



CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT *With* GOVERNMENT

Engagement is the process by which organizations, communities and individuals connect with government, in the development and implementation of decisions that affect them. Constructive engagement is the process by which community leaders develop effective strategies to understand and work with policy makers, practitioners and the public to make specific changes that will directly improve the outcomes that they seek and to advance their mission. Constructive engagement is a tool that can lead to important outcomes through collaborative work.

Civic engagement allows representatives of the people to know how the people feel. It also improves people's lives and helps them to build connections with others.

WHY ENGAGE WITH GOVERNMENT

Communities are key stakeholders in the decisions of government as they are often at the receiving end of those decisions – good or bad. Governance cannot exist in isolation of the governed, therefore, engagement is an integral part of public planning and decision-making.

Community engagement increases the visibility

and understanding of issues and empowers communities to have their say over decisions that affect their lives, their towns, cities and neighbourhoods. Constructive engagement enables better outcomes for both community and government. It allows the parties involved to identify the concerns, risks, opportunities, options and potential solutions that surround an issue, leading to more informed decision making and mutual benefits such as:

- Engagement with government will help to better identify public needs. It provides an avenue for individuals to share their aspirations, concerns and values with governing entities. This will help decision makers to be better informed and better able to meet community needs.
- Civic engagement can increase the power of ordinary people to influence government actions. It increases individual's power to influence the policies that affect their lives and change the direction of government decisions. It can help individuals to feel empowered in a way that it ensures that community members have access to valued social settings and activities and feel that they are able to contribute meaningfully to those activities.



- Engagement can help to improve quality of life. When citizens engage with government, it provides a platform for the government to be better aware of the needs of the people and the issues that affect them. These problems can be solved in an inclusive way thereby improving quality of life.
- Engagement with the government increases the rate of community participation and leadership development. It is an avenue for not only contributing to local decisions but for individuals to gain knowledge, experience and confidence in the workings of their government. This helps to build leadership skills in individuals who will be more prepared and more qualified as informed residents, involved citizens and future leaders.

PATHWAYS TO ENGAGEMENT

Individuals can become civically engaged with government in a number of ways. This can be done either as individuals or as members of groups. Some forms of engagement may require very little effort while others might require more strategic planning. Some of the ways to engage with government include:

- Staying informed about events in the community, in the state, and in the nation. Awareness is the first step toward engagement. News is available from a variety of reputable sources, such as newspapers, national news shows, including those offered by the Public Broadcasting Service and National Public Radio; and reputable internet sites.
- Another form of engagement is to write letters or send emails to political representatives. This can be done individually or as a group and is another way to make one's voice heard.
- Responding to public opinion polls, actively contributing to a political debates both online and offline are ways of also getting engaged with the government. Social media in recent time is

an avenue for pulling together voices on different issues that affect the people.

- One of the most basic ways to engage with government as an individual is to vote. Individual votes do matter. National assembly members, president, state legislators, governors, local government chairmen and councilors are all chosen by popular vote. Registering to vote beforehand is necessary in all states in the country and actually going out to vote on the specified day of election.
- Other direct forms of engagement include peaceful protests and demonstrations, boycotting businesses of those involved in making a particular bad policy.

BARRIERS TO CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

- **Inadequate Data:** For engagements with government to be successful, there is need for quality data that can help to drive home the point of advocacy. This data are sometimes unavailable when needed. Government bodies require high quality data, both data collection and data analysis can become a challenge for citizen's engagement.
- **Communication:** There is sometimes difficulty in networking in order to communicate and connect with others that have the same passion on issues affecting the community.
- **Capacity and skills:** Even an informed voter needs more tools to become a full participant in civic life. To make communities better places to live, engaged citizens need to learn the skills of communication and networking. There can also be difficulty in finding people with specialist skills needed for some particular engagement.
- **Expectations:** Managing expectations for all involved individuals and organizations can be a challenge, both in terms of the activities themselves and the expected outputs.



- **Political Apathy among some citizens:**

Some citizens have overtime developed feelings of disinterest or indifference towards politics and political activities. Political apathy is reflected in individuals and groups who do not see the point in participating in their country's political system and it can result in political stagnation and overall democratic deficits.

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