

# Public Engagement Tools

## Literature Review

Traditionally, PPPPs have relied on top-down or technocratic approaches in their formation, based on expert scientific knowledge at the expense of other local knowledge(s) (Scott 2006). In practice, however, scientific generalisations must be framed within the local context to ensure that they integrate context-specific considerations and engage the support of key local stakeholders (Reed *et al.*, 2011). The challenge is to develop tools that allow joint consideration of local knowledge(s) alongside scientific knowledge(s) (Raymond *et al.*, 2010). Involving wider publics and organisations in decision-making processes can be an important factor in ensuring that a PPPP is successful, building trust, understanding and endorsement amongst the wider community (Fish *et al.*, 2011).

There are significant challenges associated with integrating different types of knowledge which span numerous scales and contexts (Glass *et al.*, 2012). These include: differences in world views of project participants and external experts; differences in institutional power or control over access to and management of local resources; and changes in perception about the benefits generated by the work (Raymond *et al.*, 2010). The active intervention of government or powerful stakeholders can also lead to the manipulation or bypassing of structured decision-making procedures (Scott *et al.*, 2013). Engagement problems can also arise when participants represent different backgrounds or expertise, are not experienced in communication, suffer from consultation fatigue or express doubt about the relevance or credibility of a participatory process (Scott *et al.*, 2009).

Opening up decision-making to a broad range of actors can also complicate and delay decision-making, blurring who is accountable for what, both during a decision-making process and with regard to the acceptability of outputs of that process (Scott, 2011). Indeed, there is a common misconception that engagement is inherently good and desirable, but many participatory processes fail to define their goals explicitly and, in some cases, can exacerbate the problems they set out to resolve (Beierle and Koninsky, 2001; Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones 2001). This is particularly so when the exercise is done as part of a statutory requirement, becoming little more than a tick box exercise. Indeed, Reed (2008) and Scott (2011) extracted a number of best practice principles from published literature, emphasising that public engagement tools only work effectively when they are part of a carefully designed process with strong leadership present. The rest of this section considers how engagement tools might be used as part of a sequential process that is designed to:

- identify tools for early (and continued) engagement that can help open up dialogue and gather information with stakeholders;
- explore and analyse issues in greater depth with stakeholders;
- close down options and decide on actions.

## Identifying Stakeholders

Effective engagement starts by identifying and involving stakeholders as early as possible in any process and there is a range of methods to identify, differentiate, categorise and analyse stakeholders and their relationships (Reed *et al.*, 2009). Stakeholder mapping is a generic first stage tool. Gilmour *et al.* (2011) suggest stakeholders can be identified by considering the following:

- Who will be affected?
- Will the impacts be local, national or international?
- Who has the power to influence the outcome?
- Who are the potential allies and opponents?
- What coalitions might build around this issue?
- Are there people whose voices or interests in the issue may not be heard?
- Who can contribute financial or technical resources?

Including relevant stakeholders also requires tackling or accounting for power and representation issues at the earliest stages. In addition, stakeholder mapping may serve instrumental ends “if it leads to the transformation of relationships and the development of trust and understanding between participants” (Reed *et al.*, 2009: 1936).

A range of survey-based techniques can be used to gain insight into people's attitudes, values and behaviour regarding a particular issue and explore underpinning reasons for why people think about an issue in a particular way (Fish *et al.*, 2011). Structured questionnaires or surveys can be used to collect quantifiable information about views allowing statistical insights. Semi-structured questionnaires or interviews offer a more open-ended approach to eliciting qualitative information allowing contents and discourse analysis, whilst focus groups enable more structured conversations and interactions (Scott, 2011).

A range of bespoke tools can also be used to engage people in decision-making early on. Games are increasingly seen as valuable outputs in a range of European Commission research projects for enhancing public engagement strategies; particularly for hard-to-reach groups (e.g. Devisch, 2008). Games can provide an enjoyable and engaging format which allows consideration of complex issues outside their usual emotive real world context (e.g. Rufopoly as discussed in Scott *et al.*, 2013). Performance or arts-based tools can also be used to gather knowledge and insights, empowering stakeholders to get involved in the research process, potentially leading to transformative outcomes for participants (Rydzik *et al.*, 2013). By bringing creative practitioners into interdisciplinary teams, it is possible to develop new ways to enable stakeholders and project participants to understand each other's conceptions and constructions of a problem or challenge and generate new knowledge and insights that would not be possible using conventional research methods (e.g. Roberts, 2009; Scott *et al.*, 2013; Ware 2011).

### **Analysis and Assessment Tools**

Deliberative and iterative engagement tools are increasingly preferred to capture stakeholder views and to elicit a meaningful dialogue over time. Deliberation is important for social change because the process challenges those involved to consider new insights and knowledge, rethink their initial assumptions, and solve problems in a communicative and collaborative manner (Astleithner and Hamedinger, 2003; Blackstock and Richards, 2007). Using deliberative techniques successfully requires a managed and safe learning environment within which new partnerships can form to work together building trust and capacity through joint problem-solving issues (Scott *et al.*, 2011).

Here, participatory mapping can be a helpful tool for teasing out relationships across landscapes and between stakeholder groups and to promote common understanding of different perspectives for more mutually-beneficial management. This focus on enabling stakeholders to assess an issue is a characteristic of Participatory (rapid) Appraisal, a tool that uses a range of community engagement techniques to assess community views on a particular issue (Cornwall and Pratt, 2011). Initially designed as a process that is created and led by the community rather than an outside organisation (Pretty, 1994), nearly all rapid appraisal activities are now facilitated by skilled practitioners (Brown, 2006). Futures and scenario tools are also relevant here, visioning desirable futures and sketching potential pathways (Peterson *et al.*, 2003).

### **'Closing-down' Tools**

Common examples of closing-down tools are voting, ranking and prioritisation techniques (Reed, 2008). For highly complex or group decision-making processes, techniques such as participatory modelling (Sandker *et al.*, 2010), deliberative multi-criteria analysis (Stirling, 2006) and deliberative monetary valuation (Niemeyer and Spash, 2001) may be more appropriate. Participatory budgeting is a tool that allows participants to decide on the allocation of available public resources, an approach in vogue as part of the localism agenda by the UK Government (Cohen, 2012).

### **Summary**

There are many tools available for public engagement but they are often applied superficially as bolt ons rather than embedded in policy and decision-making processes. Set within an understanding of a particular PPPP, it is crucial that affected publics are able to shape meaningfully the process and outcome through effective engagement opportunities. Building and enhancing partnerships based on trust and mutual respect becomes a crucial part of a programme's and agency's legitimacy and long-term legacy.