INCLUSIVE
Community Engagement
TOOLKIT

A Practical Guide
capire
Inclusive community engagement provides people with opportunities to participate by reducing barriers and engaging in meaningful and supportive ways.
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01. Introduction

The Inclusive Community Engagement Toolkit puts Capire’s **100 ideas to engage hard to reach people** into practice. It has been designed to prompt you to think about the barriers that prevent or deter people participating in engagement activities and ways to breakdown or overcome these barriers.

In every engagement program you will have people who will find it difficult to participate due to individual circumstances. An inclusive community engagement approach is about recognising these circumstances and designing an approach to help address barriers to participation.

The toolkit has been developed based on Capire’s recent experiences and learnings. It has also been informed by input from our colleagues, associates and friends.

The Inclusive Community Engagement Toolkit is a guide only and is not intended to provide an exhaustive list of tools and techniques, groups considered hard to reach or barriers to participation. It provides ideas for planning, designing and delivering engagement activities that will help to engage the whole community.

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**FIGURE 1**

The keys steps in designing your inclusive community engagement approach.

- Understand the parameters of your project negotiables and non-negotiables
- Define the objectives and desired outcomes of your community engagement program
- Understand your community and their barriers to participation
- Design your engagement program taking into account your communities and their barriers
- Implement your community engagement program
A note on using this toolkit

The aims, objectives or intended outcomes of your community engagement program will differ depending on the location, funding, structure, timing and political imperatives of your project. The Inclusive Community Engagement Toolkit has not examined barriers to participation found within the decision-making organisation. It focuses on the barriers between you and the individuals or groups within the community.

FIGURE 2
Barriers to participation in community engagement activities
Barriers to participation
People may face barriers to participation for a range of reasons. These barriers depend on the different circumstances of the individual. Three different categories of barriers may limit people’s opportunity to participate in engagement activities or projects. These include:

**PERSONAL RESOURCES**
- Limited education and capacity
- Limited money
- Physical and mental health issues
- Limited mobility
- Geographic isolation
- Disability and sensory impairments
- Limited confidence
- Limited social networks
- Limited time

**MOTIVATION & ATTITUDE**
- Limited knowledge of benefits of engagement
- Limited knowledge of engagement activities
- Limited interest in the subject
- Limited understanding of the subject
- Consultation ‘fatigue’
- Unmet expectations

**CULTURAL FACTORS**
- Minority groups
- Language and literacy
- Values and beliefs
- Community divisions

When you come across a barrier, what do you do?
- Ignore it?
- Go around it?
- Tunnel under it?
- Wait for it to go away?

or...
address it by recognising the barrier and designing an approach that will help to reach all members of the community?
There are different groups in different settings who may find it more difficult to participate in engagement activities. Some of the groups often considered as hard to reach due to their respective barriers to engagement are:

- Homeless people
- Indigenous
- People experiencing family violence
- Older migrants
- Children
- The bereaved
- People experiencing trauma
- Drug and alcohol affected
- Young people
- Teenagers
- People in prison
- Professionals
- Youth offenders
- Residents in public housing
- People who have caring responsibilities
- Single parents
- Parents at schools
- People with health issues
- Fathers or mothers
- Newly arrived people
- Wheelchair users
- Hearing impaired
- Speech impaired
- Older people
- People living in rural or regional areas
- Transient people
- International students
- Temporary residents
- Business owner
- Same sex attracted
- People with a disability
- Vision impaired
- People with an intellectual disability

In presenting these groups, we recognise that not every individual in these groups may be hard to reach. The circumstances of each individual within these groups may vary depending on the topic, location, timing or past experiences and your engagement approach should be adapted accordingly.
## 02. Inclusive Community Engagement Matrix

There are some techniques which work better than others when addressing barriers to participation. From our recent experience we have prepared this Inclusive Community Engagement Matrix. It describes suitable community engagement tools and techniques given the specific barrier.

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<th>Large Group</th>
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<th>Online</th>
<th>Arts</th>
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## Motivation & Attitude

| Limited knowledge of benefits of engagement |            |             |             |         |         |        |      |                     |           |
| Limited knowledge of engagement activities |            |             |             |         |         |        |      |                     |           |
| Limited interest in the subject            |            |             |             |         |         |        |      |                     |           |
| Limited understanding of the subject       |            |             |             |         |         |        |      |                     |           |
| Consultation ‘fatigue’                      |            |             |             |         |         |        |      |                     |           |
| Unmet Expectations                         |            |             |             |         |         |        |      |                     |           |

## Culture

| Minority groups                           |            |             |             |         |         |        |      |                     |           |
| Language and literacy                      |            |             |             |         |         |        |      |                     |           |
| Values and beliefs                         |            |             |             |         |         |        |      |                     |           |
| Community divisions                        |            |             |             |         |         |        |      |                     |           |
03. Inclusive Community Engagement Principles

- Research your community; identify who has and who has not contributed to past projects.
- Use enticing language and incentives to encourage people to participate in your activities. Make the activity appealing to community members.
- Talk to other people in the area to find out which engagement activities have been successful in the past.
- Recognise that you may need time to invest in engaging your whole community. It can take time to build relationships and confidence.
- Involve your community as early as possible by asking your community how they would like to be engaged.
- Go to the community. Do not expect them to come to you.
- Use existing networks. It’s difficult and time-consuming to build your own.
- Encourage others in your workplace, including management, to support and participate in your engagement program.
- It is worth recognising that sometimes things do not work. It is good to recognise this; learn from your mistakes and move on.
- Clearly communicate the purpose of the engagement program and the way contributions will be used.
- Be part of a wider network of practitioners and share your experiences with others.
- Conduct an audit during your engagement program or activity to understand gaps and adapt your approach to reach those who may not be participating.
- Look beyond the ‘usual suspects’ or active groups and support other smaller or newer groups to participate in the process. Test your assumptions about who is considered hard to reach.
- Mapping, images and creative activities can help to explain information, explore concepts and encourage people to think more broadly about topics. Take the time to find images that are appropriate for your project.
- Send participants feedback on the engagement program. This should include a summary of the key findings and next steps.
- Evaluate your engagement program or activity to find out what worked well, who participated and what could be done better next time.
One-to-one

Your target group, project or reason for community engagement may require you to undertake one-to-one discussions. This can be conducted informally through five minute vox pops (‘voice of the people’) to capture people’s views on the street, or formally through structured face-to-face or phone interviews.

Interviews / Vox pops (‘voice of the people’) / Telephone hotline / Semi-structured conversations

WHY USE ONE-TO-ONE ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES TO ENGAGE?

- One-to-one meetings allow you to be flexible. You have the ability to engage in multiple ways and in a location that works best for your interviewee and their needs.
- One-to-one techniques can be used when discussing sensitive topics and will allow people to discuss information in-depth, in a private setting. It can also allow people to share information anonymously if they do not want to be identified publicly.
- Informal one-to-one techniques like vox pops can help you to approach people who may be time poor or who may not have an interest in or know about the project.
- One-to-one interviews can enable you to test or validate information obtained in other formats.
- One-to-one meetings provide an opportunity to build valuable and long-lasting relationships that can benefit the project.
- Phone conversations, phone conference calls and video links can help to break down physical isolation and link people across expansive geographic locations.
‘The Australian Government’s vision of a socially inclusive society is one in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society.’

‘The social inclusion approach is about all sectors of the community – government, business and the not-for-profit sector, communities and individuals – working together.’

From “A compendium of social inclusion indicators: how’s Australia faring?” (Australian Government, 2009).
Small group activities are designed to encourage group discussions around focused topics. They can be facilitated or semi-structured and can incorporate creative methods such as mapping, visioning, walking tours or site visits.

Focus group / Walking tour / Field trip / ‘Kitchen table’ discussion

WHY USE SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES TO ENGAGE?

- Small group activities can be tailored to suit a particular group’s needs and facilitate focused conversations to explore issues in detail.
- They can be useful to attract a group of people from similar backgrounds, as you have the ability to be flexible with time, location and resources in order to meet their needs.
- Small group activities allow the capacity to focus on ‘one community’ and tailor communication to their needs, for example by using an interpreter.
- In a small non-confrontational group environment, participants will feel safe and will be more likely to open up and discuss the issues important to them.
- Small groups allow you to build trust with the participants and this will encourage people to share information.
- Small group activities allow you to build community capacity by providing a potential networking opportunity and creating a space for like-minded people to share experiences.
Develop a flexible run sheet that details your objectives and desired outcomes. Design activities to achieve these.

Things might not go to plan and you will need to be able to adapt the process to keep the conversation moving. Have a backup plan.

Small group activities, especially focus groups, can enable you to collect quantitative information. Consider using a structured workbook that allows people to individually respond to your questions or research themes.

Use incentives for focus groups when appropriate. Incentives are a good way to acknowledge people’s contribution and time. Incentives can include a lunch, a voucher or a donation to a community group.

Walking tours or site visits can be incorporated into small group activities. Being on site can prompt people to share their experiences, ideas and feedback.

Make sure people feel comfortable and are known to each other. People are more likely to contribute to a discussion if they feel comfortable.

Small group activities can incorporate ‘fun’ elements for different ages. For example, activities involving children can include a play element.

Tailor the activities and the content to suit your audience. Make sure your questions and activities are relevant to the small group by testing the questions before they are finalised or doing your research about the target group up front.

Small groups can incorporate the use of an interpreter and visual aids to help communication. Take the time to explain the project or discussion topic to the interpreter beforehand so they are familiar with the content and key terms.

Recruit your participants for small group activities through existing networks or community groups. Invitations could also be sent to community leaders or people who work in the area to pass on to their contacts.

Tips for inclusive small group engagement

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06. Large Group

Large group activities can be structured for particular purposes or projects. They can allow for debate and encourage people to share ideas and experiences. They can be structured to allow for ‘break out’ or small group discussions or be a forum style.

Meetings / Briefings / Workshops / Forums

WHY USE LARGE GROUP ACTIVITIES TO ENGAGE?

– Large group activities provide an opportunity for you to focus on ‘multiple communities’ and hear from a large range of people with different perspectives.

– Large group activities can encourage dialogue and debate between groups.

– People bring with them energy, passion and experience which has the opportunity to be infectious in a large group setting.

– Large group activities can help to identify priorities and actions.
Tips for inclusive large group engagement

- Develop your run sheet to identify the objectives, activities, resources and responsibilities for the large group activity. Test your run sheet with your colleagues before the session.
- Use a facilitator to allow the session to flow according to the run sheet and to generate energy in the room. Individual table facilitators may also be used to encourage contribution by all participants and to record conversations.
- Hold your event on a day and at a time that would suit your audience. For example, during the day may only suit people not working.
- Think of the physical environment of the room or space and whether it is appropriate for all members of the community. Take into consideration the location, access, type of facility and size.
- Use a microphone if the room is large to make sure everyone can hear. Make sure specific needs are catered for, including hearing loops and accessibility to the building and the room.
- Encourage participants to wear a name badge. This helps personalise the interactions, but can also help you to understand who is contributing and who is not.
- Break up the group according to topics to allow for focused discussion and for people to choose their interest areas.
- Give enough notice to people to make sure they can attend. Allow at least four weeks.
- Promote your event widely in communications material and through existing networks. Word of mouth can also be a valid way of promoting your large group activity.
- Be conscious of the potential for diverse needs and knowledge in the room and design your activities accordingly.
- If you can, get people moving around. This can help to encourage the group to mix and meet other people in the room.
- Maps, images, prioritisation or voting exercises and other creative methods can help to achieve your outcomes. But remember that some people may just want to have a chat and this form of input is equally valid and should be treated as such. Make sure you have the time and the expertise to listen and record the conversations.
- Ask participants if they have specific requirements, including special access and communication needs. Make sure you have the resources to cater for these needs.
07. Drop-in

Drop-in events are largely informal activities that can have a ‘festive’ or ‘fun’ element, but can also help generate enthusiasm for your project and obtain feedback. They can also be less confronting and do not require significant interest or prior knowledge by the participant. If structured appropriately and with the right range of activities, ‘drop-in’ events can be suitable for a range of people.

Listening post / Festival / SpeakOut! / Information session / Display

WHY USE DROP-IN EVENTS TO ENGAGE?

– By setting up in a busy location drop-in events have the opportunity to engage a range of people who might not normally be involved in engagement activities.

– Drop-in events allow for greater flexibility as participants can choose to be involved for just five minutes, for an hour or even longer.

– By using fun, creative and festive elements, drop-in events can help to engage those people who may not have been initially interested in the project.

– Drop-in events encourage people to share ideas in a non-confrontational way. You can also engage with those people who may not have a deep appreciation of the topic being discussed.
Tips for inclusive drop-in engagement

- Hold your drop-in event during an existing community event as you will already have a captive audience. If you create your own event, make sure it is advertised through the local media, letterbox drops or in public places.
- Make sure your event is well signed and promoted on the day. You can use creative methods such as performance artists, chalk art or colourful signs.
- Make sure you have access to interpreters if your community is culturally and linguistically diverse.
- Make sure you have sufficient workers who are approachable and friendly. This will help attract community members. Make sure your staff are positive and inviting.
- Design your activities to allow for input from all ages and backgrounds. Use voting activities or visual displays to help make your event attractive. It will also make sure your content has universal appeal.
- Have activities where people can see what others have said and encourage people to respond to other people’s comments.
- Develop a checklist with all the material you will need on the day. These events can be labour and resource intensive and can take weeks to prepare. Allow enough time to plan.
- Choose the right location. Think about disability access and consider how your event impacts on surrounding people and businesses. Make sure your site is not overly exposed to the elements (e.g. try not to pick a windy spot to install a marquee and signs).
- Include activities that also encourage children to participate or for children to engage in while their parents or guardians participate. This could include drawing or colouring competitions or face painting.
- If your event is outdoors, make sure it is an all weather event. You can also downsize on the day if the weather deteriorates.
- Think about the time and day for your drop-in event. Weekends will help to attract families and other casual passers-by.
- Run a barbeque or food stall alongside your event to encourage people to stop, have a chat and contribute. Link in with community groups if you can. The community group may even run the barbeque to raise money.
Surveys

Surveys provide a structured way to gain feedback from people. They can be phone surveys, hard-copy or online and provided in a range of formats.

Online / Phone / Hard-copy / Take home / Intercept surveys / Polling

WHY USE SURVEYS TO ENGAGE?

- Surveys are non-confrontational and can allow anonymity. Anonymity can also encourage honest answers especially if it is a sensitive project.

- Surveys are an inexpensive way to receive input from people.

- Participants can have the choice to complete a hard copy or online survey in their own time and in the comfort of their own home.

- Surveys can be accessible to people with mobility limitations. For example, surveys can be available online, on the phone or you can offer to collect them.

- Surveys are a trusted technique to obtain rich quantitative and qualitative data.
Consider how you are going to distribute and collect your hard copy surveys. For example, if the survey is targeted at businesses, drop off the survey in person to explain the project and get their commitment to complete it and pick the survey up a couple of days later.

If it is a hard copy survey, make sure there is a reply paid envelop as part of the survey.

Think about the length of the survey. If your survey is longer than 10 minutes, provide an incentive, for example, a voucher for a local restaurant, coffee and cake or a swim at the local recreation centre.

Intercept surveys in the street will be easier to attract people and to show them images, maps or plans. In this case, using tablets (e.g. iPads) can help record information easily.

Save time by entering your hard copy surveys into your online survey to create a single database.

Make sure your survey is visually attractive. Balance visuals with text.

Phone surveys can be undertaken to help target specific cohorts in the community.

When undertaking face-to-face surveys in an area with culturally and linguistically diverse community members, have an interpreter on hand to translate the surveys.

Provide your survey in multiple formats.

Use non-ambiguous language in your survey and make sure it cannot be misunderstood. Avoid double negative, leading questions and built in assumptions. Test your survey and language before the survey is finalised.

Use language that is simple, direct and allows for either long or short answers. Consider what type of questions to use, depending on the information required; open or closed questions or a combination of both.

Promote your survey widely. Hard copy surveys may be placed at key information points, sent as a mail-out or inserted in a local paper. Online surveys can be promoted on your website or as part of an email mail-out.
Online tools include a range of internet-based activities and can be used for different purposes including social media to promote your engagement activities or online forums to encourage dialogue.

**WHY USE ONLINE TECHNIQUES TO ENGAGE?**

- Engaging with people in an online space is convenient for people who are time poor. It is also an accessible technique for those with limited physical access as they can become involved from their home or library computer and even from their mobile phone.
- People are now more confident and creative with the internet and it can be a safe place to share ideas and generate discussion among community members.
- The internet allows people who are geographically isolated to participate.
Use online tools in combination with face-to-face techniques.

As far as possible ensure that people without direct computer access can gain access to your online consultation via community drop in centres, libraries, internet cafes, etc.

Make your online space visually attractive and user friendly. Less words on a page helps with useability and navigation.

Ask yourself what type of input you are seeking from the community and choose your online tools appropriately. Are you inviting the community to: vote on options? Provide a list of ideas? Do you want to create a space for dialogue and deliberation? Or do you just want to inform the community?

Ensure the online tool provides an opportunity for people with poorer literacy skills to get involved; for example, through voting, ranking or rating processes.

Poor design and information overload can prevent many potential participants from finding what they need.

Use videos and audio files to add interest to your project and present information in appealing ways.

Ensure adequate risk management practices have been put in place to manage your online discussions for example, 24/7 moderation, response protocols, staff facilitators. Use a moderator for online conversations such as an online forum. People will want to know that they can interact and exchange ideas in a safe space.

Consider how you are going to respond to and report on the findings from your online engagement. While social media tools may allow you to reach people, most do not have adequate archiving or reporting systems, both of which are essential for meaningful engagement.

Make sure your website follows the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.

‘Public involvement processes are most effective when several consultative and participatory techniques are ‘triangulated’.

That is, when more than one technique is used, there is more assurance that all stakeholders and members of the public have been given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and in different ways.

10. Arts

Creative tools and activities can be used to promote community engagement by strengthening the process of understanding and exploring community values and allows people to express themselves using different mediums.

It can be used as an avenue to discuss a particular issue or topic, as a capacity-building initiative, for behaviour change outcomes or as part of a broader community engagement program to help promote your project.

Murals / Visions for the future / Sculptures / Photos / Multi-media / Performance

WHY USE ARTS TO ENGAGE?

- Art is a great way to communicate information and can be used to change behaviours in a creative way. Community art can also be used as a conduit to explore community concerns, ideas and feedback.
- Art activities can increase community involvement by engaging the public in community and urban design projects. For example, public art or street art can help ‘reclaim’ an area and encourage people to connect with a place. It can also help to promote a project and generate interest from the broader community.
- Arts can be used to help develop trust, build confidence and self esteem and encourage the community to learn new skills. Long-term arts projects or initiatives can also have important community-building outcomes as diverse people can be brought together to share stories and experiences.
- Arts for young people can be an important form of expression, especially when young people may feel disconnected from other forms of communication. Likewise, involving older people in arts programs will help to encourage older citizens to stay connected with the broader community.
Involve your community from the very beginning of your arts project to help encourage ‘ownership’ of the arts initiative. For example, ask the community to decide the medium, the scope and the location of your art work or initiative.

Use an artist in residence or artists in the community for your arts project. They will have the skills and expertise as well as the local knowledge.

Allow artists time to develop relationships with community members. This will help engender a sense of trust and will encourage a collaborative relationship to form.

Creative and colourful art activities can help inspire other community members to get involved in the broader community engagement project. Use art works created by the community in your communication materials such as posters to promote your project.

Use arts as an avenue to share experiences or provide feedback on your project. This can be through creating a mural to communicate a vision for an area or through a performance that communicates people’s ideas for the future.

Children’s art workshops can help to engage children in the project, but can also help to entice parents to participate. Use a printing or collage activity to engage children and parents and give them information about your project or issue.

Use art as a conduit to changing behaviours or giving people information. For example, use maps, images of places, photos of a neighbourhood or plants indigenous to an area to exchange ideas and understanding about particular topics.

Teach people simple art skills and nurture these skills through regular contact.
11. Community Education

Engaging communities through training and community education can be part of a behaviour change program, capacity building programs or up-skilling members of the community.

Community education programs can also assist in completing an engagement program (i.e. training members of the community to carry out your engagement activity) or can help you engage a captive audience to test ideas or seek feedback.

Training / Mentor programs / Leadership groups / Skills development days

WHY USE COMMUNITY EDUCATION TO ENGAGE?

- Community education can provide people in the community with skills and confidence.
- It has the potential to change ingrained behaviours and attitudes around particular issues.
- Community education programs allow you to engage a captive audience around a particular issue or to test ideas.
- Community education can provide a good opportunity to link into existing programs by working with local organisations or service providers to assist with the education program.
‘It is false and dangerous to assume that because people are silent, they agree with decisions.’

12. Communication Material

Communication materials are used to publicise and provide information about a project and/or issue. Communication material can be single purpose or be produced as a series of communication tools as the project progresses. Communication material comes in a very broad range of formats including online and hard copy.

Postcards / Brochures / Fact sheets / Displays / Newsletters / Posters / Stickers / Magnets / Media release / Advertisements / Public notices / Banners / Signs / Reports

WHY USE COMMUNICATION MATERIAL TO ENGAGE?

- Printed communication materials are a familiar method for sharing information and engaging with the community. They can be easily handed out and taken away to be read.

- Communication materials help to convey project messages through a combination of images and text.

- They can be easily adapted to suit the project and target audience.

- Communication materials, if distributed widely and in a variety of formats, can reach a large amount of people, combining the needs of promotion with project information.
Tips for inclusive communications materials

- Limit the use of jargon in your communications material.
- Images are important to help bring life to your project. Choose images that complement the words and the subject matter.
- Make sure your communications material is designed to suit your audience and project.
- Test your communication material with different audiences before going to print.
- Use creative methods to deliver your promotional material. This could be via street performers to attract children or families or through existing community groups.
- Remember that multiple methods of communication will help to reach a diversity of people as we all have different communications needs.
- Large print formats should be available for all your material, including online documents.
- Use attractive images and where possible, uses faces. Putting names to these faces can help to give your communication material a human element.
- Be conscious of colour, font size and layout and ensure that your document is easy to read.
- Translate your material into key community languages if appropriate or ensure that people can access information in languages other than English via a phone interpreter service. Include universal translation symbols.
- In your communication material, advertise opportunities for participation as well as contact details for the project.
- Be consistent with the design of your project documents. Where you can, make sure your communication designs are consistent with other communication material used in the same project.

‘The “problem” of the hard to reach rests not so much with the subjects of consultation, but rather with those conducting it.’

In other words, it is not that people are hard to reach, but rather that the tools and techniques may be inappropriate, or that not enough thought and creativity has been applied to engaging these people.

Thank you to the following people who all contributed to this toolkit –
Nicky, Ken, Nick, Helen, Gillian, Kate, Charlotte, Nezalat, Olly, Penny, Kate,
Victoria, Alicia, Rory, Marissa, Gina, Naomi, Martin, Anna, Wendy, Deborah,
Lauren, Jane, Natalie, Jen, Marion, Chloe, Justine, Dimitra, Tanya, Michelle,
Rose, Maya, Claire, Susan, Philomena, Tim, Lucy, Abi, Karen, Jess, Jane,
Lisa, Claire, Leanne, Greg, Pat, Helen, Jess, Geraldine, Christine, Kelly, Beth,
Angela, Rhonda. And a big thank you to Dr Crispin Butteriss of Bang the
Table who provided a peer review.

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capire  (ca·pi·ré) verb—
1. Italian; To understand, realise.
2. Social sustainability consultants in Melbourne, Australia. Ref; www.capire.com.au