DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION TOOLKIT

Tools, tips and techniques for assessing the effectiveness of digital engagement

Prepared for the Ministry of Justice by the Hansard Society

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Ministry of JUSTICE

The Democratic Engagement Branch (DEB) of the Ministry of Justice has a cross-government remit for promoting engagement with the public; the findings from Digital Dialogues will be used to develop government's appreciation of the role of new technologies in this context.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors. The Hansard Society and the Ministry of Justice are neither for nor against. They are, however, happy to publish these views and to invite analysis and discussion of them.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of new digital technologies has become commonplace among government departments. Many use them to enhance their internal and external communications; others, to develop cost-effective methods of discussing ideas with the public. Online tools have been found to provide an effective means of delivering information and services to stakeholders and are an effective way of prompting action.

This is still a new area for many, so Digital Dialogues was created to spread the knowledge gained by pioneers in the field. Commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and delivered by the Hansard Society, Digital Dialogues has identified what techniques and processes support effective digital engagement over a four year period. Through this project, we have been able to develop good practices that can be used not only to successfully engage online but also to assess the impact and value of that digital engagement.[1]

This toolkit outlines a number of methods, providing tips and sample questions that you can adapt to suit a range of situations when undertaking self-evaluation.

At whatever stage of the policy cycle, whether you are seeking to understand public opinion or to involve stakeholders in the decision-making processes, this toolkit will help you to judge whether your digital engagement has provided benefits. Good evaluation helps you to learn about what worked well and what can be improved in future engagement exercises. The toolkit can be adapted for evaluating offline engagement but draws on the key advantages of digital technologies, not least their capacity to provide quick and easy ways of monitoring trends and gaining feedback.

About the toolkit

This toolkit is not intended to be prescriptive; our experience with 'Digital Dialogues' has taught us that there is no 'one size fits all' solution to digital engagement and the same goes for how you evaluate it. However, through our own experience of carrying out over thirty such evaluations, we have experimented, refined and adopted various techniques that have helped develop useful and effective evaluations. We think that others wishing to evaluate their own digital engagement exercises will find this useful.

The first section of this guide describes key evaluation approaches and the outcomes that you can expect if you adopt them; next we identify the typical scope of digital engagement exercises and map these to evaluation indicators, measurements and tools, followed by a discussion on how evaluation needs differ through different stages of a project. The guide

1 Digital Dialogues has also produced a collection of case studies highlighting good practice and key factors for success. These can be accessed at www.digitaldialogues.org.uk. In addition, a definitive guide to digital engagement based on such evaluations (forthcoming) will be accessible on the Digital Dialogues website.

then moves on to discuss how to develop your own evaluation framework and the sorts of insights that can be gained from it. From here, the guide develops a range of basic questions and then provides examples of more detailed questions that can be asked in different contexts, depending on the nature of the engagement exercise and the purpose, scope and scale of the evaluation.

APPROACHES AND OUTCOMES

There are three 'must-have' tools for easy evaluation: activity logs or observations, user surveys and discussions (usually, interviews or focus groups). Each tool has different strengths and limitations and, because each engagement exercise is different, it is important to review the tools in light of the scope of your own project to select those that will be most effective. The table below highlights what you are most likely to learn from each approach and the relative strengths and limitations of each method.

CORE METHODS	KEY INSIGHTS	STRENGTHS & LIMITATIONS
Activity log /observation of exercise	Did the exercise lead to sustained engagement? What themes were popular?	Site statistics can give you an incomplete picture about the levels of interest and efficacy achieved through the initiative. Used well, they can highlight which topics and styles of engagement encouraged participation in the initiative. Observation lets you see levels and nature of engagement, emergent themes and the nature of conversation and debates.
User surveys	Did the engagement exercise attract the desired users (demographic data)? Did it change their opinion (attitudinal data and feedback)?	Self-selecting bias might see people completing surveys because they have something specific to say. Intrusive questions can deter potential respondents. Low response rates might also produce skewed findings. Analysis should sift feedback and demographic data for patterns rather than absolute trends.
Discussions with engagement teams and stakeholders	Have any policy changes come about as a direct/indirect result of engagement? Did the engagement exercise inform government approaches to the public/stakeholders?	At a minimum, these offer some useful reflections by those running the initiatives or by policy stakeholders. For them to be illuminating, such interviews need to encourage open discussion – even about the problems with the initiative, and addressing internal as well as external barriers to engagement.

Another way of looking at this is:

What do you want to find out:	Activity log	Observation	User surveys	Discussion
Did the exercise lead to sustained engagement?	✓	✓		
What themes were popular?	✓	✓		
Did the engagement exercise attract the desired users (demographic data)?		✓	✓	✓
Did it change their opinion (attitudinal data and feedback)?		✓	✓	
Have any policy changes come about as a direct/indirect result of engagement?				✓
Did the engagement exercise inform government approaches to the public/stakeholders?				✓

KEY INDICATORS

The scope and aim of your digital engagement initiative will help you to define the scope for evaluation. This section outline some of the typical functions of deliberative websites – your engagement exercise will fall into at least one of these categories:

- Gauging public opinion
- Supporting formal consultations online
- Collaboration around policy-making/service delivery

Whatever the purpose of the engagement exercise, the main question is:

- Did it fulfil its objectives?

Beyond this, you can use the core methods discussed above to asses a range of core indicators for each of these functional capabilities. Before reviewing these, consider the, following factors that you will be evaluating for:

Effectiveness The extent to which it has achieved its goal (reached the target audience, enabled effective engagement and been delivered on time and on budget etc). You can assess this through user feedback surveys, site statistics and through interviews with the engagement team and stakeholders;

Relevance	Does the engagement exercise meet stakeholder, departmental and public needs. The best indicators of this are participant take-up (via activity logs), observation of online discourse and feedback in surveys. Interviews with stakeholders can also provide you with useful in-depth insights;
Impact	Has the project had a long-term influence on the department and beyond or demonstrably impacted on the policy environment? The most effective way of assessing impact on the department is through interviews with engagement and policy teams. It can also be valuable to ask participants (via surveys) whether involvement has had any impact on themselves and whether they perceive the process to have had any impact on policy;
Coverage	Did the exercise reach the desired groups? To assess this, you can monitor and review media and other public discussions about the policy area to see if it the engagement exercise is mentioned (direct coverage) or to see if (and if so, how) public/stakeholder discourses have been shaped through the engagement exercise (indirect). It is also helpful to gather demographic data about participants (from surveys or registration) alongside activity logs to understand who has taken part;
Transparency	How much information and feedback were participants given? You can assess this through user surveys and feedback. Observations of official contributions can be made and interviews with the engagement team used to clarify how communication developed between the department and participants;
Sustainability	Will the project continue or offshoots develop? You can assess this through interviews with the engagement team. Look out for instances where the exercise compliments existing activities or triggers new activities.

Gauging public opinion

Core Indicators	Whether a diverse range of people took part and the interaction between different participants (official and public) Whether the information received was informative (to government and to the public) How public opinion informed policy processes (and the extent to which the public were kept informed of developments)
Measurement Tools	Activity logs/observation recording number of official contributions; number of user generated comments; links to and from the site; number of unique visitors; number of repeat visitors (compared to projected levels of engagement); amount of time spent on the site (and most widely visited

	sections). **Surveys with participants** asking for demographic information (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) and feedback; previous levels of engagement with departments; attitude towards engaging in future; impact of exercise on efficacy. **Feedback from policy leads/engagement staff** reflecting on experience and discussing how much time and money was spent on the project.

Supporting formal consultations online

Core Indicators	Whether appropriate audiences were identified and engaged Whether information was understood by the public and generated dialogue How public opinion informed policy processes (and the extent to which the public were kept informed of developments)
Measurement Tools	**Activity logs/observation** recording number of responses received (and from which audiences (e.g., experts, stakeholders, public)); number of interactions between officials (particularly senior decision-makers/Ministers) and participants; number of active discussions. **Surveys with participants** asking how they came to hear about the exercise and seeking demographic data (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) and feedback about experience and quality of discussion; also asking for information about previous levels of engagement and attitude towards getting involved in the future; impact of exercise on efficacy. **Feedback from policy leads/engagement staff** reflecting on whether they engaged the public at the right stage of the policy cycle; also exploring whether marketing and promotion strategies worked (i.e., attracted the right participants); exploring whether participants' opinions informed policy processes and whether participants were given feedback about policy impact; whether online initiatives were carried out alongside formal consultations and if senior policy officials and other internal staff (e.g., communications) were involved; how moderation worked and returns on investment.

Collaboration around policy-making/service delivery

Core Indicators	Whether appropriate participants were identified and engaged The nature of the emerging relationship between government and participants The quality of the interaction, and the extent to which it informed policy or led to new understandings on the part of participants/government officials
Measurement	**Activity logs/observation** recording number of participants involved;

Tools	number of people who took part regularly; numbers of comments by officials and decision makers versus participants. **Surveys with participants** asking demographic/attitudinal questions to gauge the extent to which different groups were involved (expert, lay, stakeholders) and noting their background (age, gender and etc.); feedback from participants about their experience and its effect on efficacy. **Feedback from policy leads/engagement staff** reflecting on how participants were selected and recruited; the stage of the policy process at which they were engaged; whether participants' contributions influenced the policy process and if they were kept informed of the outcome of their involvement; whether some experts/stakeholders were favoured over others; the role of facilitation.

Some indicative questions and samples of user survey and interview schedules are provided at later in this guide and model activity logs that span these three functions are shown in. All of these can be adapted to your needs and built upon, with questions excluded or added to suit the nature of your engagement exercise.

EVALUATING DIFFERENT STAGES OF ENGAGEMENT

The methods outlined in the previous section provide the easiest and fastest ways of assessing impact and quality: other approaches (which are not dealt with in this toolkit) include focus groups with stakeholders, analysis of media coverage of the initiative or policy area, product testing with audiences, interviews with select participants and observations of interactions within the exercise.

Consider that any engagement exercise (digital or otherwise) goes through a number of distinct phases. To keep the evaluation manageable and realistic, we've identified three such stages as being:

- Context – Defining the engagement
- Implementation – Carrying the engagement
- Outcome – The result of the evaluation

Below, we discuss how you can incorporate the different methods to evaluate the effectiveness of each of these stages.

Evaluating the context

> Method – discussion with policy and engagement teams and stakeholders

This is ideally carried out alongside a risk assessment when planning a project. In meetings with policy leads, engagement staff and stakeholders, key questions (identifying external barriers and budgetary constraints) can be asked. These will help you to tailor communication and marketing strategies, ensuring that resources are adequately targeted and that engagement goals are clear. Context evaluation can be a short process or may be iterative: the aim is to sharpen the initiative's focus.

By involving external stakeholders, the initiative is more likely to achieve buy-in from desired groups from the start.

> BOX B: QUESTIONS TO ASK IN A CONTEXT EVALUATION
> - What are the goals of your engagement exercise?
> - What activities will you undertake to meet your aims?
> - What factors might help or hinder the engagement exercise?
> - How will you overcome obstacles and draw on opportunities?
> - How are you going to judge your performance (the evaluation criteria and methods)?
> - What do you want to learn from the evaluation?
> - What do you want to tell participants and internal or external audiences about the exercise?

Evaluating the implementation

> Method – activity log, observation and user surveys

By tracking the routes by which people have become involved and by monitoring the levels of activity, it is possible to glean important information about its appeal and reach. When used correctly, data gathered during an implementation evaluation provide a structured way of developing communication strategies. Data can be collected through:

- demographic questions in user surveys: This method is not without its problems but surveys are nonetheless useful: we provide sample questions, along with options for when to ask them (e.g., on registration, before engaging or after taking part) and a model anonymity guarantee;

- user feedback: By providing a quick way for participants to comment on their experience of the project, it is possible to collect some useful insights; and

- back-end statistics: These can identify peaks in traffic, and may highlight the route by which people hear about the initiative, the most widely read sections and links to-and-from the site. Details about how to develop and analyse an observation log are provided in this document.

Implementation evaluations are particularly useful for initiatives that see initially high interest rapidly tailing off, or when there is low involvement or a high level of conflict.

Evaluating the outcome

> Method – activity log, observation, user surveys & discussion with policy and engagement teams and stakeholders

This explores the extent to which the exercise has achieved its goals. It draws on feedback from participants and activity logs taken during the exercise, and uses discussions with stakeholders and colleagues to identify challenges (model questions are provided). While such discussions are time-consuming to run and write-up, they provide a rich narrative that can supplement the other evaluation data.

DEVELOPING YOUR EVALUATION

Ideally, it is most beneficial to evaluate each of the three stages discussed above and using multiple methods, to provide some triangulation of the findings. This helps to ensure that your evaluation is more thorough and accurate. However, we recognise that there constraints in terms of time, budget and the scope of digital engagement exercises and these mean that, pragmatically, it is often more efficient, even necessary, to focus on a subset of the project, such as the process of setting up your project.

The way we have proposed undertaking evaluations is flexible and they can be adapted to suit your goals. This is not only pragmatic but it also recognises that no two projects are the same and that it is not useful to be overly prescriptive – in fact, doing so can lower the value of evaluations.

By way of an example, if your project has been designed to increase public involvement, then your evaluation would most usefully attempt identify the reach of the exercise in order to determine if in fact the public are now more involved (and engaged) as a result. The following scenario might help you to start thinking about the process of developing an evaluation.

> **Scenario 1: Engendering Public Trust**
>
> The Minister for Animal Welfare wants to restore public trust in the department in the face of hostile media coverage of its performance.
>
> A public engagement initiative is designed to attract the broadest possible audience. It will be considered successful if it generates a high volume of interest and discussion, but the engagement team realise that this could be counter-indicative – driven by hostile media coverage and negative campaigns.
>
> The decision is taken to focus on the impact of the engagement on public trust (via user feedback surveys) rather than focus solely on activity logs.

> In addition, the team decides to analyse the quality of interaction – strong engagement patterns (references to other user comments and adding to them, rather than simply repeating concerns) are indicative of success.

GETTING INSIGHTS FROM EVALUATION

Evaluation is as much about interpretation as it is about capturing the right information. A good analysis requires reflexivity, as the scenario below suggests:

> **Scenario 2: Challenging Assumptions**
>
> An engagement exercise has just finished. Participation rates are lower than had been hoped for and the engagement team are wondering whether their expectations were wrong, or if the exercise failed?
>
> They talk to stakeholders, review the activity log and re-read user feedback to answer this question. Such reflexivity offers transparency benefits and enables the team to learn from their experience and develop more realistic goals.

Decisions about future projects can be developed through such systematic processes. Evaluations can be used by others in a 'backwards mapping' exercise; for example, when an engagement team is planning a new exercise, evaluations of previous initiatives provide valuable support in the design. They can be used to identify the pre-conditions necessary to achieve desired goals. By developing indicators for each pre-condition, a new evaluation process will be set in motion for the next cycle of engagement.

For example, if the goal is to broaden participation, a precondition might be that there is a budget for marketing, stakeholder management and communication during the initiative. To assess whether the engagement exercise has worked, you may focus on the value for money benefits of the approaches used, and identify gaps in strategic communication.

The hindsight that can be achieved from evaluations is useful to others, which is why we recommend that you share your findings – including with the participants and stakeholders in the exercise unless there is a good reason not to. Internally, the production of an evaluation summary will inform decisions about whether the exercise was of use. Other departments and community organisations will be able to benefit from your insights. Sharing evaluation findings will make the exercise more accountable, ensuring that others can see how the department is approaching engagement.

There is a temptation to avoid publishing evaluations if the engagement exercise didn't go as expected. We would encourage you to avoid this pitfall as there can be more valuable lessons in the projects that didn't quite go to plan and this can help yourself and others learn from and avoid similar mistakes in the future: remember that this is a new and emerging field so there are always some risks involved.

Places to publish your findings:

- On your own website.
- www.peopleandparticipation.net, a website that provides guides and case studies for those involved in engagement.
- Government Communications Network (restricted to registered users who are involved in government communication): www.comms.gov.uk
- The IDeA Communities of Practice Website includes dedicated communities for engagement and digital engagement: www.communities.idea.gov.uk
- www.iap2.org allows for case studies on public participation to be uploaded by members.
- www.dc10plus.net allows for content to be submitted on digital inclusion in local authorities.
- www.epractice.eu and www.demo-net.org are both Europe-wide e-community websites where case studies and good practice can be uploaded.

SOME BASIC QUESTIONS

The following section provides some basic pro-forma questions that you can include as part of an evaluation exercise.

Objectives and methods

It is useful to keep track of the documentation relating to the project so that information about how decisions were made, the scope and its development over time are available during the evaluation. Consider the following:

Outcomes	What were the intended outcomes? Are there any aims that are difficult to define?
Risks	How were the aims set and what risks were identified? Who set them and how? Did the aims change during the project?
Aims	Have the initial aims been met? What were the unintended consequences of the project (positive and negative)?

Methods	What methods and techniques were used in the engagement exercise (and to evaluate it)? Who decided on these?

Engagement context

- Why is the engagement exercise being carried out (challenges and opportunities)?
- Is it part of a wider project or a stand-alone exercise?
- To what extent has the engagement exercise been developed to respond to contextual factors (internal and external)?
- What socio-political factors have affected the process?

Patterns of engagement

- Who were the intended participants? Who has engaged with the exercise and to what extent?
- What level of engagement was sought (from public engagement through to policy consultation) and why? Was it achieved?
- Were stakeholders involved in the planning and in the exercise? Did they stay involved?
- Did the engagement exercise target the right level of engagement or were expectations unrealistic (or too limited)?

Reflections on the exercise

- Were the engagement methods that you chose appropriate?
- What worked well and what could be improved upon?
- What are the main lessons from the exercise?
- What is the most significant outcome from the exercise (and why)?
- Were the techniques used for the evaluation appropriate?

GATHERING FURTHER EVIDENCE

Beyond the basic evaluation data described above, it is useful where time and budget permits to collect additional data. Doing so will significantly improve the quality of your evaluation.

Demographic and Attitudinal Data

If you are asking participants to register, then this is a good time to ask them for some basic demographic data. If registration is not required or demographic data not collected at this stage, then a pre-engagement survey can be used. Make sure that the data you ask for is appropriate, that it supports your evaluation and that it isn't going to be onerous for users to enter – otherwise you will lose potential engagement and potentially good data. Make sure that you have taken steps to ensure the participant's privacy and that these steps are clearly described. A standard privacy clause might read:

> We will use [the data collected | your responses] when making recommendations to government about stakeholder and public engagement. In line with the Data Protection Act, information that you supply is kept private – no details will be passed on to third-parties. The results of the evaluation will be available to the public.

If it is vital that you obtain demographic data, then you can make them compulsory to answer, however, this should generally be avoided as much as possible. If you do this, make sure that you explain why it is necessary and how you intend to analyse the data.

> The harder you make it for people to answer and the more information that you ask for, the more likely that people will shy away from answering the questions and your returns will be lower.

Online pop-ups reminding participants to fill in a survey or email notifications (if registration has been used) are two quick ways to encourage participation (but limit these to two prompts).

Here are some basic demographic questions, which can be varied to suit your needs:

Where do you live?	Provide options to ensure consistency: Might be a list by country, region, county or town depending on what data you require.
How old are you?	Either a free-text field that they can enter or provide multiple-choice age range (eg Under 18, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, over 65).
What is your gender?	Provide a multiple choice list and include an option such as 'Not specified'

You can include more specific questions, for example about socio-economic or ethnic breakdown of participants if it is relevant to your engagement exercise but avoid capturing data just for the sake of it (always ask yourself what value having this data will add to your evaluation or, conversely, what will you not be able to find out if you lack the data).

Attitudinal questions ask about previous experience of online communication (if the exercise is web-based) and about attitudes towards political engagement generally. These provide a base-line from which it is possible to assess the impact of the exercise via participant feedback.

Internet use	
Are you a frequent user of the internet?	Yes, No, Unsure.
What do you do online?	Provide a list: Email, finding information, news, shopping, banking, planning/booking travel or holidays (add others that are relevant and allow multiple choices)
Where do you access the internet?	Provide a list: Home, Work, School/College, Library or community centre, internet café, mobile (allow multiple choices)
About the engagement exercise	
How did you find out about the engagement exercise?	Departmental website, other website, email, media coverage, search engine, word of mouth, other (specify).
Why did you choose to visit the site?	For general information, to read/download content, to make a comment, because it affects me, curiosity, for work or study purposes (allow multiple choices).
Assessing prior interest and knowledge	
How interested are you in politics?	Not at all, Somewhat, Fairly interested, Very interested, not sure.
How interested in you in *x* policy area?	Not at all, Somewhat, Fairly interested, Very interested, not sure.
How informed are you about the *x*	Not at all, Not very, Undecided, Fairly, Very.

department/agency?	
Have you been in touch with the x department/agency in the last three years?	Yes, No, don't know/won't say
Have you contacted your MP (or MSP, AM or MLA) in the last three years?	Yes, no, don't know/won't say
Have you ever voted in a national (general), local or European election?	European, General, [Regional][2], Local (allow multiple choices)

Patterns of Participation

Basic levels of website activity can be measured from a websites traffic logs. Beyond this, it is important to ensure that activity logs are designed in to the engagement site and that activity data is being captured in a database for future evaluation. Beyond what is recorded automatically, it is often useful (even necessary) to set up a spreadsheet or offline database to record key events during an engagement exercise. It is important to pre-define discrete categories for measurement and these might include:

1. Number of registrants (if applicable).
2. Number of active participants (e.g., who contributed to discussions).
3. Number of survey responses.
4. Number of discussions instigated by department/agency.
5. Number of comments posted by participants.
6. Number of responses to participants by department/agency.
7. Most discussed topic by department:
    a. when initiating themes; and
    b. when responding to comments.

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2 You can include a regional option for surveys including Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

8. Most discussed topic by users.

9. Number of comments per topic.

10. Peaks in traffic (this can be matched to a timeline of key offline and online events around the exercise).

Feedback from Participants

The responses from feedback surveys can be read in conjunction with stakeholder and engagement team perspectives (questions to elicit these can be found towards the end of this section). Where possible (usually if the demographic and attitudinal data is captured alongside feedback), comparisons can be made between respondents statements about previous engagement and their responses to questions about future engagement.

The list of sample questions below can be modified to suit your needs and the nature of your engagement exercise. Some of the responses can be compared to other data captured. For example, if respondents say that they visited a website daily but the site traffic data does not suggest that this was a general trend, then it is worth noting the effect of self-selection bias (in other words, only those committed to taking part and registering their opinion will fill in surveys). Look out also for social desirability bias when asking questions – for example, if you ask people how often they recycle, they are quite likely to over-report.

Here are some sample questions:

1. Compared with other engagement exercises that you have experienced how would you rate this initiative (on a scale of 1 – 5, with five being the top score)?

2. How often did you visit the initiative? (Multiple choice: Daily, Weekly, Fortnightly, Monthly, Rarely, Never).

3. Which the topics did you look for most often (open text).

4. Did you contribute to the discussion? (Multiple choice: Yes, No).

5. Did you read other participants' contributions? (Multiple choice: Yes, No).

6. Did you appreciate the official responses to participant comments? (Multiple choice: Yes, Somewhat, No, Not sure).

7. Describe one thing you liked most about the initiative. (open text).

8. Is there anything that you would change to improve it? (open text).

9. Did you learn anything new about the department/agency/policy area through the initiative? (Multiple choice: Yes, No, Not sure).

10. In the future, I am likely to… (Multiple choice: Visit the initiative again, Recommend it to others, Get more involved in politics as a result of the initiative, Stop visiting the initiative, Tell people not to get involved, Get less involved in politics generally as a result of the initiative).

11. Please make any other comments about this initiative or about politics generally. (open text).

Model Questions for Stakeholders and Engagement Teams

So far the sample questions have focussed on the participants in the engagement exercise. The evaluation will also assess the views of and impact on internal stakeholders and the engagement team themselves. The following list provides two sets of sample questions to help you assess this, firstly at the pre-engagement stage and, secondly, post-engagement.

Pre-engagement questions

- Do you feel that you have set the right objectives? (to repeat at end of exercise)
- What obstacles do you face?
- Are there factors and externalities which you anticipate may help the exercise?
- What steps are being taken to promote the engagement and sustain it?
- Do you feel that they are the right ones?
- Have the right people been involved in planning the exercise?

Post-engagement questions

- Looking back, do you think the right objectives were set?
- To what extent did you manage to overcome any obstacles?
- What unintended barriers did you encounter?
- Did it have the intended reach? How did the reach and outcomes differ from those achieved using other methods?
- What helped or hindered participation? Were certain groups excluded or absent?
- Were the appropriate tools used? Did they help or deter people from participating? How useful were they compared to other tools?
- Were the contributions relevant to the policy area? How was conflict and disagreement handled?

- How were contributions responded to?
- Do you think that the participants benefited from the exercise?
- Did participants gain new insights and did the exercise change their perception of government or politics generally?
- How much do you think stakeholders benefited from the exercise?
- To what extent did the department gain from the experience and how? Might it change the way they engage the public in future?
- Did the exercise have a policy impact? Were the processes around policy and engagement transparent?
- Were there any unintended consequences of the exercise (either good or bad)?
- Could the exercise lead to the development of a community of practice that could be sustained or deployed in the future?
- Might the exercise change the ways that citizens engage with political institutions? Do you anticipate that participants may encourage other people to take part?
- What are the main lessons? Could the exercise have been more effective if run differently?
- Which initial strategies are being implemented and which have been excluded from future exercises? Can the rejected strategies be adapted?

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Table of Evaluation Indicators and Tools

What to assess or measure	Key indicators of success	Which methods to choose: Logs	Observation	Survey	Interviews	How to assess or measure
Did the department have the capacity to run the exercise?	▪ Successfully adapted to participant requirements. ▪ Communicated clearly and resolved conflicts. ▪ Provided feedback to participants.		✓	✓	✓	▪ Interviews with stakeholders and engagement team members. ▪ Observations of the exercise. ▪ User/stakeholder feedback surveys.
Was the exercise visible? Was it adequately promoted? Was information communicated clearly? Did it receive appropriate levels of publicity?	▪ Stakeholder/participant satisfaction. ▪ Levels of participation. ▪ Appropriateness and timeliness of information. ▪ Was it mentioned by the media or opinion leaders?	✓	✓	✓	✓	▪ Feedback surveys. ▪ Interviews with engagement teams and stakeholders. ▪ Media tracking. ▪ Activity logs and observations of the exercise. ▪ Demographic and attitudinal data from participant surveys.
Were the right stakeholders consulted appropriately?	▪ Number and range of people consulted. ▪ Stakeholder satisfaction.			✓	✓	▪ Interviews with engagement teams and stakeholders. ▪ Surveys with stakeholders who did not take

What to assess or measure	Key indicators of success	Which methods to choose: Logs	Observation	Survey	Interviews	How to assess or measure
						part.
Was participation encouraged and sustained? Does it remain sustainable now?	▪ Number of people who took part. ▪ Extent to which they remained involved and felt able to participate. ▪ Satisfaction of stakeholders and participants.		✓	✓	✓	▪ Interviews with engagement teams and stakeholders. ▪ Survey of participants. ▪ Observations of the exercise.
Was the engagement exercise appropriately targeted?	▪ Relevant stakeholders and communities were involved. ▪ The level of engagement suited participants. ▪ Satisfaction of those taking part.		✓	✓	✓	▪ Interviews with engagement teams and stakeholders. ▪ Comparison of participation base with intended participation. ▪ Feedback surveys with participants.
Did the exercise attract previously disengaged citizens? Are any likely to become future champions?	▪ A range of voices took part in the conversation and a variety of different views was heard. ▪ Satisfaction of those taking part.		✓	✓	✓	▪ Activity logs and observations of the exercise, compared with intended levels of participation. ▪ Demographic and attitudinal data from participant surveys. ▪ Feedback surveys. ▪ Interviews with engagement teams and stakeholders.
Did the engagement exercise help the department to reframe policy agendas? Did it change public perception?	▪ The exercise had a measurable impact on policy or departmental practice. ▪ The extent to which the public is now		✓	✓	✓	▪ Interviews with engagement teams and stakeholders.

What to assess or measure	Key indicators of success	Which methods to choose: Logs	Observation	Survey	Interviews	How to assess or measure
	more sympathetic to government or better understands the policy area.					▪ Feedback surveys. ▪ Tracking media, publications from key departments/agencies and Parliamentary Hansard.
Were participants given enough feedback and was there sufficient interaction with participants?	▪ Information about policy decisions and the impact of the engagement exercise was fed back to participants. ▪ Participants felt their views were heard.			✓	✓	▪ Interviews with engagement teams and stakeholders. ▪ Feedback surveys.

Appendix 2: Further reading

Digital Dialogues

Miller, L., & Williamson, A. (2008). Digital Dialogues – Third Report. Hansard Society & Ministry of Justice. Available online: www.digitaldialogues.org.uk

Evaluation guides

Guthrie, K., & Preston, A. (2005). Building capacity while assessing it: Three foundations' experiences using the McKinsey Capacity Assessment Grid. URL: www.blueprintrd.com/text/capacityassess.pdf

Involve, Shared Practice. (2007). Making A Difference: A guide to evaluating public participation in central government [online] London. Available at http://www.involve.org.uk/making_a_difference/

Kellogg Foundation. (1998). Evaluation Handbook.

Measurementcamp08 Wiki. (2009). Available at measurementcamp.wikidot.com/tools-for-measurement

Paterson, L. (2006). 'Ingenious Evaluations: A Guide for Grant Holders'. The Royal Academy of Engineering. URL: http://www.raeng.org.uk/about/engagement/pdf/Evaluation_Guide.pdf

People and Science Policy, Research Councils UK. (2005). Practical Guidelines: Evaluation [online] Bristol. Available at www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/publications/evaluationguide.pdf

Queensland Government. (2007). Community Engagement in Context. URL: http://www.onlinelearning.qld.gov.au/materials/ce/online/ce/info/learning/guide/t1.htm

Research Councils UK. (2003?). Evaluations: Practical Guidelines. Research Councils UK and the Department for Trade and Industry.

Sheldrake P., 2008 Social Web Analytics. (2008). The social Web Analytics eBook Available at www.socialwebanalytics.com/The_Social_Web_Analytics_eBook_2008.pdf

Warburton, D., Wilson, R., & Rainbow, E. (2007?). Making a Difference: A Guide to Evaluating Public Participation in Central Government. Involve, London.

Articles, academic papers and books

Blair, E. (2007). 'Evaluating an issue's position on the policy agenda: The bellwether methodology'. The Evaluation Exchange, 13(1).

Dahlberg, L. (2004). 'Internet research tracings: Towards non-reductionist methodology'. Journal of Computer Mediated Communication, 9(3).

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Jensen, K. B. (2002). 'The qualitative research process'. In K. B Jensen's (Ed.) A handbook of media and communication research: Qualitative and quantitative methodologies, 235-253. London, Routledge.

Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2005). 'Participatory action research: Communicative action and the public sphere'. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Luppicini, R. J. (2002). 'Toward a conversational system modeling research methodology for studying computer-mediated learning communities'. Journal of Distance Education, 17 (2).

Macintosh, A., White, A., Renton, A. (2005). 'From the Top Down: An Evaluation of e-Democracy Activities Initiated by Councils and Government.' Local e-Democracy National Project, Bristol City Council and International Teledemocracy Centre, Napier University.

Macintosh, A., & White, A. (2006). 'Evaluating How eParticipation Changes Local Democracy.' Paper for eGovernment Workshop '06, Held on September 11th at Brunel University.

Rowe, G., & Frewer, L.J. (2000). 'Public Participation Methods: A Framework For Evaluation'. Science, Technology & Human Values, 25(1). Sage.

Rowe, G., & Frewer, L.J. (2004). 'Evaluating Public Participation Exercises: A Research Agenda'., Science, Technology, & Human Values 29(4). Sage.

White, A., Renton, A., & Macintosh, A., (2005). e-Petitioning in Kingston and Bristol: Evaluation of e-Petitioning in the Local e-Democracy National Project. International Teledemocracy Centre, Napier University.

Other Resources

Capacity Building Assessment Resources McKinsey Capacity Assessment Grid.
www.vppartners.org/learning/reports/capacity/assessment.pdf

Marguerite Casey Foundation Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool.
www.caseygrants.org/pages/resources/resources_downloadassessment.asp