

3. Principles

Sound principles can stand the test of time. This section sets out the core principles for online participation.

Snapshot

Voices

"Allow us to be valued participants in the formulation of policy, permit us to share our combined wisdom with you and most of all respect the voluntary commitment we continue to gift to our individual communities and allow us to sit at the table as equals." -- Community leader

Quote

To add value, however, e-participation schemes need to be shaped by certain principles. At a minimum, if they are to be seen as legitimate and worthwhile they must involve a commitment to being inclusive of hard to reach groups on the one hand and a clear commitment by authorities to respond to citizen communications received over the internet on the other. -- *Local E-Democracy Needs a Boost*, Institute of Public Policy Research, UK (<http://www.ippr.org/articles/archive.asp?id=299&fID=52>)

Key messages

- Principles for online participation are the bridge between our current practice and our future aspirations.
- The tools for online participation will change over time. The principles guiding their application must be future-proof.
- To be of value, principles for online participation must be able to be applied in practice.

Principles for online participation

The following principles are not listed in any priority and should be regarded as mutually reinforcing. They serve to guide online participation initiatives. They should not be seen as detracting from, or supplementing, agencies' existing legal obligations regarding access to information and consultation.

Clarity

Be clear. Be open and transparent about the objectives, limits, resources and potential impacts of online participation.

Respect

Demonstrate respect. Show respect for the contributions, perspectives, values and prerogatives of people, stakeholders, elected representatives and public servants.

Confidence & commitment

Build confidence as a basis for commitment. Online participation is a new practice for decision makers, people and stakeholders. Give it time, prove its worth.

Creativity

Be creative. New tools mean new approaches. Success hinges on innovation.

Inclusion

Be inclusive. Go to where people are. Make every effort to be accessible and connect with all relevant communities, online and offline.

Accountability

Be accountable. Online participation is a multistakeholder process where everyone is accountable.

Achievement

Make a difference. Strive for, build on and celebrate achievements in using online participation as a means for people, government, communities and businesses to achieve their goals.

Full story

Why have principles for participation?

The **seven** principles for online participation set out in this Guide to Online Participation:

- are intended to underpin development and implementation of online participation methods and tools across the State Services
- can help guide State Services in designing, implementing and evaluating their online engagement
- contribute to ensuring consistently high quality government engagement with people when using technology
- are the basis for achieving the 2020 milestone set out in the E-government Strategy.

These principles draw on valuable input from members of the Participation Community of Practice (PCoP) at two workshops (held on 7 December 2006 and 7 May 2007 in Wellington) and other channels - see SSC case study for more details ([http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz/wiki/State_Services_Commission: Online Participation Project Case Study](http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz/wiki/State_Services_Commission:_Online_Participation_Project_Case_Study)). They also build on the principles developed by other New Zealand public sector organisations and in other jurisdictions and at the international level.

What is a principle?

Principles are fundamental assumptions, laws or requirements which form the basis for reasoning or action. They have the following characteristics when applied to public policy:

- they articulate the basis - the 'why?' - of the policies
- they reflect concerns, risks, issues and emphases
- adherence to them can be qualitatively assessed.

Source: *New Zealand Government Trusted Computing and Digital Rights Management Principles and Policies* (<http://www.e.govt.nz/policy/tc-and-drm/principles-policies-06/chapter1.html>)

Principles for online participation

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Clarity

Be clear. Be open and transparent about the objectives, limits, resources and potential impacts of online participation. Be clear about:

- what the issues and questions are
- how the process works
- the role played by government -- as the instigator, facilitator or observer of public participation
- how to make an impact on the process
- who will make the final decision, how they will make it and how they will inform participants about the outcomes
- the fact that disagreement is natural, but should also be cordial
- the time, energy and resources needed to participate effectively
- how to become informed about the issues.

Respect

Demonstrate respect. Show respect for the contributions, perspectives, values and prerogatives of people, stakeholders, elected representatives and public servants. Demonstrate respect for:

- people for their contributions which reflect their own opinions, expert and experiential knowledge
- the unique knowledge and customs of the diverse peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand
- people's multiple roles in life (eg as parents, partners, students, professionals, farmers)
- terms and conditions for online engagement that promote civil behaviour, constructive criticism, active listening and discussion
- different viewpoints and perspectives
- different levels of ability and the need to use multiple channels when providing information and seeking engagement
- people's time by ensuring engagement with them is co-ordinated across government to minimise duplication and overlap.

Confidence and commitment

Build confidence as a basis for commitment. Online participation is a new practice for people, stakeholders, elected representatives and public servants. Give it time, prove its worth. Genuine commitment is built by building confidence:

- among government decision makers, for whom online participation is a relatively untested way of gathering information for developing policy and designing services
- by making it easy for people to engage online -- for many this may be a new and challenging channel
- in the technologies and in those charged with facilitating, moderating or supporting online interactions and deliberations
- by providing timely feedback and evidence that online participation can be an effective tool for meeting the needs of people, decision makers and stakeholders
- by evaluating online participation to learn from your experience and improve quality in the future.

Creativity

Be creative. New tools mean new approaches. Success hinges on innovation. Be creative about:

- involving people in designing online participation and inviting their feedback on how it went
- how you build public awareness and encourage people to participate
- creating content that will hook people into your process
- making the most of technology -- audio, video, web, print -- and integrating it into online and offline engagement processes
- who you work with to mobilise resources and ensure success -- build sustainable relationships with community groups, civil society and others
- facilitating discussion--make every interaction worthwhile.

Inclusion

Be inclusive. Go to where people are. Make every effort to be accessible and connect with all relevant communities, online and offline. Be inclusive by:

- taking a broad perspective of who needs to be informed and engaged
- being proactive and making particular efforts to reach a diverse range of people, especially those typically considered 'hard to reach'
- recognising that Māori, as *tangata whenua* and by virtue of the Treaty of Waitangi, have a unique relationship with government. This requires government to ensure that Māori are involved in making decisions on matters that affect them and to take positive steps to ensure their interests are protected
- designing online participation to fit the needs of community members as well as those of agencies (eg providing information in other languages, favouring video over text to facilitate oral traditions)
- reducing barriers to online participation and adhering to Web standards for accessibility (<http://www.e.govt.nz/standards/web-guidelines>).

Accountability

Be accountable. Online participation is a multistakeholder process where everyone is accountable. Be accountable for:

- the use of public funds in undertaking online participation
- ensuring that people's time has been well used and recognised
- fair and appropriate management of content generated by public participation
- the process of public participation and its outcomes
- actions and behaviour online given the terms and conditions established for online engagement (for the public) and the Code of Conduct for the State Services Standards of Integrity and Conduct (for State servants)
- decisions once they are taken, and for providing feedback to participants.

Achievement

Make a difference. Strive for, build on and celebrate achievements in using online participation as a means for people, government, communities and businesses to achieve their goals. Ensure a sense of achievement by:

- explicitly recognising people's individual contributions and collective endeavours
- providing evidence that people's online participation is making a difference
- designing the online process to deliver immediate benefits in terms of knowledge, understanding, new skills and a sense of personal efficacy
- ensuring that online participation is tightly coupled to actions that lead to clear improvements in decision-making processes and outcomes
- highlighting the obstacles or challenges that online participation may help to overcome
- communicating and celebrating results.

Links (New Zealand)

- Office for Community and Voluntary Sector: Good Practice Participate website (<http://www.goodpracticeparticipate.govt.nz/>)
- *Social Inclusion and Participation: A Guide for Policy and Planning* (<http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/work-areas/social-research/sip-guide-2007.doc>) Bromell D. and Hyland M., Social Inclusion and Participation Group, Ministry of Social Development, March 2007.
- Ministry of Justice: A Guide for Consultation with Maori (http://www.justice.govt.nz/pubs/reports/1998/maori_consultation/process.html) (1997).
- The Office of Ethnic Affairs Ethnic Perspectives in Policy (EPP) framework (http://www.ethnicaffairs.govt.nz/oeawebsite.nsf/wpg_url/Resources-Ethnic-Affairs-Publications-Ethnic-Perspectives-In-Policy) (2002).
- Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs: Pacific Consultation Guidelines (http://www.minpac.govt.nz/resources_tools_pacificconsultationguidelines.htm)
- Ministry of Youth Development: Guidance on effective youth participation (<http://www.myd.govt.nz/Youthparticipation/effectivelyouthparticipation.aspx>) and Levels of youth participation (<http://www.myd.govt.nz/Youthparticipation/levelsofparticipation.aspx>)

- Local Government New Zealand: Growing Active Citizens project (<http://www.lgnz.co.nz/projects/ActiveCitizens>) and Children's Toolkit (<http://www.lgnz.co.nz/projects/archive/toolkit/index.html>)
- Tangata Whenua, Community and Voluntary Sector Research Centre: Code of Practice (<http://www.communityresearch.org.nz/COP.htm>) (2007).

Links (International)

- Australia (Commonwealth) Principles for ICT-Enabled Citizen Engagement (http://www.agimo.gov.au/practice/delivery/checklists/citizen_engage_principles) and speech by Special Minister for State Gary Nairn
- Australia (Queensland) Queensland: E-democracy policy framework 2004 (http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz/wiki/Queensland:_E-democracy_policy_framework_2004)
- UK Principles for Youth Participation (http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz/wiki/UK_Principles_for_Youth_Participation)
- Canada Citizen and Community Engagement (http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz/wiki/Public_Health_Agency_of_Canada%2C_Atlantic_Region_-_Citizen_and_Community_Engagement)
- Finland Principles of Citizen Consultation (http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz/wiki/Enhancing_citizen_consultation_in_Finnish_ministries#Principles_of_Citizen_Consultation)
- OECD Guiding principles for successful information, consultation and active participation of citizens in policy-making (http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz/wiki/OECD_-_Citizens_as_Partners:_Information%2C_Consultation_and_Participation_in_Policy_Making%2C_2001)