(s) being recruited are very small. This method entails recruiters asking people who fit the research criteria if they know of anyone else who may also meet the criteria. This method should be used carefully, however, to ensure engagement events do not end up

with groups of people who know each other as this can impact participation.

These methods can sometimes be used in tandem. Ultimately, the key to successful recruitment for these engagement projects lies in a careful and strategic approach, a willingness to adapt and learn from experience, and a deep commitment to inclusivity and representation.

You can see more examples on recruitment approaches [here](#).



# Stage 2: Recruitment and design

## Case study: Recruitment innovation

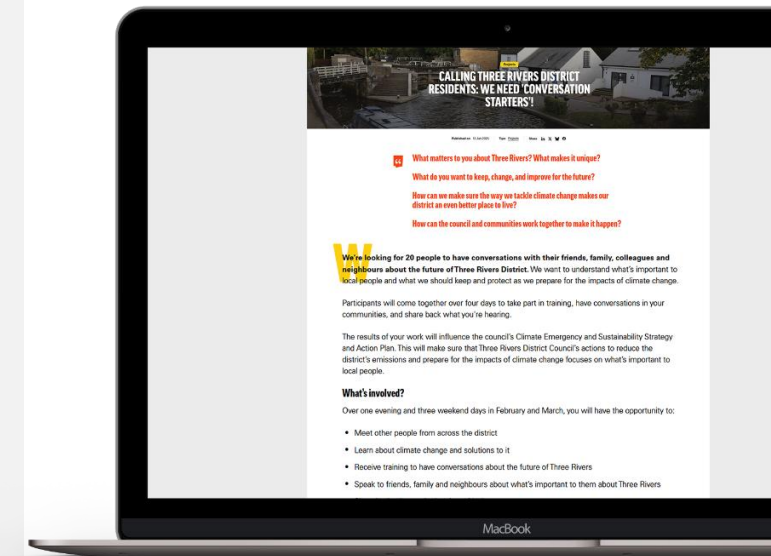
In this citizen visioning engagement, participants were recruited through a combination of different channels. This included using a community-based approach such as posting on Facebook, hosting webinars, distributing posters and leaflets, and sending emails through the civil society networks connected to the council. To supplement the community recruitment and ensure a diverse group of participants, a market research agency was brought in. This approach was more costly but necessary to achieve the desired participation. The focus of recruitment was on reaching parts of the community that were previously less engaged, such as younger people, ethnic minorities, religious minorities and people with disabilities.

Two key challenges were experienced by the local authority:

- Framing the recruitment message was challenging. Initially, they targeted people under the age of 54, as past engagements were predominantly attended by those over 50. This led to some people feeling deliberately excluded, particularly those who were already engaged in sustainability efforts.
- Considerable time and effort were required to reach the target demographics, which led to additional resources being allocated for recruitment.

Overall, while the delivery team recruited the desired diverse group of participants, the team recognised that involving community-led organisations more deeply, and compensating them for their efforts, may have been a better approach. This might have resulted in stronger community ties and potentially more expressions of interest.

Example of a detailed recruitment page:



# Stage 2: Recruitment and design

## Design

How you design sessions should be driven by the purpose and goal of the engagement.

- Are there clearly defined goals for your citizen engagement?
- Are there plans for how your local authority will respond to citizen input?

For example, if you're exploring how your local authority can design improved flood defences, focus your questions on local flood risks, community priorities, and possible solutions, while still considering broader concerns like the social impacts of those solutions.

First, start with your research questions: how can these be brought to life, with participants brought alongside them? Will traditional table-discussion be enough for participants to engage fully with what you're asking? Or will more creative methods and activities be required to get to the crux of the issue?

Secondly, based on how those research questions are likely to pan out, map out when you will time sessions for depending on when the people you are speaking with are likely to be available, and is accessible for them (for example, in evenings, or on weekends).

You should also start mapping out the flow of the day. This should follow a logical progression for the question being asked, from introductory activities to more in-depth discussions. As part of this, you should also have a think about how you are presenting information for participants in an accessible and easy to understand way. This may be materials you develop, or in how you brief expert speakers. Communicating information should be transparent and clear for participants.

# Stage 2: Recruitment and design

## Design (continued)

Thirdly, to keep each workshop engaging, especially if you are planning on all-day in-person workshops, you should aim to incorporate a mix of presentation styles, group discussions, and hands-on exercises to cater to different learning styles and keep participants' interest. This is where you can let your creativity flow with ideas around different activities and visual material to engage participants that might work for your place-based discussion.

When thinking about practicalities, here are the essentials:

- A facilitation plan, detailing timings for different presentations and discussions, outlining key questions for facilitators to ask and the general running of the day.
- A slide deck or presentation which provides an agenda and stimulus for presentations provided by experts.

- Any materials for the participants to use and refer to during the process, such as handouts, workbooks, or fact cards.

The rest of what you might need will vary based on what you're discussing and what your planned activities are. Materials for activities will vary from Post-it notes and pens for participants to add their thoughts to a shared map; to designed assets or images, which will be used to inform and aid discussions.

As always, you should be thinking about ensuring your participatory process is in line with relevant standards. You can find information on what these look like [here](#).

# Stage 2: Getting set up

## Case study: Example agenda for workshops of a community conversation

- **Session 1** (evening): “Get to know” session for participants to meet each other and provide an overview of key climate adaptation topics.
  - **Session 2** (full day): Participants received training on effective conversation techniques and planned their community outreach.
  - **Conversation period** (three weeks): Participants engaged in community conversations to gather local insights and feedback.
  - **Session 3 and 4** (full weekend): Participants shared findings, identified themes and collaboratively developed recommendations for the future.
- adaptation topics relevant to citizen priorities to avoid focusing conversation on broader community concerns.
- **Ensuring deliberation and agreement:** The process emphasised deliberation and consensus-building among the participants on the final recommendations.
  - **Flexibility:** The team was flexible and adapted to unforeseen circumstances, such as a speaker emergency.
  - **Council input:** There were discussions about how to involve council representatives without influencing the engagement process and participant discussions too much. This role should be responsive to what citizens want to see.

### Key considerations in designing the agenda:

- **Balancing content and training:** A significant portion of the workshop time was dedicated to training participants on how to have effective conversations. While this adequately equipped participants for conversations, spending more time on climate adaptation content would have enhanced participant knowledge when discussing these topics.
- **Scope management:** There is a need to define the scope of the conversations clearly. Discussions should be more angled towards climate

# Stage 2: Getting set up

## Considerations for place-based conversations

- One of the key learnings from citizen engagement with local authorities as part of the Net Zero Living Programme has been the importance of centring conversations on the local area itself, rather than focusing fundamentally local conversations on broader and less tangible challenges like climate change in general. The below provides some key considerations for designing discussions centring on place.
- At the outset of conversations, start with understanding what matters to people in their place, framing discussions around specific concerns, aspirations, and priorities of the community in that location, instead of more abstract topics.
- In designing activities for your panel, try to draw on the unique history, culture, and assets of the place to make discussions more relevant and meaningful for participants. For example, hiring a local artist to help participants design place-based assets, allowing for complex issues to be explored through the lens of an individual who can relate to participants' localised concerns. This should also include employing examples or case studies that are specific to the local area to illustrate key concepts.
- Aim to engage local people with expertise from professional or lived experience. This may include academics from a local university, community leaders, and representatives from local councils or organisations.
- Have a clear idea from the beginning what the end goal of workshops will be, what decisions engagement aims to contribute towards, and what are the parameters of discussion? This knowledge can help you ensure that actors and examples you use locally are appropriate to what participants have influence over in the context of conversations. Focus on the unique challenges and opportunities facing the community in that particular location.

# Stage 2: Data protection

## Data protection

At the core of any engagement are the participants, and it is vitally important that you are protecting your participants' privacy and best interests. Make sure before speaking with participants that you have the core principles of GDPR and Market Research Best Practice integrated into your approach to recruitment, data management and storage, and approach to fieldwork.

You can find out more information on GDPR and data protection [here](#) and the Market Research Society's support materials and advice [here](#).



# Stage 2: Practicalities

## Practicalities

Engagement activities take a lot of practical planning and considerations. It will be important to bear these in mind as you design your approach. These may include:

- Gift of thanks: You will want to make sure you are able to thank participants for their time and inputs. These may be in the form of vouchers, for example, for their personal use.
- Venue: Are you hosting online, or in-person? For both, make sure you think about the accessibility of the platform or venue you use. Ensure any in-person venues are wheelchair accessible, are large enough to comfortably accommodate attendees (including you and any guests), and have the requisite technology to make the day run smoothly. Considerations like location (such as proximity to public transport) and the appearance of the room might factor in, too, alongside cost and availability.
- Onboarding: It will be vitally important to complete onboarding with participants once they have been recruited. This onboarding functions in two ways: ensuring participants understand the research and providing reassurance and support to participants on what the expectations are for them.
- Timelines and how you're operating around them. If the engagement starts at 10am, how much earlier do you need to be in the room, getting everything set-up?
- How are you collecting the data? What recording devices are you using? How are you gathering written data produced by participants on the day?
- What materials might you need on the day, such as post-its or pens and paper?

# Stage 3: Running the engagement



# Stage 3: Running the engagement

## Top tips for the day:

- Prioritise accessibility and inclusivity: Continuously think about how you can remove barriers to participation, ensuring that your sessions are accessible and inclusive for all.
- Create a welcoming environment: Choose venues with natural light and a comfortable set-up to enhance participants' engagement and encourage full participation.
- Ensure you have a team of skilled and independent facilitators. They'll play a vital role in your participatory process, creating a trusting atmosphere and keeping discussion on track and moving forward.
- Consider using a "Car Park" system: Designate a physical space in the room for writing down off-topic ideas or comments. This acknowledges participants' input and provides them with information on where in

the local authority they can seek help or support for specific issues.

- Provide information sheets or workbooks summarising key points from speakers, especially on complex topics like climate change, to give participants a handy reference during discussions.
- Stay flexible: Be ready to adapt sessions based on participant feedback if the original setup isn't working as anticipated. Implement structured feedback tools, like sticky dots on flip charts, to quickly capture participants' immediate reactions and feelings about the sessions.
- Show the value of participation: Clearly demonstrate how participants' contributions feed into official decision-making or planning documents, highlighting the significance of their input and maintaining their engagement.

## Checklist for stage 3

- Welcome participants and introduce all facilitator and support staff
- Clearly outline all the session agendas and objectives
- Set ground rules to ensure openness, listening and respect for different opinions
- Explain feedback systems for the sessions
- Impartial facilitation, making sure discussions remain on topic and gently steering back if they stray
- Checking in during sessions, and between sessions, to make workshops a safe place for everyone

# Stage 3: Running the engagement

## Case study: Place-based creativity and innovating how we talk about future visioning

A core part of the place-based participatory processes undertaken for this programme was to envision the future of the local area. Different local authorities took different approaches, with varying success, with learnings informing how practitioners can effectively facilitate and frame envisioning the future for climate-focused engagement processes.

Core to these visioning exercises was the theory that getting people to think about the future can help to generate different ideas, engage in climate action in a new and creative way, and connect with people differently. In these processes, visions were not intended to be used as forecasts. Instead, visions were intended to inform principles being established and the recommendations.

Different processes had different approaches to facilitating future-visioning, and project leads reported varying success. The following characteristics were shared in processes where visioning was seen as particularly effective in informing recommendations or priorities:

- **Making the abstract tangible:** In Newham, participants were invited to visit a retrofit warehouse. This enabled attendees to experience and

understand technical concepts (such as heat pumps and insulation) which otherwise may have been challenging to imagine.

- **Bringing in other perspectives:** In Wakefield, the team set up a gallery of visioning posters designed by young people, helping the participants (who were adults) engage with longer-term thinking and helping to connect with the emotional side of the future, rather than just their own experiences.
- **Including creativity:** in Newham and Blackpool, creative approaches were taken to explore the future. In Wakefield and Blackpool, a local artist created visual representation of participants' vision for the future of the local area, with visuals then being used to focus conversations and be updated following group in-put. The visual served as a creative channel for participants to articulate concepts in a tangible form.
- **Building trust first:** where visioning activities took place later in the workshop structure, this trust and relationship building enabled depth and creativity in visioning.

# Stage 3: Running the engagement

## Case study: Asset-based discussions

**Situation:** A local authority project focused on leveraging public transport as a key community asset in their citizen visioning engagement.

**Aims:** The engagement process wanted to gather community insights to achieve a net zero transport system and improve accessibility.

**How:** Sessions considered existing transport challenges (such as limited bus networks and areas lacking train access). They examined what the area currently has, where citizens valued there being greater access to transport, and what support and challenges there may be to achieving this.

**Result:** The engagement led to actionable recommendations for enhancing public transport. This asset-based approach exemplifies how focusing on existing community asset can yield valuable insights and drive infrastructural improvements.



# Stage 4: Closing the feedback loop



# Stage 4: Closing the feedback loop

The engagement events are finished: here's what comes next.

A robust feedback loop ensures transparency, accountability, and sustained community involvement beyond the confines of workshops. This will help to move beyond engagement for the sake of engagement, and towards genuine participatory decision-making.

By providing participants with clear information on how their input has been used and what actions have been taken as a result, local authorities can also build greater trust through demonstrating a commitment to incorporating citizen voices into decision-making processes. This feedback should be in a format and delivered in a way that is accessible for participants.

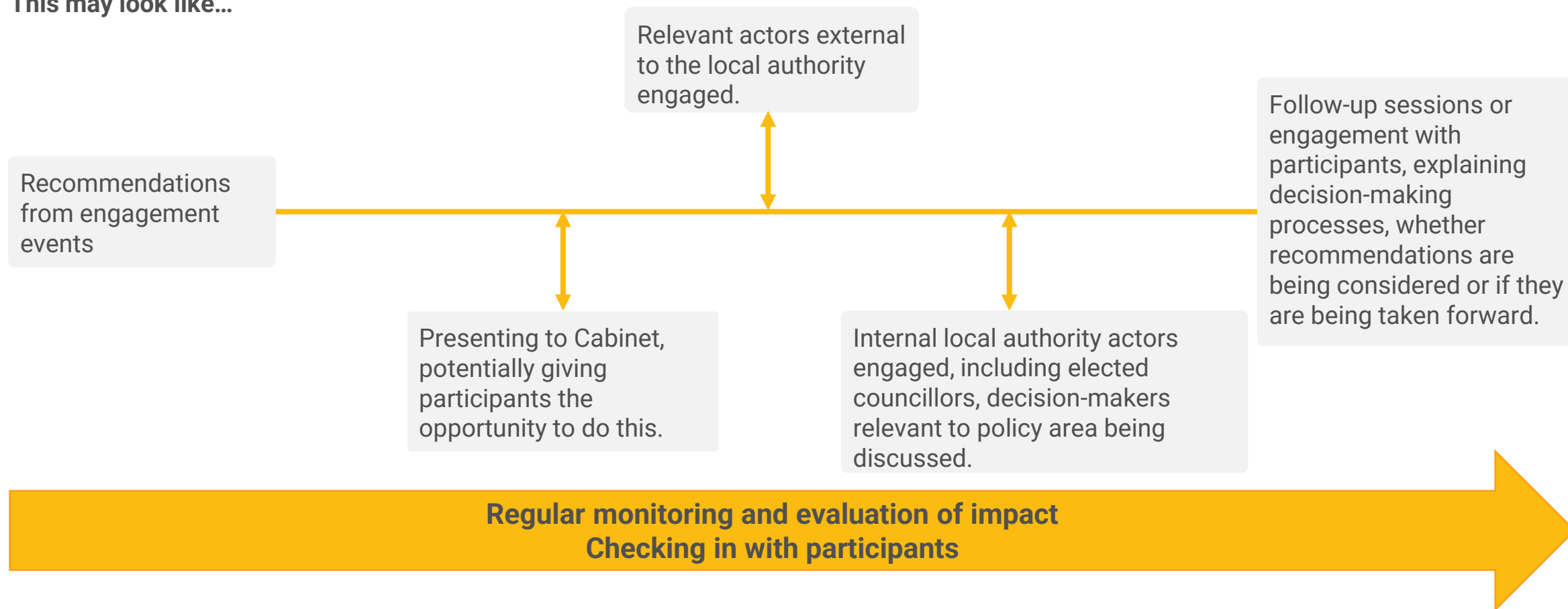
You can find further information [here](#).

## Checklist for stage 4

- Analyse engagement data.
- Communicate response to participants at each stage of the response plan, checking participants' words and intentions are reflected.
- Prepare a clear and concise report summarising the process, key findings, and recommendations.
- Disseminate findings to key actors, decision-makers, and participants.
- Develop a response plan, including timelines, outlining how the local authority will respond to the findings and recommendations.
- Use accountability mechanisms, decided at Stage 1, to track and report progress.
- Establish a monitoring and evaluation plan, evaluating whether the desired outcomes have been achieved.

# Stage 4: Closing the feedback loop

This may look like...



# Stage 5: Embedding engagement



# Stage 5: Embedding engagement

Building on the robust feedback loop in Stage 4, Stage 5 brings us back around to the first stage again. It is important for communities to continue to be involved and taking part in genuine participatory decision-making.

What this looks like may be built from the recommendations or outcomes of your first citizen engagement, or it could take the form of a robust, consistent set of engagement activities across the local authorities decision-making processes or programmes of work, to enable citizens' voices to be heard across the local authority.

This can also be part of evaluation and continuous communication with participants and the wider community, enabling consistent learning and furthering your reach.

## Checklist for stage 5

- Review and work to implement recommendations from participants into decision-making.
- Use accountability mechanisms to track progress on a regular, agreed upon basis with participants and stakeholders.
- Identify the impact of participatory engagement from monitoring and evaluation of work, and explore how this can be further utilised across the local authority.
- Identify future opportunities to continue engaging the public, for example, through leveraging the network of engaged citizens, or through establishing new engagement practices in future.

# Conclusion



# Achieving better places through local engagement

## 1. Empowerment through participation

Engaging citizens in climate action fosters empowerment and inclusivity. Local authorities can create pathways for citizens to influence and shape their community's future.

## 2. Engagement process

The five-stage process provides a structured pathway to engagement.

- **Stage 1:** Understanding public engagement and aligning it with strategic climate goals.
- **Stage 2-5:** Detailed plan from deciding objectives, setting up, conducting engagements, to integrating feedback into actions.

## 3. Innovative methods

Use engagement methodologies like those outlined in this guide to tailor local climate responses.

## 4. Feedback loop for continuous improvement

Key to long-term success is establishing transparency by consistently integrating citizen feedback into policy decisions.

## 5. Embedding engagement

Ensuring the recommendations, learnings, and impact of participatory engagement is consistently integrated into policy decisions in the long-term.



# Thank you!

For more information, please visit Innovate UK's Programme website [here](#).

If you have any questions, please contact: [involve@involve.org.uk](mailto:involve@involve.org.uk)