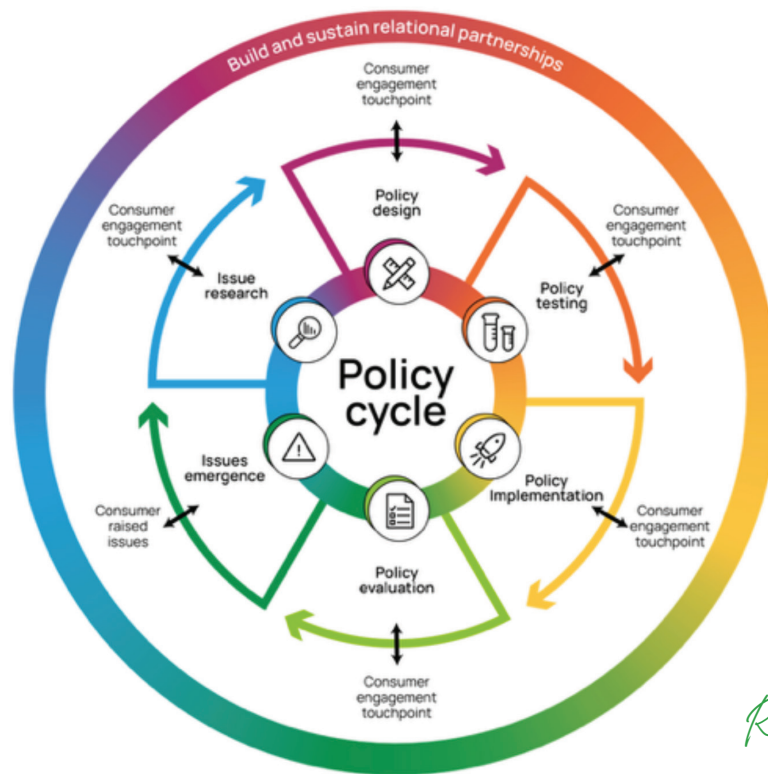


When to Engage?



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There are six key consumer engagement touchpoints across the policy cycle that are central to building and sustaining partnerships with consumers and communities.

Engage early

While consumer engagement can be activated in all or any of these touchpoints, planning for engagement should start as early as possible, including to help identify the problem.

Map who is most affected once an issue has emerged. Early planning also allows time to identify any hard-to-engage groups which may require establishing relationships with specific community leaders or networks. It also allows

you to identify who is the most concerned with this issue and what other activities or barriers may impact the success of the proposed change.

Know how you can engage

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) outlines five levels of engaging consumers, and it is important to carefully consider what level you can achieve. You might want to co-design and empower consumers (the highest level) but limited resources, decision making authority or time may mean you can only consult with or involve consumers. Aim for “partnering” types of engagement but be honest with consumers about whether their input will inform your work

When to Engage?

and if they will be part of any decision-making. Maybe you can explore use of different levels of engagement for different parts of your policy development.

Stay open to new ideas and perspectives

It is important that these early stages of engagement be treated as fact-finding missions, so you can remain open to changes or suggestions in the policy area. If consumers are presented with a set agenda or concrete policy direction, they will feel like their input is not valued or is tokenistic.

Testing before launching

Once the policy is drafted, it is good to test it with the consumers previously engaged and consider whether there are now any other consumers needing to be consulted.

Close the communications loop

As the policy is implemented, it is vital to communicate with consumers and keep them informed about any decisions or changes made since the initial design stage. Consumers should be able to recognise their input into the design phase and be provided with any rationale and context for any new directions or omissions.



“I was one of the consumers engaged to provide feedback on a new health policy being rolled out. Only problem was our input was only sought after they had created a 20-page form to be completed by (seriously unwell) people trying to apply for the service they needed. An example of not what to do.”

Aunty Maureen, CHF Consumer Assembly member

Evaluation

Finally, evaluating the policy implementation closes the loop on the consumer engagement and provides engagement participants and other stakeholders (such as consumer or community organisations, NGOs or health service providers) with the opportunity to say how the policy is working ‘on the ground’. This allows any non-intended consequences to be identified and addressed where necessary. Consider having consumers in your evaluation team to help design the evaluation framework or plan.

Implementation Checklist

- Plot your policy project against the six consumer engagement touchpoints
- Identify which community groups will be affected by the proposed policy change
- Ask consumers when and how best to engage with them at the beginning of the engagement
- Consider innovative approaches to engaging communities who may be harder to reach
- Appoint a team member to be the contact point for all engagement logistics
- Establish measures and/or feedback loops to evaluate the engagement from the consumers’ perspective