



THE LEADERS' REPORT

INCREASING TRUST
THROUGH CITIZEN
ENGAGEMENT



About this research

Welcome to *The Leaders' Report: increasing trust through citizen engagement*. At the heart of this research lies the simple recognition that public policy cannot be delivered successfully without effective communications. And that this requires increased engagement and dialogue with public audiences.

This report provides a comprehensive, global overview of how government communicators in 50 countries are thinking about citizen engagement, the challenges they face, how they are addressing them, and what issues lie behind the challenges identified.

There is already a well-established canon on the many different methods of citizen engagement.¹ This report is not intended as a contribution to this particular field, but is a global overview of how the professionals charged by governments with communicating with the public are thinking.

The Leaders' Report is structured in five parts:

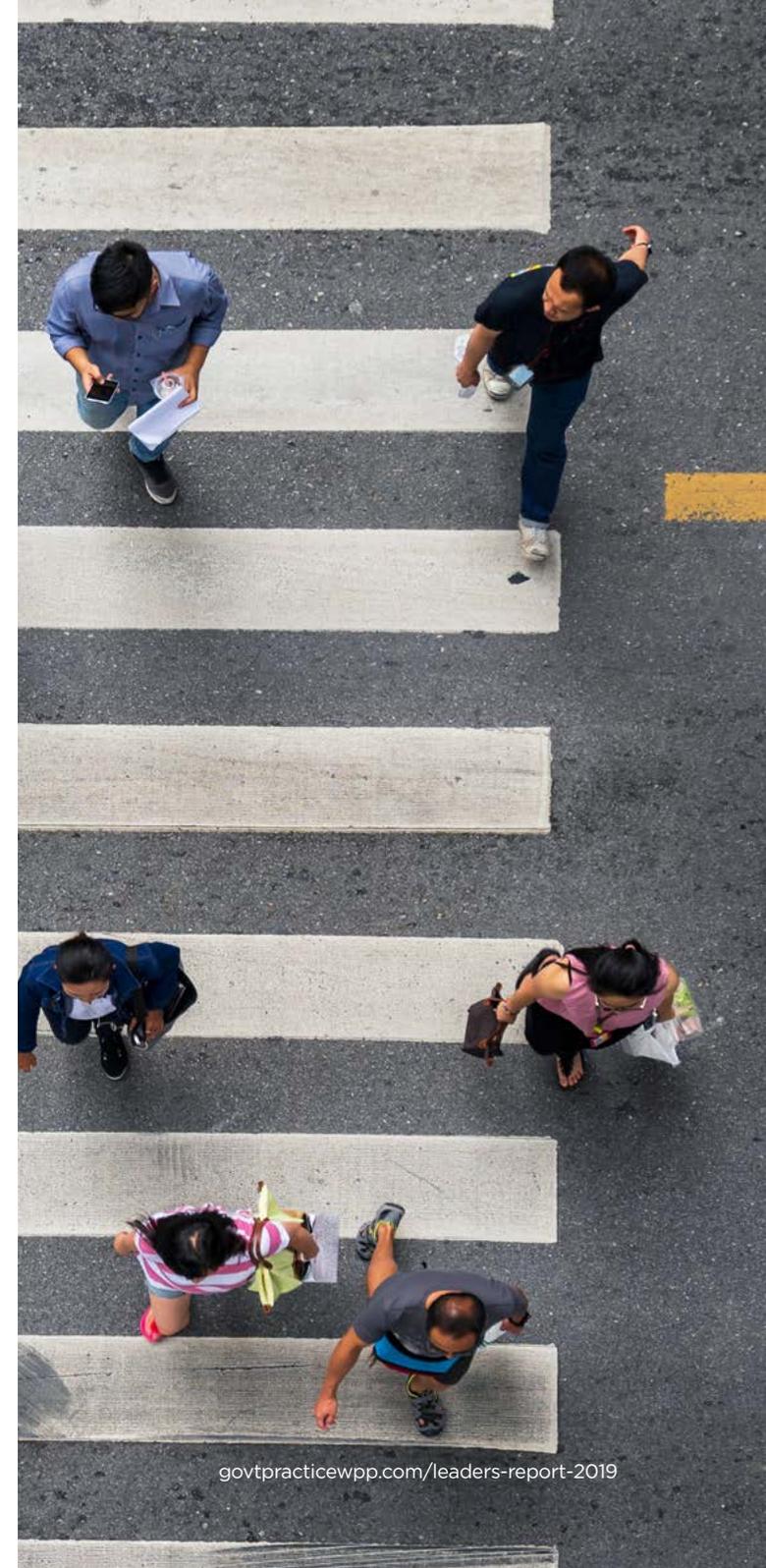
The introduction outlines how the communication landscape has changed. It explores the larger context and challenges shaping the work of the profession;

The findings shares the insights of our global research. This section draws out five key points that were common to professionals working across every level and type of government in the 50 countries covered by this research;

The conclusions distils our findings into four overarching take-out points from the research;

The recommendations focuses on key learnings from the research that can help communicators refine their strategies for citizen engagement;

How our thinking has developed sets out 10 key drivers that we believe our research among practitioners and citizens identified as prerequisites for creating a closer connection between public authorities and the public.



Additionally, the online version of this report contains details on a range of case studies that show interesting approaches to citizen engagement around the world. The case studies include examples from:



Canada
Developing international aid policy through stakeholder input

Ireland
Consulting on the constitution

UK
Knowledge sharing and listening to citizens' views

France
Citizen-led project design through participatory budgeting

European Union
Driving engagement through employee advocacy online

Taiwan
Empowering citizens at scale

Mexico
Collaborating on public safety and security

Liberia
Co-creating child protection policy

Egypt
Bringing transparency to the budget

Australia
Strengthening community engagement through participatory budgeting

Methodology

The findings, conclusions and recommendations in this report are underpinned by a unique set of global insights, which were gathered in partnership with Kantar Public through:

- Conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with over 60 senior government communication leaders across all continents;
- Quantitatively surveying the views of over 400 government communicators across 50 countries and six multilateral organisations;
- Complementing this study of professional opinion and experience with a comprehensive review of existing literature;
- Conducting a quantitative study of 8,000 citizens across eight countries (Australia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Singapore, South Korea, United Kingdom and United States).

All mentions in this report of *communication professionals* relate to the insights we have uncovered through a combination of our research approaches. References to *communication leaders* refer specifically to the senior individuals we interviewed as part of the qualitative study. References to *communicators and respondents* refer specifically to the 400-plus government communication practitioners we surveyed in our quantitative work.

About us

This report is the second in a series produced by the Government and Public Sector Practice. The Practice is part of WPP, the leading global marketing and communications services company. Quantitative fieldwork was carried out on the Practice's behalf by Kantar Public, also a WPP agency.

The Government and Public Sector Practice advises policymakers and public sector communication leaders on strategy, innovation, capability development and global best practice. Our team of senior consultants connects clients with the best ideas and expertise in WPP's global network. And, we invest continuously to advance our thinking and evidence on effective communication.

WPP agencies partner with governments in over 70 countries on the policy challenges where communication can have the greatest impact, including:

- Behaviour change;
- Citizen engagement and participation;
- Digital government;
- Place marketing;
- Public sector recruitment.

If you would like to discuss citizen engagement with us further, or find the right team for a specific brief, please get in touch at govtpractice@wpp.com.



Executive summary

In 2016, WPP Government and Public Sector Practice published *The Leaders' Report: the future of government communication*. Its findings were based on interviews with senior communication professionals working in 40 countries. It found that despite significant geopolitical differences, they shared five common challenges:²



1
Declining levels of trust in government



2
A lack of understanding of—and an inability to connect with—increasingly fragmented audiences



3
An over-reliance on one-way 'broadcast' communication



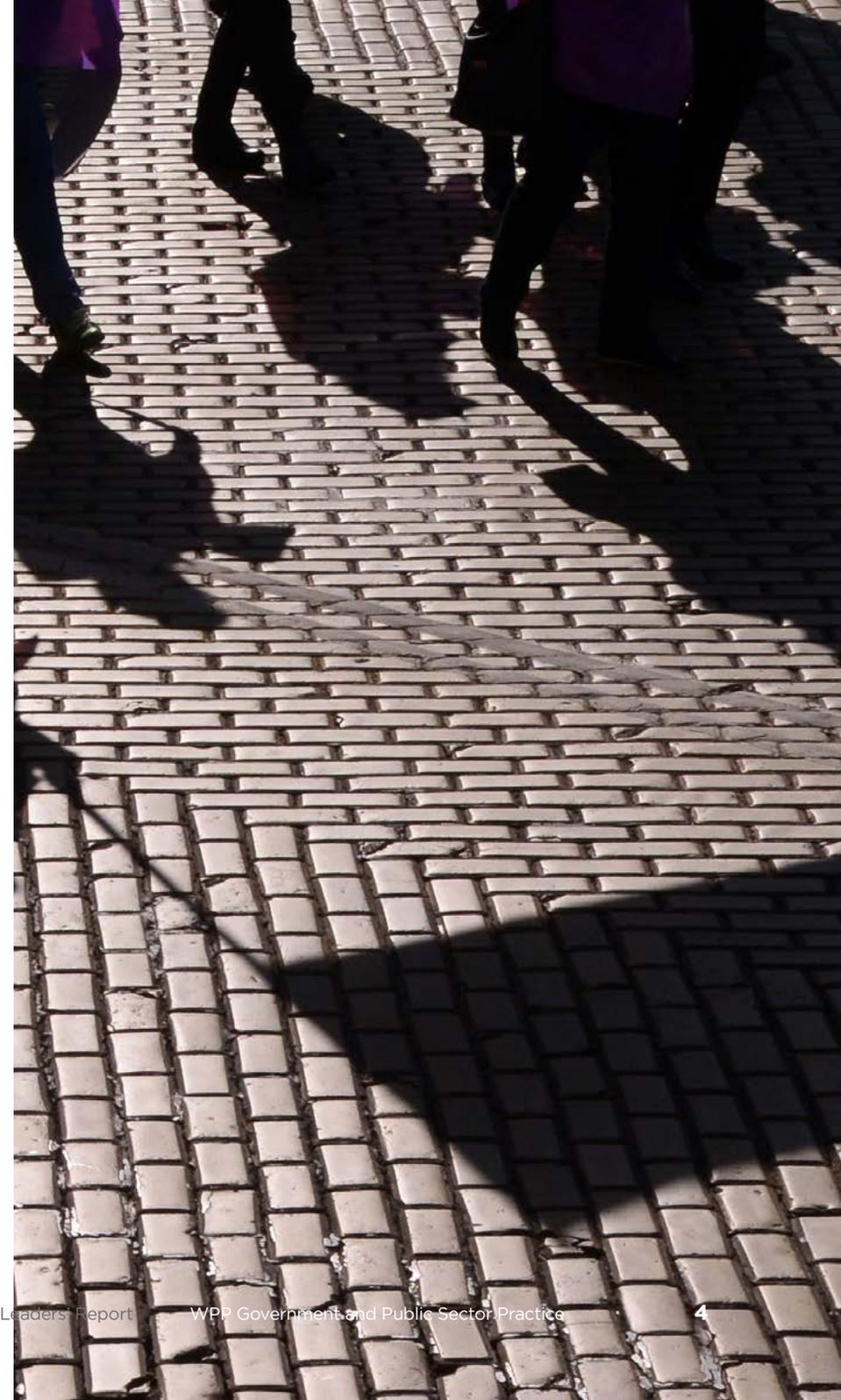
4
A lack of modern—particularly digital—communication skills



5
Inability of government communicators to influence sufficiently within and across their organisation

All respondents to this research felt that rebuilding a positive and trusting relationship with citizens was critical for effective governance. Delivering effective citizen engagement was felt by many of these communicators to be central to helping government reconnect with citizens.

Before initiating subsequent quantitative and qualitative research in 2018, WPP Government and Public Sector Practice undertook a comprehensive audit of existing citizen engagement activity and conducted a deep-dive into our own learnings from consultancy work around the world to understand how the landscape experienced by government communication professionals was changing.



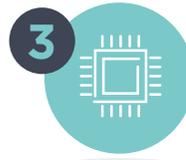
Our research and consultancy experience suggested that the major challenges identified in 2016 have been compounded since then by three additional global factors:



1
Geopolitical disorder has continued to produce more uncertainty for citizens. Political orthodoxies are being upturned and populism has continued to grow



2
Economic growth has led to a culture of individualisation that is altering the citizen-state relationship

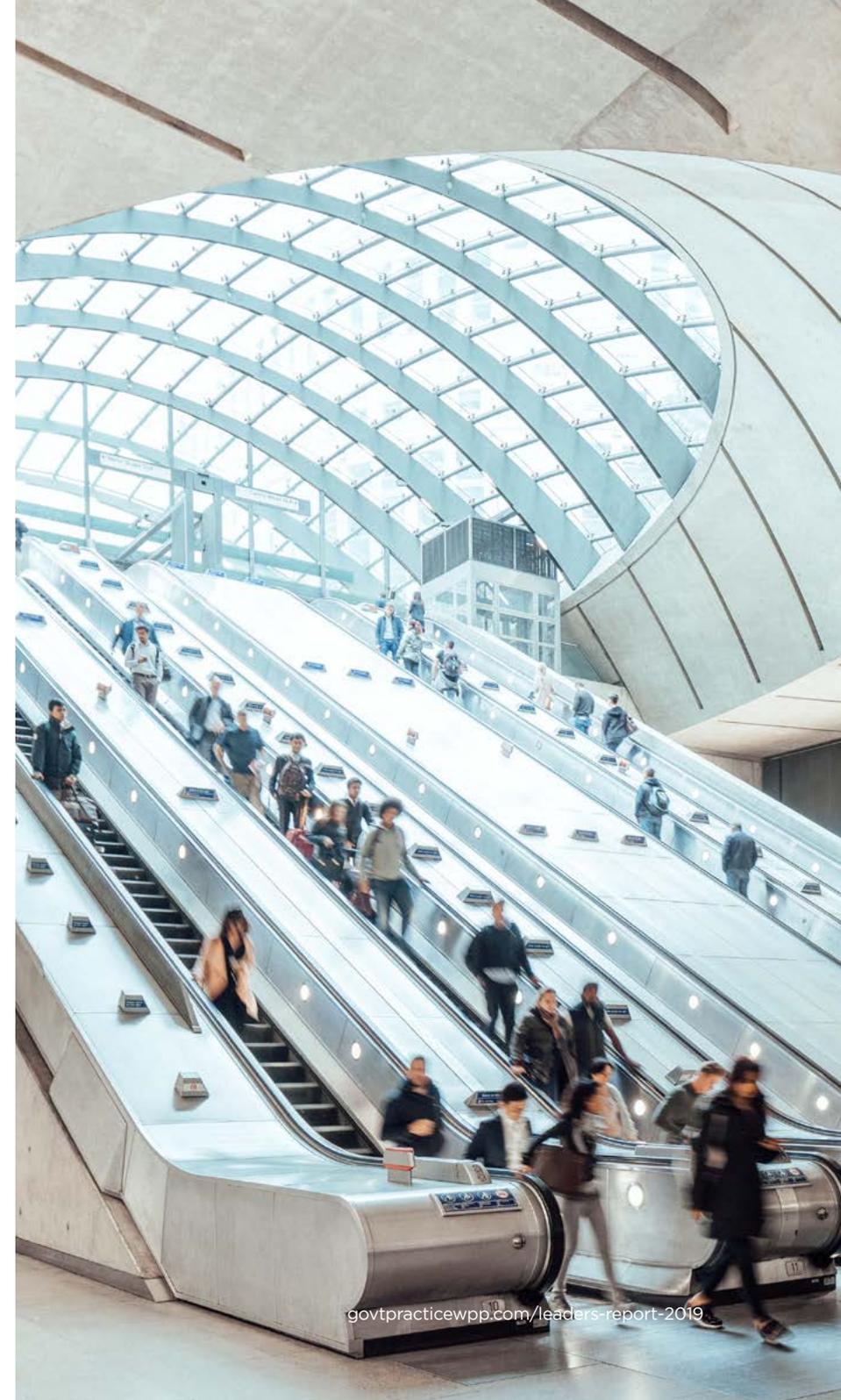


3
Technological advances are permanently disrupting how we live, work and communicate

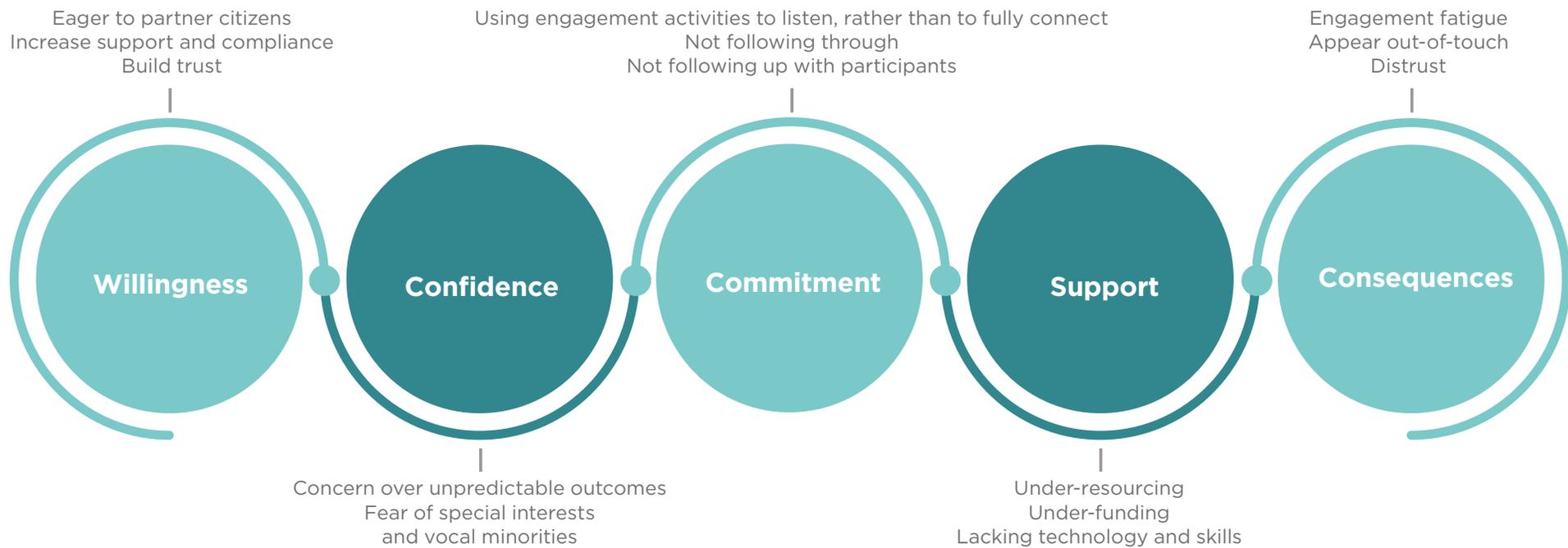
Two years on, we have spoken with the world's senior communication professionals again, to better understand the challenges they are grappling with, how they are dealing with them, and whether citizen engagement is helping develop and deliver better policy and build trust in government.

Our qualitative and quantitative work, carried out with communication professionals across 50 countries and six multilateral organisations, found that this combination of challenges had made their work harder still.

Despite significant differences in geo-political situation, form of government, and level of government, we found that—with the exception of high-performing outliers such as Taiwan and Canada—communication professionals are cautiously balancing an increased desire to engage with citizens against the risks that their organisations fear emerging from unintended consequences of increased public outreach.



We distilled our global learnings into five key findings:



Willingness

Communication professionals are generally eager to adopt engagement activities. They recognise their potential to help them partner with citizens, build support and compliance around a policy, and gain trust. While this willingness was often echoed by political and policy colleagues, it translated far less frequently in practice—the majority of citizen engagement activities do not alter policy.

Confidence

Communication professionals feel that politicians and policymakers within their own organisations lack sufficient confidence to engage with citizens. Fear of overly vocal minorities, special interests and the “tyranny of the majority” were all raised as barriers that inhibit a government’s confidence in this area, and also reduce confidence in citizens that their opinions can make a difference.

Commitment

Respondents felt that a lack of confidence in citizen engagement and how to effectively manage its outcomes mean that governments often initiate engagement activities without following them through to implementation.

Support

Some organisations are struggling to support citizen engagement activities. Communication professionals globally continue to work under difficult conditions, as set out in *The Leaders’ Report: the future of government communication*. They are generally under-resourced. Funding, skills, technology and evaluation continue to act as barriers to realising best practice.

Consequences

There was widespread recognition that activities that do not commit to addressing citizens’ inputs are likely to backfire through engagement fatigue, and by increasing perceptions that governments are unwilling to listen to citizens. This can increase levels of public distrust.

Why citizen engagement matters

Our research showed a widespread recognition that citizen engagement has the potential to help governments develop better policy through collaboration. When done well, it can enrich the citizen-state relationship, provide a clear mandate for policy implementation and service design, and ensure that policy benefits from a clear understanding of how it is likely to be received by both stakeholders and citizens. Citizen engagement can help government in the following ways:

Improved decision making

While authorities are well intentioned, they may not know the lived experiences of someone impacted by policy changes, nor understand the specific requirements of a community or group. This information-experience gap can lead to ineffective, inefficient and unequal resource distribution.

Citizen engagement activities allow citizens from relevant communities or groups to have a voice in the decision-making process. These communities and groups may better understand the complexities of their lives and needs. They can provide insight authorities may not have otherwise considered.³

Improved outcomes / improved effectiveness of service delivery

Improved decision making can help drive better outcomes and the effectiveness of service delivery. Policies effectively developed through citizen engagement can better meet citizens' needs, and evidence suggests that citizens are more likely to engage or comply as a result.

Citizen engagement also ensures that policy is rooted in local insights, rather than rooted in imported models that may not be fit for purpose:

our research suggests this leads to more effective outcomes.

Engaging end users in decision making has the potential to improve the efficiency of decision-making. In turn, this may avoid wasting resources on ineffective or inappropriate measures that are unlikely to be fit for purpose.

Improved transparency in policy decisions

Engaging citizens in decision making can help make the policy development process more transparent and representative of citizens' views.

Globally, a number of public bodies have instituted platforms to enable citizens to raise issues that can be addressed at a national level. There are also instances of private, third-party organisations, such as Change.org, carrying out engagement activities that support citizens to shape the agenda of public authorities (so long as enough signatures are gathered)⁴. Similarly, within the public sector, the Finnish Parliament's 2012 Citizens' Initiative Act opened a channel for direct democracy by allowing Finnish citizens to submit proposals for new legislation or amendments to existing legislation.⁵

Although authorities generally retain an ability to choose to accept, amend or reject citizens' suggestions, decisions resulting from engagement activities can be presented as a response to the will of the people. Transparency can be sustained even when authorities 'reject' the public's position.

Greater public accountability

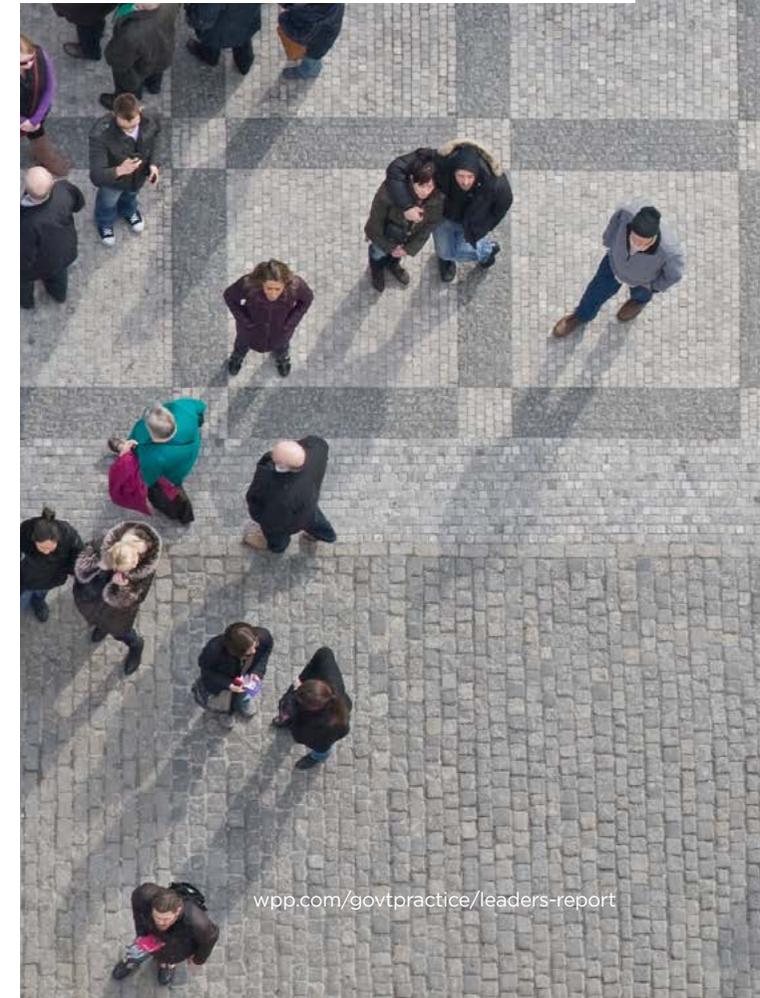
Actively engaging citizens in policymaking and increasing transparency can help make governments more accountable.

As citizens become more engaged with the process and become more aware of their rights, they are

more able to hold authorities to account if their interests are unmet. This, in turn, may reduce corruption and the risk of authorities governing in the interests of established elites (such as big business, ruling parties, and unrepresentative groups).

Improved trust in government

Evidence suggests that trust increases when the decision-making process is transparent, and citizens can see how and where their views have informed the development of a policy.⁶



“There is still the mindset that if we see something positive on social media, we see it as a huge success, even though that may only be reflective of a small part of the audience. It’s kind of like clutching at straws. There’s always pressure to move on and do the next thing rather than reflect, review and evaluate: there is a limited ‘window of interest’ from our political and policy colleagues.”

Communication Leader, Western Europe



Why we're here

Our research highlighted the major challenges facing government communicators in designing and implementing effective citizen engagement. But respondents also voiced frustration at the lack of guidance, best practice and knowledge sharing across the sector.

The lack of sharing arises from several factors:

- Even where citizen engagement has been successful, public organisations frequently lack the time, forums and resources to share learnings;
- Governments are nervous that if learnings from unsuccessful or ineffective engagement programmes are publicly available, political opposition parties and groups will use them to attack the credibility of the party in power;
- The lack of evaluation and benchmarks around citizen engagement means that, even where programmes have had an impact, the results are not always measured and evaluated comprehensively. This means communicators lack the evidence to use successful examples to leverage additional support and funding.

The senior communicators we interviewed shared a desire to know what other public organisations were doing, pointing to the lack of global forums and perspectives.

The frustration felt by many communicators at the lack of visibility over best practice and innovative thinking is the motivation for *The Leaders' Report*. We hope that this report will serve as a gateway for communication leaders and practitioners to access best practice in citizen engagement around the world. It is intended to support communicators in their obligations to improve the relationship between citizen and state.



Introduction

In 2016, *The Leaders' Report: the future of government communication* found that communication professionals around the world were confronted by a series of five interconnected challenges:



Declining levels of trust

The distrust of authority and the rise of populism highlighted the need for governments across political systems and countries to better engage with their citizens, listen to their concerns, and ensure there is a genuinely responsive relationship between citizen and state at every level of government.

A lack of understanding of—and an inability to connect with—increasingly-fragmented audiences

Government communications were too often directed at generic audiences. Government communicators lacked the ability to target audiences with personalised and relevant messaging. While governments were becoming more aware of the need for personalised communications, their efforts were failing to keep pace with citizens' expectations.

An over-reliance on one-way 'broadcast' communication

Government needs to shift away from one-way (state to citizen) communication towards more consultative forms of engagement. Citizens felt that government communication was focused on simply disseminating information: it failed to properly enter into a sustained and engaged dialogue, and was too focused on mass media.

A lack of modern—particularly digital—communication skills

Government communication was still prioritising media management, while citizens increasingly expected to interact with government directly on emerging digital platforms. Financial pressures on government communication teams increased this capability gap, with communicators often unable to produce content and services on the platforms most relevant to citizens, and untrained in a range of important specialisms such as data science and behavioural science.

The inability of many government communicators to influence sufficiently within and across their organisation

The function of communications was viewed primarily as a presentational one—a way to display and sell policy to the public. Communicators reported that they struggled to be involved in policy development and were brought into proceedings once decisions had already been made.

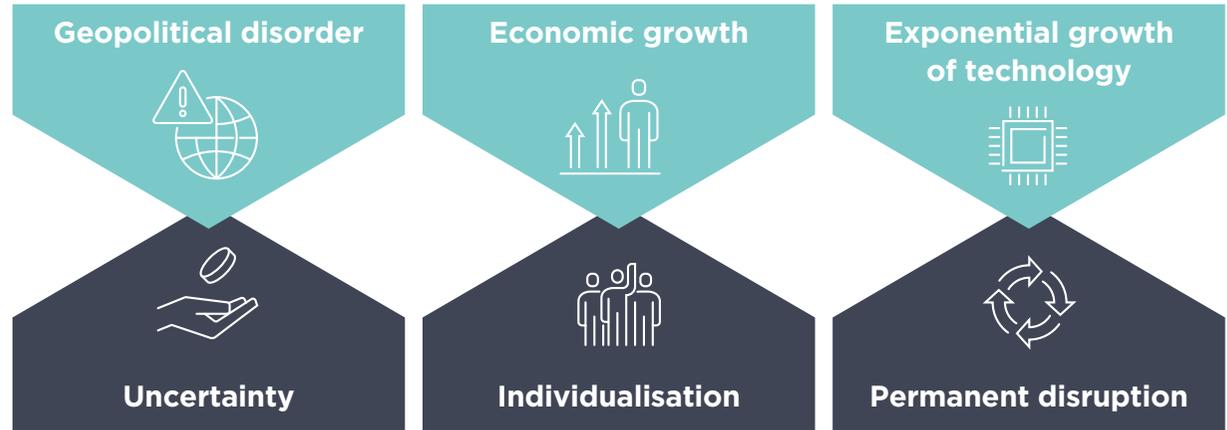
The Leaders' Report: the future of government communication concluded that communication professionals felt that citizen engagement had the potential to address these challenges by:

- Restoring a sense of agency to citizens in the decision-making process;
- Helping make the work of government more transparent;
- Making policy the product of co-creation and collaboration;
- Better engaging hard-to-reach audiences, ensuring there is a shared sense of common good and core narrative across society as a whole.



New global factors have intensified existing challenges

What were identified as key challenges for communication professionals in 2016 have become even more crucial in 2019. Our experience in the field, and complemented by desk research, found that the communication challenges identified two years ago have been compounded across all 50 countries reviewed by three additional factors:



- The porosity of borders coupled with the permeability of information systems has increased geopolitical disorder, driven the rise of populist and nationalist movements, enabled more terrorism and more cyberattacks, and increased environmental problems and economic uncertainty;
- Although very difficult situations remain in many parts of the world, globally poverty is decreasing and access to health and education is improving. This is profoundly good for humanity, but simultaneously challenging for society: it can create a culture of individualisation and an attitude of ‘me before anyone else’;
- The exponential growth of technology has sped up the pace of change; the arrival of the fourth industrial revolution has produced a state of permanent disruption.

Publics across the world are now, arguably, more fragmented and more diverse than ever before: their relationship with government is less defined, less

deferential and more distant. And as research for *The Leaders’ Report* in 2016 identified, they are also angrier and more insecure than probably at any time since the end of the cold war.⁷

Individualisation has changed the citizen-state dynamic. Where the citizen was once deferential to the state’s authority, they increasingly expect the state to accommodate and meet a growing number of needs.

Technology has amplified and diversified the voice of the citizenry, bringing both opportunity and challenges. Government can better understand the needs and expectations of all citizens, but it has also allowed minority and special interest groups to dominate public discourse. It has significantly increased the burden on government communications, as it attempts to meaningfully respond to citizens across a fragmented media landscape.

Many respondents to our qualitative and quantitative research see a citizen response to these challenges in the growth of new populist movements around the world and across the political spectrum. What unites these diverse populist movements is:

- A direct appeal—above the heads of established political parties—to the interests of ordinary people;
- The sharing of information at speed, freed from the burden of governments for truth and veracity;
- The fostering, both on and offline, of empathetic and emotive forms of engagement.

Populist movements have also given citizens new and simplified forms of core narrative that frequently feel more authentic and personal than those of existing governments. Populist championing of ordinary people has often come at the expense of traditional political parties, which are portrayed as self-interested, out-of-touch and lacking in empathy.

These large-scale challenges to the world's social, economic and political order, have thrown up some important questions:

- How can governments make citizens feel empowered?
- How can citizens be involved in decision-making and feel valued by government?
- How can government re-establish a sense of shared vision and common good?
- How can governments ensure they are responding to the needs and expectations of citizens?

In the face of these big questions and challenges, the communication professionals that contributed to this research find themselves walking a tightrope: they are expected to meet citizens' proliferating needs and expectations with the same or less resource. Additionally, many of the organisations they work for are balancing the desire to understand and deliver for citizens with the concern that citizens' appetite for agency and transparency outstrips their ability to resource and offer it.



Defining citizen engagement

The research showed that there is high awareness of the role of citizen engagement, some agreement on its core elements, and a growing number of respondents implementing citizen engagement programmes. But, it also showed that there is no clear definition among respondents of what citizen engagement is, or what constitutes best practice.⁸

There is, however, consensus around several key themes:

		
Citizen-centric	Multi-directional	Action-oriented
Citizen engagement puts the citizen at the heart of policy. There was a recognition that people increasingly want more human-feeling interactions with government.	Citizen engagement is about shifting from broadcasting to more conversational ways of engaging citizens with a strong emphasis on listening.	Citizen engagement is not just a communications function. Listening to public opinion must be an integral part of policy development.

But when communication leaders went beyond these core principles, there was little sense of how these principles could be converted into concrete programmes and strategies.

While no single agreed definition exists, for the purposes of this research we have defined citizen engagement as **a process of two-way dialogue between an authority and citizens that uses inputs from both parties to better develop and deliver public policy.**

Communication professionals are engaging citizens at different levels. Our research found a clear gradation of engagement levels, involving different kinds of activities. This spectrum of activity, however, broadly fell into two distinct categories: higher- and lower-order citizen engagement.

“Engagement is a growing share of our overall communications work but I’m not sure we’ve really properly defined what we mean by engagement. The reality is that the majority of what we do is not what we’d call genuine dialogue.”

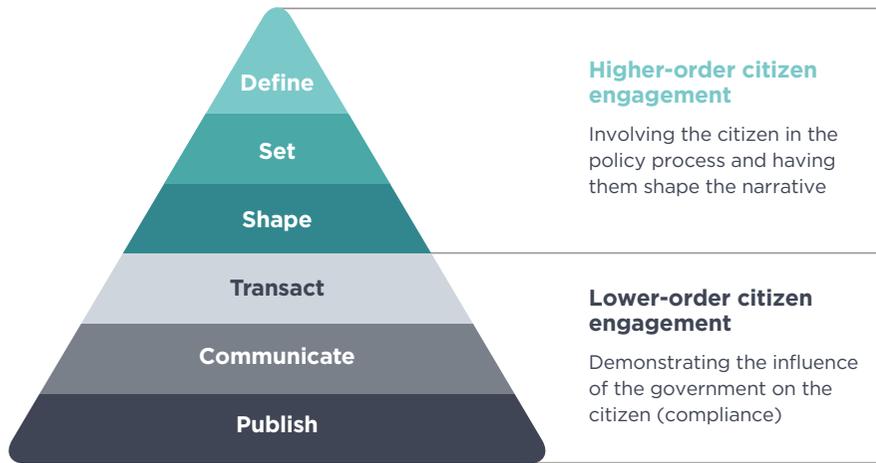
Communication Leader, Multilateral Organisation

“Citizen engagement is a two-way conversation directly with the target audience. We don’t often do it properly. It needs active listening and we don’t do much of this, but our intention is to listen more. Goodwill towards citizen engagement within the government is growing, but people don’t know how to do it.”

Communication Leader, Western Europe



Levels of citizen engagement



At the **lower order**, authorities do not relinquish decision-making power to citizens as there is no commitment to act. Engagement activities consist primarily of:



Publishing information

Authorities place information into the public domain. The information published may not represent full disclosure: information may be redacted for political, legal or security reasons. However, ensuring accurate information is available to the public forms the bedrock of citizen engagement activities. While publication may not be linked to action, it may be incorporated into subsequent engagement activities (such as hackathons).

NationalMap, Australia

NationalMap is an online map-based tool to allow easy access to spatial data from Australian government agencies. This allows information to be available in a transparent way that facilitates other uses and innovations. It:

- Provides citizens with an authoritative data source;
- Encourages federal, state and local government to be transparent;
- Provides a framework that supports commercial and community innovation.



Communicating information

Authorities share or exchange information, news or ideas and solicit public feedback. Authorities may direct citizens to private or third-sector organisations delivering relevant services or working on a particular issue. Opportunities to respond are limited and often mediated.

GREAT Britain, UK

The UK's GREAT Britain campaign is a multi-dimensional campaign targeting both domestic and international audiences. Domestically, the campaign aims to provide support to businesses with exporting. Internationally, the campaign aims to promote UK trade overseas and encourage tourism.



Transacting

Authorities provide opportunities for citizens to engage with them on a functional issue. Transactional exchanges do not usually develop into more dynamic conversations. Many public consultations are transactional—citizens are asked to feedback on a specific issue, rather than to engage in an ongoing conversation.

vTaiwan

vTaiwan is an engagement process designed to engage experts and members of the public in large-scale deliberation. It does this by creating several stages, including an initial 'objective' stage for crowdsourcing facts and evidence, and a 'reflective' stage using a mass deliberation tool, which encourages the formation of 'rough consensus'. Finally, key stakeholders are invited to a live-streamed, face-to-face meeting to draw up specific recommendations.

For more on this case study, please see govtpracticewpp.com/leaders-report-2019

At the **higher order**, authorities relinquish some decision-making power by actively soliciting detailed input from the public, with a view to acting upon the findings. Higher order citizen engagement activities consist primarily of:



Shaping

Authorities give citizens the opportunity to shape discussions on how services or activities may be developed. The authority retains a relatively high level of control. If not managed well, activities can be perceived as tokenistic, particularly if authorities do not demonstrate to citizens the impact of their contribution.

Public safety in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico

In the past two decades Ciudad Juárez has been affected by high levels of violent crime, particularly against women. Since 2008, various levels of government and state institutions (local and federal police and the military) had staged interventions, often with limited success. Trust in these institutions and the government was very low.

To counteract this, authorities initiated a series of roundtables with key stakeholders and citizens. These meetings saw all three levels of government come together with members of academia, representatives of civil society organisations, business leaders and citizens to design specific public security policies, draft a common agenda, identify shared goals and key performance indicators to evaluate.

For more on this case study, please see govtpracticewpp.com/leaders-report-2019



Setting

Authorities allow citizens to decide how an issue should be handled, and to define key priorities. Although there may be pre-set parameters for discussion determined by the authority, citizens are given a relatively high degree of control over outcomes.

Citizens' Assembly: Ireland

The Citizens' Assembly was established by the Irish Government in 2016 in response to calls from citizens for wider constitutional and political reform on issues such as the ageing of the population, climate change, and a proposed Eighth Amendment to the constitution on abortion.

The Assembly included 99 randomly selected citizens — broadly reflective of wider Irish society in terms of sex, age, geography, education and socio-economic status, together with an independent chair.

The Assembly considered a different issue at each meeting with the help of expert advice. It then developed a series of draft recommendations and voted on them. These recommendations were then submitted to Parliament, which had to provide a response.

The report and recommendations on the Eighth Amendment were considered by a joint committee of politicians from both Houses of Parliament, who in turn also recommended a referendum on whether to remove the Eighth Amendment from the Constitution. This referendum took place on 25 May 2018 and passed by a majority of 66.4%.

For more on this case study, please see govtpracticewpp.com/leaders-report-2019



Defining

Authorities give citizens autonomy to decide how and what is important to them as part of a dynamic ongoing conversation. While there may still be limits (for example budgetary constraints), the authority has placed decision-making power into the hands of citizens and has committed to acting upon the outcomes of discussions.

'Madame Mayor, I have an idea', France

In 2014, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo sought to bring citizens into the policy making process. The first step was to introduce participatory budgeting. In its first year the city council put forward 15 proposals that over 40,000 Parisians voted on. The following year proposals were crowdsourced from citizens on a new website. Over 5,000 ideas were generated and 58,000 people participated.

To ensure that peoples' choices were balanced against the council's obligation to all citizens, part of the budget was ringfenced for the poorest areas of the city. Additional resources were protected for youth and education projects that even engaged pupils on specific policies.

Over €500m has been allocated to projects between 2014-2020.

For more on this case study, please see govtpracticewpp.com/leaders-report-2019

The Leaders' Report: Our Five Key Findings

1 Willingness

Government communicators are willing to engage with citizens.

78%

of respondents had delivered some form of citizen engagement activity in the past year.



There is a belief that engagement can generate support for government policy.

75%

of respondents believe that policies delivered through citizen engagement are more likely to be supported by citizens.



When done well, respondents feel that citizen engagement can also build trust in government.

'Citizen engagement by definition should build trust and add value to the mechanisms government uses to deliver policy.'
Communication Leader, Australasia

2 Confidence

However there is a lack of confidence in how governments implement engagement activities.

Barriers include:



risk aversion



unwillingness to devolve power to citizens



concern over unpredictable outcomes

As a result, citizen engagement often does not move beyond the level of soliciting opinions.

77% of organisations asked citizens for their opinions

11% of organisations allowed citizens to decide how policies are made and/or budgets are spent

7% of organisations asked citizens to make a decision on its behalf

So communicators are often gathering opinions that will have no tangible impact on policy.

'There is a fear within the organisation of a lack of control. Listening and engaging means we may lose control.'
Communication Leader, Western Europe

3 Commitment

Governments are not committing to following through on the input of citizens.



Only **8%**

of respondents said that their organisation always commits to acting on the public's opinions before running a citizen engagement programme.



Politicians and policymakers are unwilling to implement the findings of citizen engagement activities.

'The problem is not that people don't trust governments, but governments don't trust people.'
Communication Leader, Western Europe

Only

46%

of respondents said their organisation had the insights and research to evaluate the effectiveness of their programming.



4 Support

Communications professionals do not always have the resources to deliver effective citizen engagement.

56%

of respondents said they needed to invest more in citizen engagement.



There are often more organisational challenges too.

Biggest challenges - Top 3

44%

Balancing the needs of citizens, stakeholders and decision makers

36%

Lack of budget

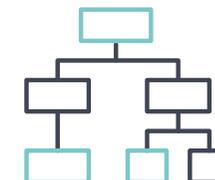
26%

Overcoming bureaucracy

The combination of process and resource hurdles means that many programmes fall short.

Only **39%**

of respondents felt engagement activities were coordinated across the organisation.



5 Consequences

Failures in activity design meant that those affected by a potential policy were often unable to participate in engagement activities.

Only



36%

of respondents surveyed said that affected citizens could always get involved in engagement activities.



While citizens want to engage on issues that are meaningful to them, they do not want to be consulted on every issue.

'All public issues can be opened for citizen engagement. However, if you consult the citizenry about topics they ignore, you will probably get a useless answer.'
Communication Leader, Western Europe

Sometimes it's not clear to citizens how influential their input will be.

85%

of respondents stated that citizens are not always clear on their level of influence.



Conclusions

1



Citizen engagement is under-resourced and under-funded

2



Citizen engagement is always possible but not always desirable

3



Citizen engagement has unfulfilled potential

4



If executed poorly, citizen engagement activities can make relationships between the citizen and the state worse



Findings

Our work globally since 2016 has found that government communication professionals around the world continue to face significant challenges in maintaining public trust in their government's competency and integrity. Both our quantitative and qualitative research showed that the optimism and promise surrounding citizen engagement two years ago has seen more communication leaders advocate for increased consultation and dialogue with citizens. There is an appetite to embrace new techniques and technologies and a genuine willingness to partner with citizens on a wide range of policy issues.

However, respondents globally shared a frustration that this commitment to greater citizen engagement rarely extended as far as empowering citizens to influence policy outcomes. There was widespread recognition that politicians and policymakers were worried about the potential risks of greater citizen engagement: populist political sentiment and new technology have formed a potent combination that can allow relatively small groups to become prominent yet unrepresentative voices in society. Governments are struggling to meet the needs of increasingly unpredictable publics, and to protect society as a whole from vocal minorities and special interests adept at exploiting the new media landscape and the politics of emotion.

While some governments have begun to change their outlook and approach to skills, training and capability—for example, by establishing bespoke citizen engagement teams—the problems of trust, two-way conversation, embracing personalised communication, integrating communications with policy development and bridging the skills and knowledge gap have increased as citizens' needs continue to rapidly evolve.

Globally, respondents felt that citizen engagement activities aim to strike a difficult balance. Its promise and potential is widely recognised, but organisations remain cautious about ceding power to citizens. Governments are trying to manage demands that can often be in tension with each other: protecting the interests of society as a whole and allowing citizens to make decisions that may be divisive or come at the expense of other citizens' wishes or values. This tension has often led to engagement activities being limited in scope and efficacy.



Populist political sentiment and new technology have formed a potent combination.

The five key findings

The current state of the profession is one of impasse. Organisations are running citizen engagement activities more often but failing to use them to help develop and deliver better policy. Many organisations require an attitudinal shift, one that is more willing to cede power to citizens. Additionally, the profession needs greater support and resources in order to deliver effective citizen engagement at a level that makes a meaningful impact. This may mean being more judicious and selective about undertaking activities but doing so with greater strategic focus, resource and political and policymaker buy-in.

The research suggests that globally there is a distinct absence of strategy and frameworks to help government rebuild trust with citizens and understand the role of engagement activities in this overarching relationship. The findings fall under the following five headings.





1. Government communicators are willing to engage with citizens

Government communication professionals are increasingly attempting to include citizens in the decision-making process. They believe they are already practising citizen engagement and many respondents to the research see a growing role for it.



of respondents had delivered some form of citizen engagement activity in the past 12 months.



Nearly two thirds of those surveyed felt that their organisation should do more citizen engagement.

This finding from our quantitative work was consistent with findings from our qualitative interviews. Communication leaders across several countries said that citizen engagement is becoming an imperative for government. Indeed, several governments and government ministries have made citizen engagement a mandatory part of policy development. Some have even imposed quotas on ministers.

“Our cabinet took a decision that all ministers will have a minimum number of interactions with the public... and they’re supposed to run listening campaigns... so as part of the ministers’ agreement there is a minimum number of stakeholder engagements they are supposed to deliver.”

Communication Leader, Africa

“Whenever we release a new law or a new policy, we release it first for public consultation and ask for citizen feedback. We publish the feedback and answer why we may not be following the request on this option, or why we accepted that suggested change.”

Communication Leader, Middle East

The importance placed on citizen engagement was driven by the perception that it helped generate support and compliance for policy:



of respondents believe policies developed through citizen engagement are more likely to be supported.



believe that policies developed through citizen engagement were more likely to lead to increased compliance.

Communication leaders also stated that when done well citizen engagement improves public perceptions of transparency and accountability, and can help build overall trust in government.

“Citizen engagement by definition should build trust and add value to the mechanisms government uses to deliver policy—not just communications for communications sake.”

Communication Leader, Australasia

Technology was in many cases helping communicators convert willingness into meaningful action. However, some communication leaders believed that technology has its limitations and can often be a barrier, rather than a bridge, to greater engagement.

“With online platforms and offline civil society partnerships, we’re now in a space where we can link together people with different positions. We can find common value and a solution that works for everyone. It’s not consensus. It’s more like group collective consent.”

Communication Leader, South-East Asia

“Direct communication cannot be substituted with digital communication. It can only be amplified.”

Communication Leader, South America





2. There is a lack of confidence in how governments implement citizen engagement activities

Communication professionals believe that ministers, other politicians, and policymakers are not always willing to cede power to citizens. Respondents identified three primary barriers to using citizen engagement in their organisations:

- Risk aversion among politicians and policymakers;
- A lack of willingness to devolve power and influence to citizens. Respondents often said their organisation was reluctant to cede control, and lacked the agility to conduct and implement engagement activities;
- Uncertainty about how to prepare for and manage any potential unintended or unforeseen consequences of increasing citizen engagement (for example, citizens making unrealistic or impractical requests).

The growing unpredictability of publics and the ability of citizens to share information and amplify points of view at speed have understandably made governments cautious.

“Power is now in the hands of citizens. Everyone can be a lobbyist. Outside organisations can mobilise individual people to influence members. So, for the Parliament, citizen engagement has to progress in the hands of both members and citizens.”

Communication Leader, Multilateral Organisation

“Our experience across a fairly broad set of citizen engagement scenarios is the people most likely to opt in are those who are opposed to whatever the policy or project is, so we supplement direct engagement with research to make sure we capture the views across the citizenry.”

Communication Leader, Australasia

Our quantitative research suggested that this lack of confidence was reflected in the engagement level that government organisations were choosing. The vast majority (77%) of communication professionals stated that engagement activities in their organisation are generally conducted at lower levels. While this might seem to manage the risk of ceding decision-making power to citizens, it also diminishes the potential for increasing citizen agency, transparency and trust.

Which, if any, of the following has your organisation done in the last 12 months?



These results indicate that citizen engagement in many cases is not moving beyond the level of soliciting opinions. Lower-order activities do not

offer the same potential to influence policy or engage audiences. Our research also found that lower level activities were more likely to end at the consultation phase.



Respondents stated that these 'listening exercises' are only influencing policy around

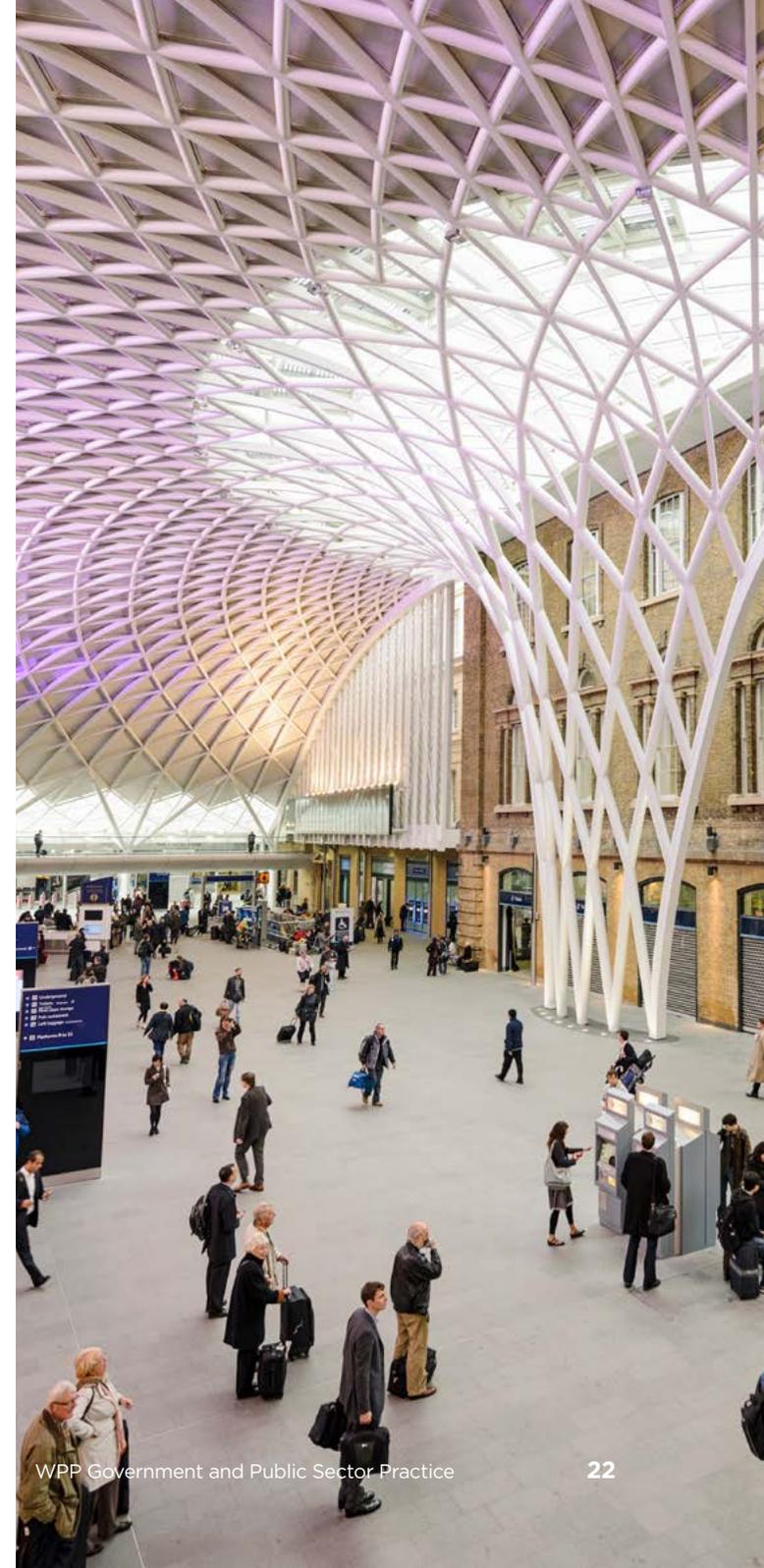
50%
of the time.

This means that for much of the time, communicators are gathering opinions that will have no tangible impact on policy development or delivery. Fear of risk among politicians and policymakers means that communication professionals are not receiving the backing and buy-in they require to deliver higher-order citizen engagement.

“There is a fear within the organisation of a lack of control. Listening and engaging means we may lose control: it increases the risk. We don't like risk. Most of the senior management team and our government bodies prevent us from taking risks.”

Communication Leader, Western Europe

The research also suggests that government communication professionals and their policymaking colleagues lack confidence in their ability to effectively explain complex public issues to citizens in a simplified yet meaningful way.





3. Governments are not committing to following through on the input of citizens

Communication professionals believe that for citizen engagement to be meaningfully different from traditional, stand-alone consultations, governments need to commit to integrating it into policy and service development, and to provide the funding and resources required to do so.



61% of respondents stated that organisations should only run citizen engagement programmes if they are committed to acting on the opinions that the public give during that programme.

Our research found that the confidence government communicators have in the potential of citizen engagement is not matched by governments overall: politicians and policymakers are unwilling to commit to integrating engagement activities into policy development and delivery, or to implementing the findings of citizen engagement activities.



Only 8% of respondents stated that their organisation always commits to acting on the opinions that the public give before running a citizen engagement programme.

“There is a political risk to boosting people up to think they have influence. That’s why we need an ongoing engagement mechanism and not just dialogue. Dialogue on its own can make things worse.”

Communication Leader, Multilateral Organisation

This suggests there are clear attitudinal barriers to delivering effective engagement activities in government. Communication professionals feel that not all authorities (or stakeholders within authorities) may be willing, able or ready to cede decision-making power to the public and lose perceived control over the policy development cycle.

“If we trust the people enough, if we learn their language and their lived experience enough, some of them will trust back. It’s not good to ask people to trust the government without the government trusting them first.”

Communication Leader, South-East Asia

While communication leaders agreed that risk aversion was a major barrier, some attributed this to politicians and others to policymakers. These problems become more acute as authorities attempt to move to higher levels of engagement, and potentially mask wider concerns over the political implications of implementing suggestions made by the public.

“The problem is not that people don’t trust governments, but governments don’t trust people. We switch on, dial up and then switch off. We make policy tweaks instead of fundamental reform. Communications teams need to influence at the beginning of the process but that is hard. I’m not on the board of my organisation. It’s hierarchical and there are blockers that stop me and my team making the impact we are capable of. Others in this organisation need to take responsibility to effect change. It’s not just communication. Communication is just one policy lever, but we don’t use or integrate it with the others. 70% of my team’s time is spent fighting internal battles. Hierarchy matters more than outcomes. Communications doesn’t hold the levers of power.”

Communication Leader, Western Europe

The challenges facing communicators around implementation and securing commitment to act are exacerbated by a lack of evidence and evaluation.

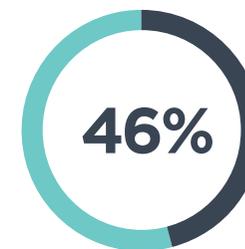
Communication leaders are frustrated at their inability to answer the following questions:

- What does good look like?
- What’s the best form of citizen engagement and what are others doing?
- How can I integrate citizen engagement into policy development?
- And, how do we evaluate what we are doing?

“The definition of a success in consultations could be better policy... but it’s difficult to measure. A measurement of success could also be trust in government, whether people feel they are being consulted... it’s very clear we need some work on how to measure the impact of the consultations.”

Communication Leader, North America

The research suggests that the lack of quantification and measurement has inhibited the development of best practice. Organisations lack the confidence to act on findings in part because they don’t have a coherent measure of effectiveness. This leads to a reluctance to properly resource engagement activities.



Only 46% of respondents said their organisation had the insights and research to evaluate the effectiveness of their programming.

Our research also found that many organisations were measuring the success of citizen engagement against communication outputs rather than policy outcomes. This mirrored one of the central findings in the first edition of *The Leaders’ Report*, and suggests that it remains a pressing issue for public authorities around the world.

In the absence of KPIs against which authorities can measure success, the research suggests that participation data (such as completion or drop-out rates) is taking the place of outcome-focused evaluation. These proxies can offer some value in terms of refining and improving processes, but they do not reveal whether activities are enriching policy; whether citizens feel that government is responsive; or whether it is building trust.



4. Communication professionals are under-supported, under-resourced and under-funded

Respondents to the research consistently identified the continued struggle to secure resource as a major barrier to delivering more and more effective citizen engagement.



56%

of respondents said they needed to invest more in citizen engagement



28%

of respondents said their organisation lacked the tools, skills and resources to carry out citizen engagement programming.

Senior communication leaders pointed to the fact that the of majority engagement activities were being run out of communication teams. However, these teams were often reliant on other parts of their organisation for funding.

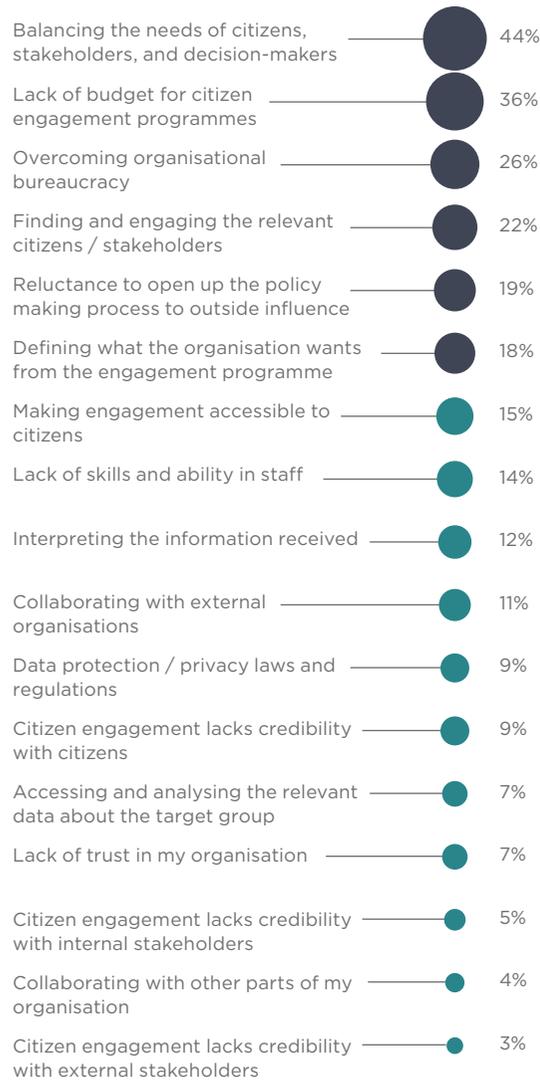
“The problem is that the cash sits with policy, not with communications, so it’s time consuming to get clearance and financial approval to do things properly. There is a culture of protecting budgets which inhibits effective working and stops communications driving change.”

Communication Leader, Western Europe

“We communications people are always complaining that we aren’t involved early enough in policy development, but I’ve also been thinking of the role of the policy people in the campaign development process. I’ve been explicitly involving them, particularly in formative research and concept testing as it gives them an opportunity to hear directly from our audiences which may, in turn, influence them when developing policy. All this is leading to much better collaboration all around.”

Communication Leader, Australasia

Our quantitative research revealed that the challenges facing communicators were varied.



The research found that the major challenges to delivering more effective citizen engagement were:

- Finding the right balance between the needs of citizens, stakeholders and decision makers in engagement activities;
- Internal barriers around bureaucracy;
- Risk aversion and buy-in;
- Budget.

These quantitative findings were reinforced by communication leaders, who cited the diffusion of decision-making, the lack of clarity about how or when to feed in citizens' view, and the siloed nature of government policy development.

The professionals also identified a lack of coordination and collaboration between authorities and teams, which can prevent effective citizen engagement; may result in engagement fatigue; and may mean that the decision-making process is less open and transparent than it could be.



Only 39% of respondents felt engagement activities were coordinated across the organisation.

The global picture emerging from the research was of a process that is still constrained by both process and resource hurdles. The lack of commitment on the part of public organisations to driving citizen engagement activities into policy development and delivery means that many programmes are stumbling or falling short along the way.





5. Failure to deliver or under-delivering on citizen expectations has consequences

Communication professionals recognised that poorly-executed citizen engagement that under-commits or does not affect policy development could have serious counterproductive effects.

“It’s good to say that it’s important to be transparent and to have feedback, but if you just say that and then don’t have mechanisms to actualise it, then it can backfire.”

Communication Leader, Multilateral Organisation

“There is a political risk to boosting people up to think they have influence. That’s why we need an ongoing engagement mechanism and not just dialogue. Dialogue on its own can make things worse.”

Communication Leader, North America

There is widespread recognition across the profession that citizen engagement should make the work of government more transparent and give citizens more agency. These significant benefits often fail to be realised due to a lack of confidence in delivering and a lack of commitment to delivering engagement activities.

Failures in activity design meant that in many instances those affected by a potential policy were unable to participate in engagement activities.



Only **36%**

of respondents surveyed said that affected citizens could always get involved in engagement activities.

Failure to be both user-led and outcome-focused—by prioritising those most affected—can lead to the tyranny of the majority. Where the minority most affected by an issue has the majority’s view imposed upon them.



If engagement activities do not involve those most affected, then the impact of these activities is likely to be minimal or, worse still, will add to perceptions that the government is out of touch or only listening to a privileged few.

Relevance was also identified as an important issue for professionals. While citizens want to engage on issues that are relevant and meaningful to them, they do not want to be consulted on every issue.

“All public issues can be opened for citizen engagement. However, if you consult the citizenry about topics they ignore, you will probably get a useless answer. That is a problem of design, not a knowledge problem.”

Communication Leader, South America

“We’ve identified over 200 possible engagements broadly targeting the same people, and we have to be really careful not to overwhelm our public and create consultation fatigue but also make sure there’s an authentic feedback loop to our public and they understand they really are contributing to outcomes.”

Communication Leader, Australasia

Many respondents voiced uncertainty over the level of influence that the engagement activities they run may be giving citizens. This uncertainty was mirrored in citizens’ own lack of clarity on their involvement.



of respondents were not always sure on the level of influence they were giving citizens.



of respondents stated that citizens are not always clear on their level of influence.

The failure to establish levels of influence means that the contract of expectation established between organisations and citizens was often breached: respondents believe that citizens often feel misused because their energy and input has not been respected and appears not to have been valued by the organisation.

Communication professionals are keenly aware of these challenges and many voiced frustrations with how their organisation used engagement activities as a public relations exercise or messaging platforms, rather than a genuine attempt to listen to the opinions of citizens.

“There is very little evaluation of our citizen engagement because in most instances the organisation is not interested in the results. It’s lip service or a PR stunt, not a genuine attempt to find out what people believe, want or fear, and take that into account when developing services or policies.”

Communication Leader, Western Europe

Across the profession, there is a high level of awareness that citizen engagement needs to be approached with caution. While it has enormous potential, failure to realise it can often render activities counter-productive. There is recognition, too, that building trust should begin with giving it. Activities that promise the citizen a role in decision-making, only to withdraw it later, are likely to negatively impact levels of trust in government.

Conclusions

Our five findings show that communication professionals around the world clearly face a consistent set of challenges. These findings have led us to four distinct conclusions:



1. Citizen engagement is under-resourced and under-funded

- Citizen engagement is widely endorsed in principle, but is often being practised as a stand-alone listening exercise that does not impact policy;
- Citizen engagement activities are rarely resourced sufficiently. Many organisations require better funding for engagement activities;
- There remain significant capability gaps. In many cases, governments lack the equipment, skills and expertise to conduct and fully evaluate engagement activities.

2. Citizen engagement is always possible but not always desirable

- Activities have been successfully run in all areas of policy, including highly sensitive issues such as national security;
- However governments need to pick and choose engagement opportunities strategically;
- Governments should only pursue opportunities that can impact policy development and delivery, or service outcomes;
- Organisations need to assess whether they have the capacity to effectively deliver programmes before undertaking them.

3. Citizen engagement has unfulfilled potential

- Most citizen engagement activities are taking place at a lower-order level and are not influencing policy;
- The benefits of higher-order engagement activities are not being realised in most organisations;

- The lack of rigorous evaluation makes defining success and measuring outcomes elusive;
- Lack of integration and collaboration means too many programmes fail to move beyond consultation;
- There is a lack of strategy and a lack of frameworks available to practitioners that help them understand how activities can build more trusting relationships between citizen and state.

4. If executed poorly, citizen engagement activities can make relationships between the citizen and the state worse

- A lack of commitment and action following engagement activities risks them being perceived by citizens, stakeholders and the media as a public relations exercise;
- Consultation without implementation breaks the contract of expectation between citizen and state;
- Failing to engage affected audiences on policy decisions can increase perceptions that governments and public bodies are out of touch and disinterested;
- Governments must be wary of the reputational risk of doing citizen engagement poorly. Citizens increasingly expect authorities to engage them in user-centric and relevant ways that challenge traditional government communication practices.

Recommendations

It is clear from the communication professionals we spoke with and surveyed that citizen engagement continues to be an exciting area of development. However, the context in which the profession operates around the world poses significant challenges to delivering effective engagement to the public.

Geopolitical disorder, individualisation and permanent disruption have made an already challenging communication landscape harder still. Government and communication professionals both recognise the need to engage citizens and to establish a sense of shared purpose, collaboration and crucially trust. But these positive outcomes are counter-weighted by real risks.

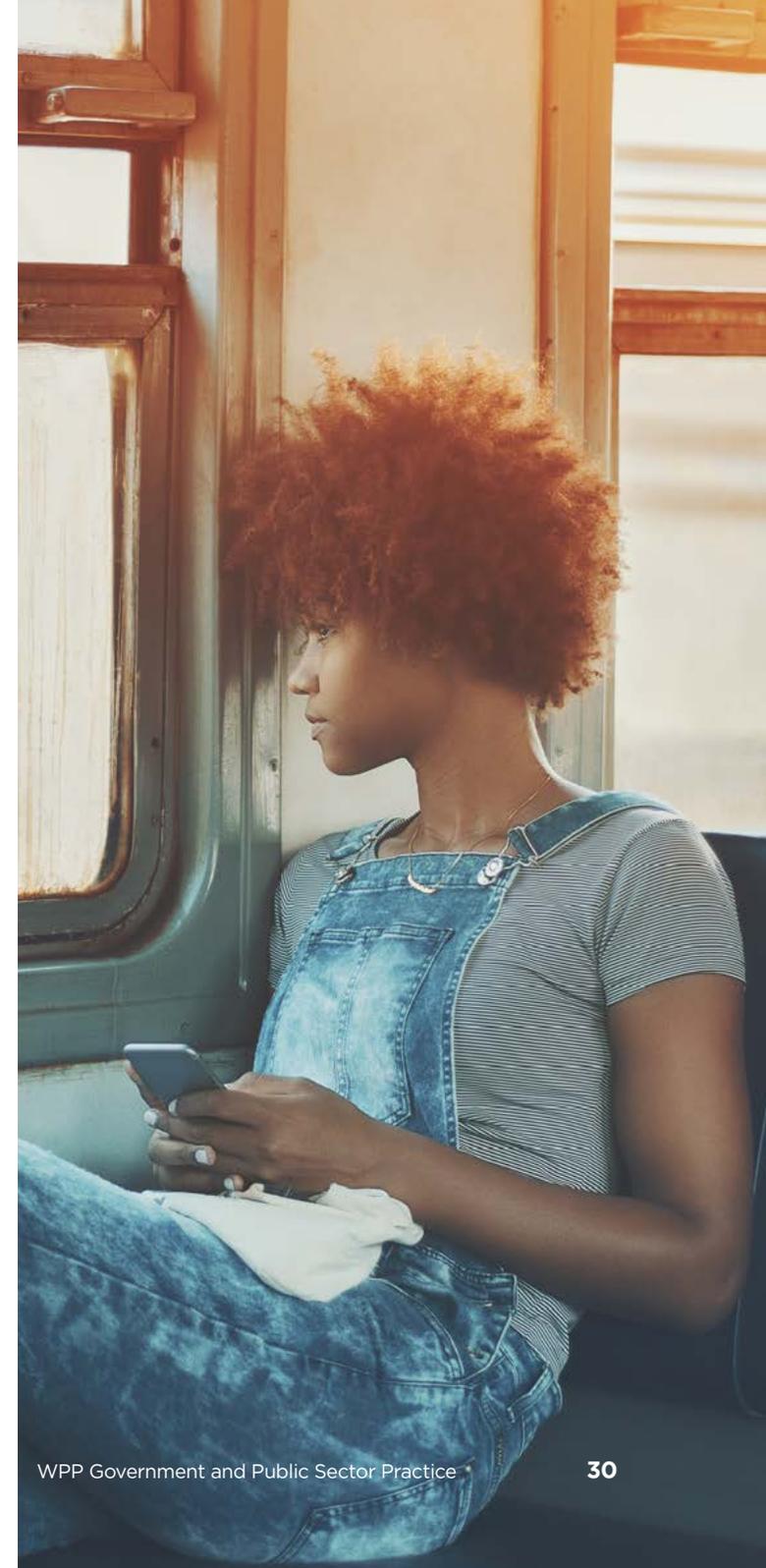
Unpredictable publics equipped with new ways to share and amplify messages, engagement fatigue, and disappointed citizens all threaten to undermine the efficacy and legacy of engagement activities.

These global factors are compounding longer-standing challenges for communicators: the pressures on resource and the difficulties in securing buy-in from policymakers and politicians make meaningful engagement elusive in many situations.

Our research into the state of the field and the thinking of government communication professionals has led us to make several recommendations about how communicators should approach engagement activities. We identified a need to be more strategic in the opportunities organisations pursue, being mindful

of limitations in resource and only committing to engagement where activities can affect outcomes. In short, we recommend engaging on a higher level—but potentially less often, doing so more carefully and committing to follow through.

What follows are our key recommendations for how to achieve this balance. As with the rest of this report, these recommendations have their roots in the insights we have gained from consulting communication leaders and professionals from around the world. They are not presented here as a guide on how to conduct citizen engagement, but as learnings from professionals about what is already working well when partnering with the public to build a richer and more trusting citizen-state relationship.



1. Make engagement meaningful

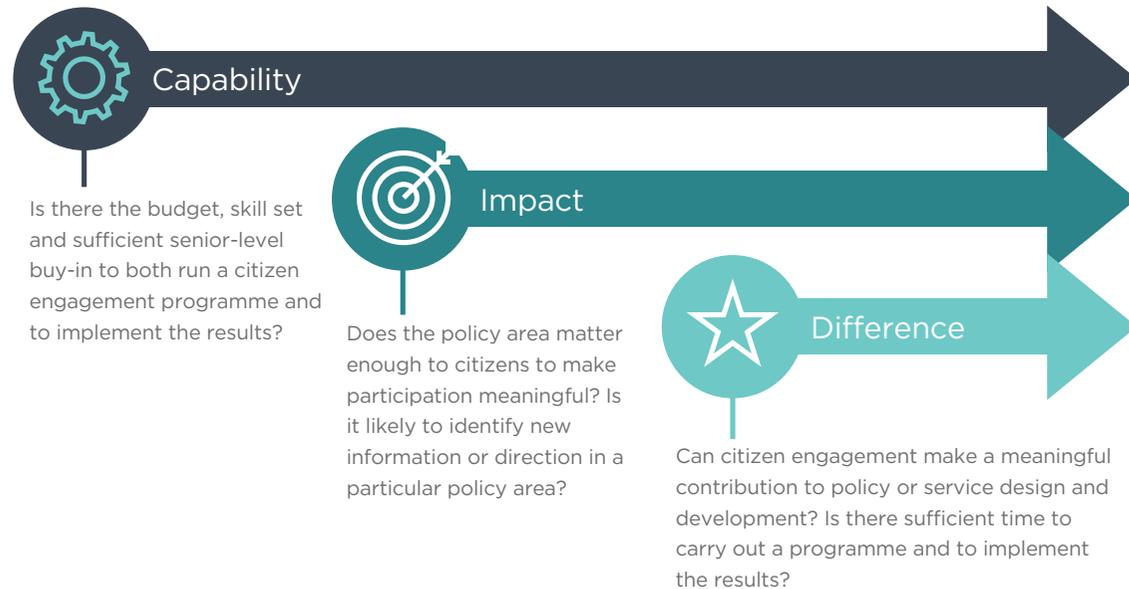
Government and citizens are not always in opposition and can meaningfully work together with the right support. Authorities must ensure that citizens' contributions are acknowledged and meaningfully incorporated into decision-making.

Respondents to the research cited negative examples of public authorities:

- Restricting citizen engagement to once every electoral cycle—invariably in the period preceding elections;
- Using citizen engagement as a form of public relations—focusing activities on generating headlines rather than widening participation;
- Prejudging citizen engagement—framing questions in a way that delivers for government the answers that it wants, rather than those that the public may want.

This raises significant risks to the credibility of government. Public authorities must ensure there is adequate buy-in within and between authorities, and acknowledge that they must be willing to delegate a degree of decision-making to citizens. The belief of respondents is that engaging citizens can improve the delivery and quality of public services, enhance the management of public finances, and lead to greater transparency, accountability and social inclusion—but only if that engagement is meaningful.

We believe that citizen engagement should only be used as part of a broader strategy where government can meet the following criteria:



Around the world, communication professionals are delivering effective engagement by building their strategies around core principles that ensure their activities meaningfully deliver for citizens throughout the process. We have consolidated these learnings into a strategic sequence that represents the best practice we found throughout our research:

- **Establish an effective range of approaches for citizen engagement.** An effective organisation will be able to identify the most appropriate approach based on its longer-term objectives, resources, target audience and skills—and deploy accordingly;
- **Clarify what is and what isn't in scope.** Authorities must define clearly the topic for citizen engagement and what is or is not possible in a given framework. Ambiguity may lead to stakeholders working at cross purposes and lead to dissatisfaction with both the approach and results;

- **Give citizens the policy content.** Successful engagement requires that citizens have access to the full range of relevant information required to enable them to make informed decisions. Participants require a commitment that their contribution will not lead to negative repercussions;
- **Coordinate engagement activities.** The research suggests that public authorities continue to work within silos: few policies are developed under a single point of oversight. This creates challenges for effective citizen engagement as audiences may receive information from a range of different sources. Respondents to the research also spoke of the risk of 'decision fatigue' when citizen engagement is uncoordinated across governments and organisations;
- **Resource appropriately.** Authorities must consider the level of resources required to run effective citizen engagement programmes. If insufficient resources are available, it may be best to use traditional communication methods.



2. Find the right audience and engage them with sensitivity

One of the major challenges identified by our quantitative study was the need to balance the needs of the public and stakeholders with those of decision makers. Communication professionals clearly feel that care has to be taken to ensure that citizen engagement programmes are accessible to those most affected, and are not co-opted by vocal or resource-rich special interest groups. We found that the most successful cases of citizen engagement were underpinned by research, sensitivity to citizens' needs and user-led design, consequently we recommend communicators undertake the following:

Scan the environment

Assess the landscape around the policy issue. Identify in advance those who have a view on or stake in the issue. Social listening tools can help identify where conversations are already taking place.

Target the appropriate audience

Not all communities have access to the same resources—or indeed the same appetite for participation. Citizens may feel marginalised if the 'right' people are not in the room or if special interest groups dominate. Be mindful that stakeholder groups are more likely to engage through representatives or spokespeople. Authorities must actively reach out to relevant community members to engage the right people in sufficient numbers.

Use mechanisms that work best for the audience, not the authority

Apply the principles of user-led design. Run activities when participants can most likely participate. The right engagement mechanism

will depend on both the issue and the audience. For example, digital channels are unlikely to work in engaging people experiencing homelessness. Face-to-face meetings may not be suitable for geographically-dispersed communities.

Be culturally sensitive

Be mindful when designing activities that differences in language, culture and identity can affect everything from availability to willingness to participate. Take into consideration how target audiences perceive authority in general. Consider partnering with civil society organisations where they have higher levels of trust or legitimacy.

Follow up

Citizen engagement should never be regarded as an end in itself. For it to be meaningful and impact on trust levels, the outcome of citizen engagement must be explicitly acknowledged. Authorities should invest in communications that show citizens how their contribution has made a difference. Our research suggests that authorities fail to notify participants of the outcome of their involvement in more than 40% of cases.

In more than 40% of cases, authorities fail to tell participants how their role in citizen engagement programmes has made a difference.





3. Choose the right platform for your audience

Authorities should consider whether an analogue or digital approach is likely to be most successful, bearing in mind that technology can be a barrier to, as well as a bridge into, hard-to-reach audiences. The choice of platform will depend on whether the authority is seeking greater or lesser inclusivity; greater or lesser intensity of communication; and greater or lesser authority. The choice also depends on which areas of the communications ecosystem target audiences are most comfortable and confident with.

Technology can be a barrier to, as well as a bridge into, hard-to-reach audiences.



Examples of analogue activities include:

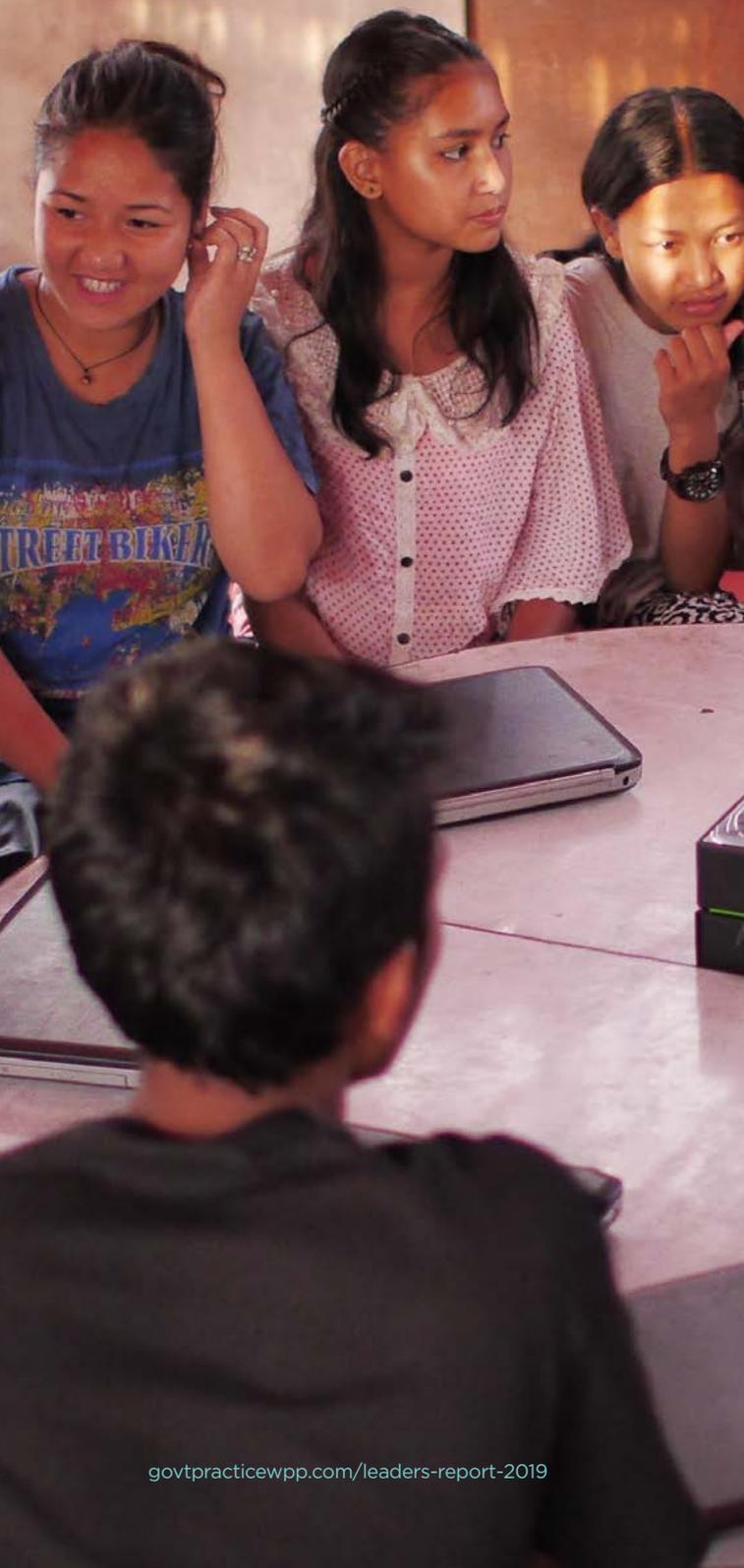
- **Public comment periods.** The authority sets a time in which stakeholders can comment on a particular policy or issue before it is developed or decided;
- **Public hearings.** The authority convenes sessions in which members of the public can meet with members of the authority in a physical place and voice their opinions;
- **Polling and surveys.** The authority captures public sentiment through polls and surveys. These present a snapshot of views on an issue;

- **Collaborative and deliberative forums.** The authority gathers more in-depth feedback on an issue by convening discursive sessions over an extended period of time with members of the public. Conversations are generally structured;
- **Expert advisory committees.** The authority facilitates discursive sessions over an extended period of time, generally involving expert stakeholders;
- **Citizen panels and juries.** The authority facilitates discursive sessions over an extended period of time involving a smaller number of people and more restricted set of issues;
- **Deliberative polling.** The authority facilitates discursive sessions over an extended period of time, but participants will generally have been selected because they form a representative sample of the whole population;
- **Negotiated rulemaking.** The authority tasks participants with reaching a consensus over the intended outcome or 'next step'.

Digital activities are becoming increasingly common and include:

- **E-rulemaking, old and new.** Examples include, e-petitions and e-referenda via platforms such as Change.org;
- **Online dialogues.** One-off discursive forum around a policy issue;
- **Tools for autonomous online collaboration.** The public connect and collaborate with one another online in order to achieve a specific goal or outcome.

The activities an authority may choose will depend on the topic; the range of voices that need to be included, the size of budget, time and other resources available; and the degree of discussion required for citizens to make an informed decision.



4. Commit to acting on the findings

Citizen engagement is a commitment to sharing power with the public. Our research showed that this cultural shift is often difficult for authorities to make. The research also suggests that there are reputational risks of running citizen engagement activities that appear not to take into account public inputs. Only 8% of respondents said their organisation always commits to acting on the findings—a major barrier to more effective engagement.

Public authorities can demonstrate greater commitment to citizens by:

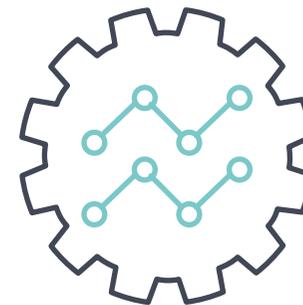
- **Defining the task and the ask correctly.** Manage citizens' expectations by clearly setting out what is being asked of them and what is likely to happen as a result;
- **Committing to actively considering the results of the public's input.** Authorities need to listen and respond to citizens' input, this means allowing enough time and having enough buy-in to do so;
- **Always communicating outcomes.** In doing so, authorities must explain why decisions were made and actions taken or not taken.

Only 8% of respondents said their organisation always commits to acting on the findings of citizen engagement programmes.

In advance of any engagement activities, authorities must ask themselves:

- Have they thought through the potential consequences of citizen input?
- How will they react/deal if responses don't align with their point of view, objectives or expectations?
- Are they talking to the right people? What steps will ensure the programme isn't hijacked by special interests?
- How can citizens navigate technical or knowledge-based barriers?
- Is there sufficient information to ensure that citizens are making an informed decision and understand the possible implications?

Governments and public authorities must understand the boundaries to the influence it is giving citizens before embarking on any engagement activity. And it is critical that these limits are communicated to and understood by participants. Authorities should not seek public input where there is no intention to act on the findings.



5. Develop the necessary skills to deliver citizen engagement

Citizen engagement represents a significant development in existing government communication skill set and capability. Ensuring that engagement activities are culturally embedded in an organisation is one of the primary challenges facing authorities and practitioners alike: only a third of respondents working in government organisations said they were able to coordinate effectively with policy.

Organisations should not assume that the skill set required for citizen engagement sits within existing communication functions: designing, structuring and implementing engagement activities requires skills from project management through to policy development. It also requires increased:

- **Training.** Effective citizen engagement requires investment in distinct training programmes. It should not be viewed as an organic extension of existing communication functions;
- **Knowledge sharing.** Organisations must share their own best practices across government. Refining and developing approaches can only take place when organisations have a granular picture of what has or hasn't worked and why;
- **Collaboration.** Responsibility for citizen engagement should be shared and not seen as the sole concern of the communications function.



Only a third of respondents working in government organisations said they were able to coordinate effectively with policy.



6. Evaluate against policy outcomes

Respondents stated that a key barrier to improving the performance of citizen engagement activities is a lack of effective evaluation. Without it, respondents were unable to identify which engagement activities were successful and which were not.

Tactical evaluation

Our research uncovered a series of approaches that communicators are beginning to use to measure their activities. These individual activities should be developed into a full evaluation framework for citizen engagement and include:

- **Participant surveys.** Participant feedback is a key measure of an activity's success at an operational level. Authorities should seek to identify fully the participant experience, areas to improve, and areas that participants felt to be particularly useful;
- **Pre- and post-activity surveys.** These can measure impact provided there is a large enough sample size aware of the policy developments;
- **Proxy measurements.** The success or otherwise of citizen engagement activities should be measured against important proxies such as trust, integrity and competence.

Strategic evaluation

While the above can help communicators gauge whether a policy was, or series of policies were, effective, they are general—rather than comprehensive—indicators of whether engagement activity is truly effective.

Strategic frameworks can help bridge the insights gap between data points that are either too large

to offer meaningful attribution or too granular to ascertain impact on trust.

Authorities should consider using an evaluation framework that can measure engagement levels across a number of critical areas to understand the bigger picture of trust. These frameworks allow government to identify and then target the factors most pertinent to the relationship they have with their public.

The World Bank strategic framework for mainstreaming citizen engagement

The World Bank developed a strategic framework to incorporate stakeholder feedback into its operations and service delivery. It is guided by five key principles:

1. It is results-focused;
2. It involves engaging throughout the operational cycle;
3. It seeks to strengthen country systems;
4. It is context-specific;
5. It is gradual.

The strategic framework has helped the World Bank deliver more relevant programming, with a significant increase in projects using citizen-led design.

For more on this framework, please see www.worldbank.org/en/about/what-we-do/brief/citizen-engagement



How our thinking has developed: introducing the 10Cs

In little more than ten years, the world has witnessed tremendous change—unprecedented technological, economic and societal transformations. These changes have brought a fundamental redistribution of roles, accompanied by the gradual deconstruction of well-established architectures of power.

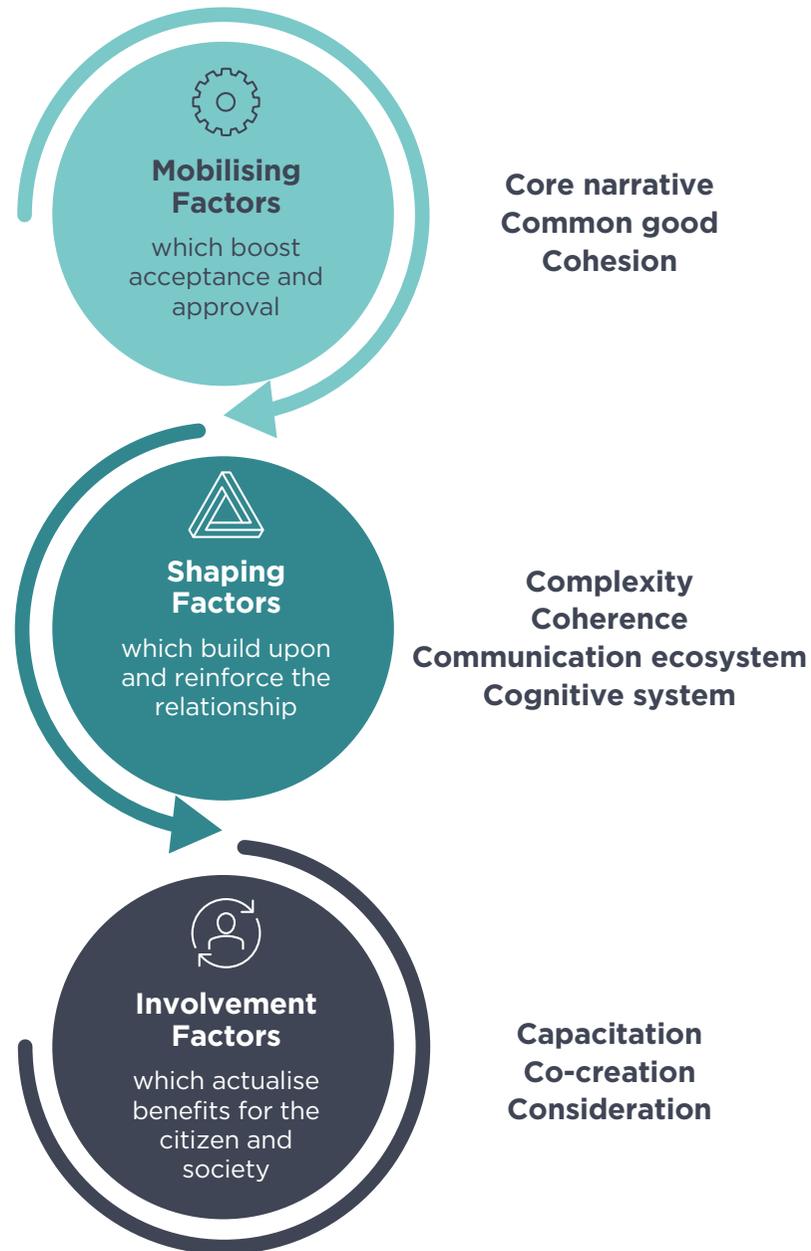
Respondents to the research acknowledge this, together with the potential that citizen engagement can play in helping authorities reconnect with the public, improve policy and services, reduce anti-government sentiment, and build trust. But achieving this is challenging in an era of falling levels of trust in government and public institutions.

Our research suggests that to rebuild trust, organisations need to ensure they create positive, relevant interactions with citizens. This means being more open, receptive and responsive. As one respondent noted, “trust is not one-way: citizens tend to trust authorities that trust them”.

Our view is that public authorities must empower the public to make and take decisions; use co-creation to help develop policies and services; and listen to what citizens say are their priorities and their expectations from government. But how?

Two years of extensive research has led us to the conclusion that good strategic engagement should be underpinned by a clear strategic framework. Several countries, including Taiwan and Canada, and multilateral organisations, such as the World Bank, have reached the same conclusion. Our own framework, developed jointly by the WPP Government and Public Sector Practice and Kantar Public, is based on key indicators that emerged from this research with both government communication practitioners and with citizens themselves.

We call this the 10C Framework and have identified three groups of factors that government communicators and policymakers should take into account when setting out to engage citizens.



Mobilising factors: factors likely to improve citizen acceptance and approval

Mobilising factor 1	Core narrative	Mobilising factor 3	Cohesion
Key question	<i>Before undertaking citizen engagement activity, have you built a single, strategic story that establishes where your government or organisation is heading and what it wants to achieve?</i>	Key question	<i>Do you have in place adequate initiatives to help unite different groups or sections of society?</i>
Rationale	Crafting a shared positive vision of the project and motivation to build a better public realm can help determine whether citizens feel their future hopes and ambitions are likely to be fulfilled. By developing a core narrative, authorities can see whether they are creating an optimistic and ambitious impression of the future that citizens identify with.	Rationale	Reinforcing equality and inclusion across communities, and a sense of unity within society or an institution is crucial. Understanding which parts of society feel less engaged or integrated can help form the basis of better engagement.
Mobilising factor 2	Common good		
Key question	<i>Do you have a set of systems, communications and policies that reassure citizens you're acting in the public interest?</i>		
Rationale	Finding common ground and solutions that serve everyone's interests can avoid the perception that public authorities work for the benefit of disconnected elites. The credibility of public authorities increases when citizens perceive them to be working on behalf of society as a whole and that they exercise power for the public good rather than for self-interest.		

Shaping factors: factors that build upon and reinforce the relationship between citizen and the state

Shaping factor 1	Complexity	Shaping factor 3	Communication ecosystem
Key question	<i>Do all groups in the community have adequate and equal opportunity to express opinions, preferences and demands?</i>	Key question	<i>Do you have an efficient set of communication channels that are able to support citizens with clear, relevant and easy-to-understand information?</i>
Rationale	Public authorities must reassure citizens that their leaders can understand and balance the complex interests of diverse groups.	Rationale	Authorities must manage the increasingly complex communication ecosystem if citizens are to receive the information they need in the way that best serves them.
Shaping factor 2	Cognitive system	Shaping factor 4	Coherence
Key question	<i>Are you employing the right messaging and arguments to influence citizens' behaviour?</i>	Key question	<i>Is there consistency in the messages that you put out to the public through different channels, and consistency between what you say and what you do?</i>
Rationale	The capacity to engage citizens emotionally as well as intellectually is vital to building public support. Organisations that can successfully communicate with citizens on an emotional level, recognising the inherent tensions involved in their behaviour, are likely to get better engagement and outcomes.	Rationale	Maintaining consistency between what leaders say and what they do is at the heart of building public trust. Authorities must assess the public's perception of the consistency between its communications and its actions over time.

Involvement factors: factors that further develop the relationship between the citizen and state, and actualise the benefits

Involvement factor 1	Capacitation	Involvement factor 3	Consideration
Key question	<i>Are there adequate opportunities for citizens to organise, participate and develop new skills so they can deal with the evolving needs of the future?</i>	Key question	<i>How will you reward citizens who participate?</i>
Rationale	Making citizens feel they are capable, equipped and empowered to achieve their goals and contribute to society is central to effective citizen engagement: how can authorities help citizens feel able to realise their ambitions for themselves and society?	Rationale	Reward citizens for their engagement so they feel like valued stakeholders. For many citizens, having their input and effort recognised not only produces a positive reaction, but can provide motivation to engage further.
Involvement factor 2	Co-creation		
Key question	<i>Do your current systems enable citizens to input into and shape decisions, policies and programmes in the public realm?</i>		
Rationale	Involve citizens in the decision-making process so they feel their views are considered. Authorities must give citizens the sense that they are contributing to decision-making. This means being open and receptive to their input, which can in turn generate public support.		

We've piloted this model successfully in eight countries. By breaking engagement down into its constituent parts, the model can help public authorities identify the audiences that have the largest estimated potential for positive impact; find the right levers, channels, content and touchpoints to reach that audience; and develop the right kind of activities and messaging. This approach combines quantitative research with artificial intelligence and machine learning. It employs Bayesian inference and advanced modelling techniques to size and analyse the potential impact of a given group to create an overall Engagement Index.

The 10C framework allows organisations to set KPIs and measure Return On Investment (ROI) as they work to build a better public realm. By taking this kind of insights-driven and outcome-focused approach to citizen engagement, authorities can start to develop a strategy that helps government reconnect with their public and work towards building a better, more trusting relationship.

To discuss how the 10Cs can help your organisation, please contact info.global@kantarpublish.com



About the Authors

Sean Larkins

Director of Consulting and Capability
WPP Government and Public Sector Practice

sean.larkins@wpp.com

Sean leads the Practice's consulting and capability offer, helping governments and public organisations around the world improve their communications functions and strategies. Based in London, he works worldwide and has led projects in Africa, Australasia, Europe and the Middle East.

A frequent speaker on communications capability in government, Sean leads WPP's executive education faculty at institutions include the Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore. He also teaches Communications for Public Policy as part of the Master of Public Policy course at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford.

Dr Michelle Harrison

CEO
WPP Government and Public Sector Practice

michelle.harrison@wpp.com

Michelle is the CEO of WPP Government and Public Sector Practice. She has led the establishment of WPP Government Practice Hubs in New York, London, Brussels, Sydney, Beirut and Singapore, with another opening in Canada this year. She is the founder of the WPP Faculties for Behaviour Change and Strategic Communications at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore.

Michelle is also the CEO of Kantar Public, which improves public sector decision-making through data, insight and consultancy. Kantar Public operates in every continent, with specialisms that include the fields of behaviour change, digital government, international development policy and opinion and electoral research.

Sean Howard

Global Managing Director
WPP Government and Public Sector Practice

sean.howard@wpp.com

Sean works with some of WPP's largest government clients and strategic partners, oversees the Government and Public Sector Practice's thought leadership, and supports its regional leaders in Australia, Europe, the Middle East, Singapore, the UK and the US.

Based in New York, Sean is also responsible for bringing WPP's best talent, innovation and experience to bear for the US's Federal, State and Local governments, meeting the needs of complex, integrated, and large-scale government tenders. As WPP's lead for the U.S. Navy, Sean advises senior Navy personnel on non-traditional marketing programmes to further define the Navy brand and drive its annual recruiting mission.

Dr Ed King

Consultant
WPP Government and Public Sector Practice

ed.king@wpp.com

Ed is based in London and supports the Practice's consultancy and thought-leadership projects in the UK and around the world.

Endnotes

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