



**Te Tari Taiwhenua**  
**Internal Affairs**

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# How digital can support participation in government

**Government Information Services**  
**The Department of Internal Affairs**  
**Te Tari Taiwhenua**

March 2018

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# Why we did this



## Our intent

To enable people, business and communities to have insight into and be involved in government decision making.

## Our focus

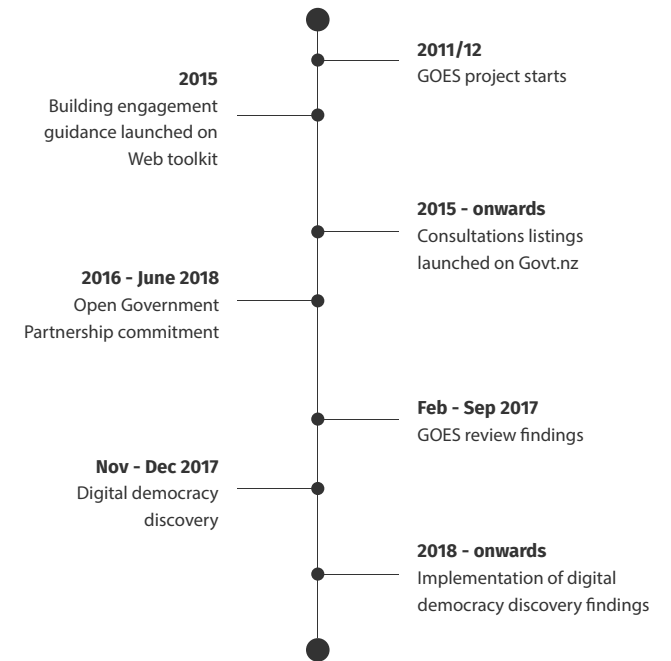
How can digital support participation in government?

## Government Online Engagement Service (GOES)

GOES began in 2011, aiming to make it easier for people to participate in government. This was done by providing engagement advice, an online consultation listing and piloting a survey tool. GOES is part of the work Government Information Services (GIS) is doing to support the State Services Commission (SSC) on commitment 5 of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), which aims to increase government's use of digital tools for engagement.

A review of GOES in 2017 found that agencies needed joined up guidance, easier access to digital tools, and training on using both digital engagement tools and different facilitation methods (like deliberative decision making) to improve engagement with the public.

As a result of the GOES review, we wanted to further understand people's experiences of engaging with government.







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# What we did

Over six weeks, we completed interviews and workshops to look for opportunities where we could improve people's experience when participating in government. We used human-centred design methods to capture the insights and iterate our focus. This report provides a summary of our insights and recommendations from the discovery research.

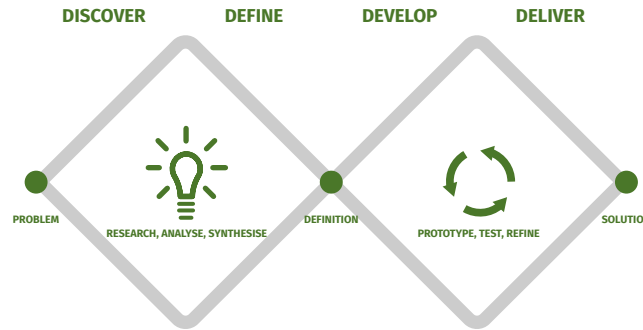


Figure 1. The Service Design double diamond framework we used to approach our research.

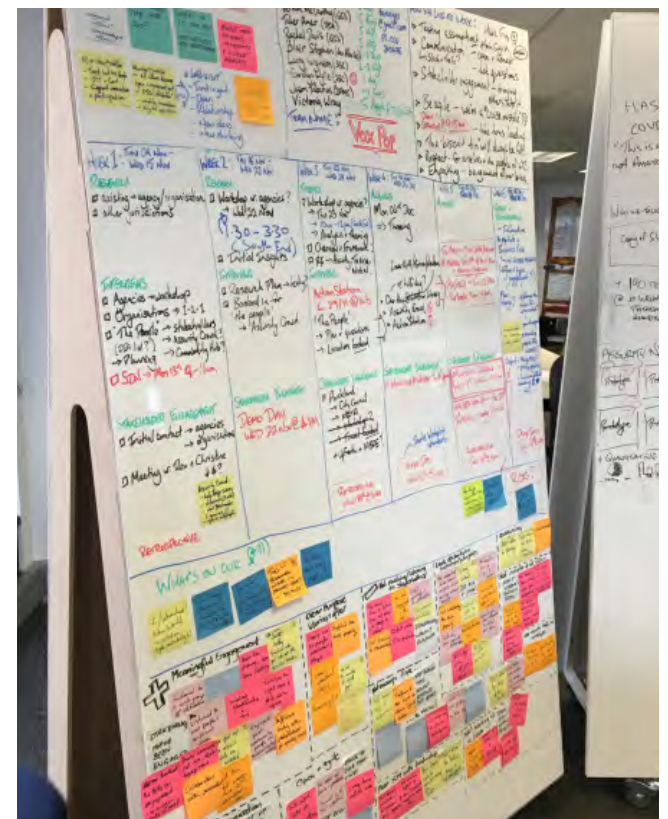
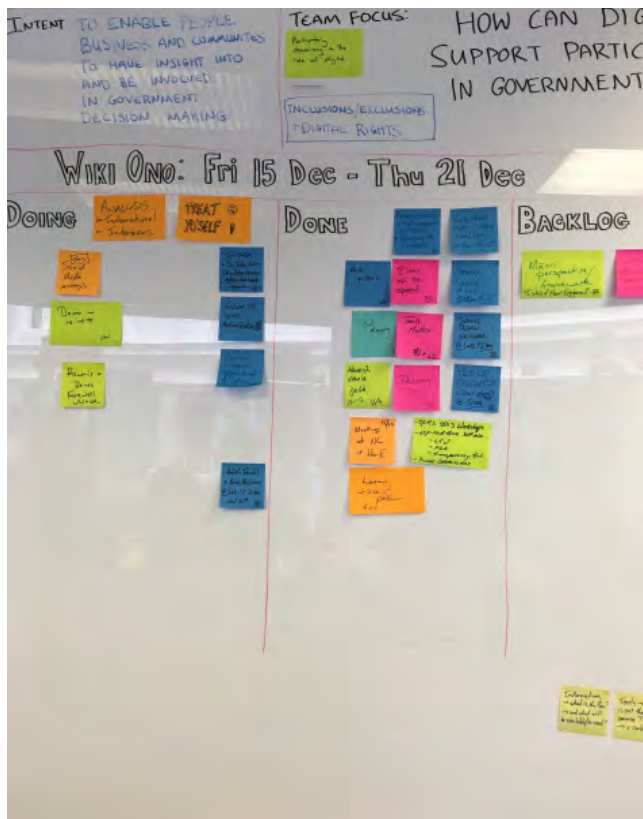


Figure 2, 3, 4. Discovery Lab wall planning.

## Who we talked to

We wanted to hear from the widest variety of people we could within six weeks. We first went to the annual #WellyTech event to hear initial thoughts and ideas from a crowd who was already digitally-engaged.

Remote online testing was then used to reach an ethnic, gender and age diverse group of people located across New Zealand. They were posed a series of questions through an online survey about how they would like to have their say with government. We also developed a basic prototype to test the idea of how they might like to engage through an online platform. Using this crowd was a great way to hear from a variety of people around New Zealand within a short period.



**195**  
Citizens



**9**  
Non-government  
organisations



**20**  
Government  
agencies

The team also set up a stall at Pātaka Art + Museum in Porirua to engage with people face-to-face. This community space allowed for time to engage in one-on-one conversations. We also felt this would provide us with a range of views.

The government agencies we talked to have a range of experience in talking and consulting with the public. They have a diverse range of customers and stakeholders. We captured their experiences through interviews and workshops, while also integrating research the agencies had done themselves.

Other non-government organisations, such as Volunteering NZ, ComVoices and Hui E!, frequently engage with government. They offered insight into their challenges and what works well for them.

We also learned how government is experimenting with new methods of engagement through projects supported by organisations (like Design+Democracy and Toi Āria) who take a human-centred design approach. They are independent from government (Design+Democracy and Toi Āria both come out of Massey University), but often work with government agencies to better improve public services.

## International research

We reviewed how other jurisdictions are engaging with the public. We looked at the tools they used, barriers to engagement with the people (and vice versa) and how they overcame the barriers. International governments reviewed included Belgium, Canada, Estonia, France, Iceland, Spain, Taiwan and the United Kingdom.

### How are government and people engaging?

Engagement is done through multiple online and physical channels. The factors involved include the organisation's budget and resources, knowledge of the available tools, people's availability, digital literacy and remoteness.

The Pirate party in Iceland uses offline meetings to debate and vote on ideas. The ideas that gather at least 5% of the votes proceed onto an online portal where 50% majority is required for the idea to be adopted as official party policy. In Taiwan they use a wide range of digital and physical engagement methods. Through the Taiwan forum the people can interact directly with government ministers and ask them to share information. The relevant ministry is required to respond within seven days.<sup>1</sup>

Governments are using videos to explain complex issues. For example, in France each consultation is accompanied by a video from the representative leading it. In Brazil's e-Democracia portal each project includes a short video explaining the project's aims and how people can participate.

Participatory budgeting is being trialled in Belgium, France, Iceland and Spain with citizens voting on their preferred projects. For example, the city of Madrid in Spain allocated 60 million Euros of its annual budget for a participatory budget exercise. They organised public spaces for people to discuss ideas before holding a public vote. The city checks the feasibility of the winning projects and then holds a final public vote. Each citizen is allocated a portion of the budget and may vote on any project until their budget is depleted.

Citizen juries have also been trialled to help develop ideas to solve social problems. For example, in the state of Victoria one was established to tackle obesity. One hundred 'jurors' were drawn from a pool of 570,000 to provide a representative example. Over six weeks, they engaged in online deliberation in a facilitated forum. Seventy eight of the jurors then met in person over two days. The main objective of the two days was for the jurors to collectively produce a report with recommendations on how to make it easier to eat more healthily.

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### Summary of findings from the international research

There are consistent themes coming from the research on how governments can improve and increase people's participation in decision making.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/digital-democracy-tools-transforming-political-engagement>

## Barriers

### Barriers to people engaging with government

- **Trust**  
People are concerned social media may be used for public opinion manipulation and for misinformation. People also do not trust that the government will listen and can be wary of its presence on social media.
- **Internet access and digital literacy**  
People with poor digital literacy and/or no access to digital technology, are severely limited in the ways they engage with government.
- **Time**  
People find consultation periods are often short and deadlines change before they can respond. People are also busy. They do not want to answer many questions and sometimes want to contribute without having to fill in text boxes.
- **Content**  
Consultations are usually hard to understand, uninspiring and lengthy documents. People want to participate but are unwilling because of poorly written content.
- **Motivation**  
People don't feel represented or valued, don't know what happens in government and do not believe they can make a difference.

*“Why should I care? What's in it for me?”*

### Barriers governments face engaging with people

- **Support and guidance**  
Public servants often lack support and skills, and may not know the best practices of engaging with people. Their teams may need digital literacy and social media training. Analysing and interpreting consultation results can be a challenge. There can also be concern about the large number of hearings or amount of moderation they have to do.
- **Silos**  
Governments often carry out their work in silos. There is little apparent sharing of information or previous insights and lessons learned. Collaboration across disciplines can be difficult, with the most gain coming from joining policy and operational groups.
- **Diversity and representation**  
A lack of diversity and representation in government engagements is a worldwide trend. Extra measures need to be taken to ensure people across the digital divide are equally represented.
- **Trust**  
People sometimes believe there is a conflict of interest if the tool is run by government. The Icelandic government, for example, noticed that participation decreased when they started asking for more demographic information about the people engaging with them.
- **Genuine engagement**  
There is a great risk of alienating people when their input into a consultation can have no impact on the final decision. It can lead to people thinking they are undervalued and their opinions are not respected, as well as disengagement with the process.

### How they overcame the barriers

- Having a dedicated person or team to build an engagement program.
- Using a variety of channels to engage with people, for example attending cultural events.
- Describing consultations in plain English.
- Translating consultations into different languages.
- Using tools that produce easy to analyse statistical data. Government getting buy-in and cross-party support for the issue.
- Using a neutral platform (not closely associated with government).
- Having a clear feedback loop between government and people.
- Seeing a tangible outcome from the online discussions increased trust.
- Using innovative digital tools and a user-friendly website.
- Using extensive and targeted advertising on social media achieved higher levels of feedback and engagement.



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**What else did  
we learn?**

## Inclusion and diversity

### Use face-to-face for creating relationships

***“Powhiri - starts with a Karanga - says who the people are coming - who they are and what they are talking about. Whaikorero. Know who people are before you start talking.”***

Building trust and increasing political engagement with communities who traditionally have high rates of digital exclusion<sup>2</sup> and low political engagement, requires ongoing investment in face-to-face relationships.

Relationship building needs to be built into a mechanism, not just relying on a single person who can leave an organisation and take the knowledge with them. A non-government organisation (NGO) interviewed suggested government use Memorandum of Understanding as a mechanism to lock-in an ongoing, constructive relationship. This also allows trust to build between government and communities who experience digital exclusion.

### Language is a barrier

To increase people's involvement in decision making, government has to make information easy to understand. Every group interviewed commented that the information government publishes is typically difficult to understand. People talked about there being too much information or that it is poorly communicated.<sup>2</sup> Even the public servants involved in this research said they don't like long discussion documents.

Recent evidence, that 40% of adults are unable to read at a functioning level<sup>4</sup>, highlights that easy to read, accessible information is a keystone of inclusive engagement. Consultation documents are typically difficult to read, with a 2017 audit finding that 45% are aimed at a university educated reading level<sup>5</sup>.

Other groups have to be considered when writing information for increased participation, such as English as a second language readers, people with cognitive impairments, and dyslexia for example. Doing this means there is clarity and transparency, as well as a potential increase in participation amongst diverse, more 'silent' voices.

### Digital access and literacy

*“The ability to leverage technology to improve relationships between governments and citizens depends on citizens being able to use that technology.”<sup>6</sup>*

Being unable to afford data or devices, and not having the skills to use them, were highlighted by people as barriers to engaging with government. Ideas that came up from the research to help address lack of access and skills included the use of community outreach, like piggybacking off local events, such as using the library bus in South Auckland.

<sup>2</sup>Families with children in low socio-economic communities, people living in rural communities, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees with English as a 2nd language, Māori and Pasifika youth, offenders and ex-offenders, Seniors (Digital NZers: the Pulse of our Nation).

<sup>3</sup>Interviews at Pataka.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/348306/40pc-of-kiwi-adults-unable-to-read-at-functioning-level>

<sup>5</sup><https://webtoolkit.govt.nz/guidance/online-engagement/review-government-online-engagement-service-goes-pilot/>

<sup>6</sup><http://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2016/disempowered-citizen/>



## Civic education

### *Government is “just a humongous system with so many wires attached to it.”*

There is a strong call for government to do a much better job of explaining what it is, and what it does, and why that matters. Young people interviewed talked about people helping them register to vote, but no-one explaining why voting matters, how they can have their say - not just in elections - but in other government decisions. There is a common theme that the complexity of government makes engaging too difficult.

International research shows that if people don't understand how government works, and how they can participate, their trust in it decreases.<sup>7</sup> This is true of New Zealand, with a 2016 survey showing 50% of respondents losing trust in Government Ministers and Members of Parliament.<sup>8</sup> While voter turnout rates in New Zealand is better than some other countries, it has been on a downward slide since the 1960s, when it reached 90%. There was a slight rise in turn-out in the 2017 elections with 78.8% of people voting (of people enrolled to vote), compared to 77.9% in 2014.<sup>9</sup> However, there is still significant room for improvement in encouraging young people to vote and to get involved in government decision making.

<sup>7</sup><https://www.edelman.com/news/2017-edelman-trust-barometer-reveals-global-implosion>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.victoria.ac.nz/news/2016/04/new-zealanders-distrust-in-government-growing>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/industries/95021675/chart-of-the-day-how-many-kiwis-turn-out-to-vote>

## Big bold ideas!

These are ideas that were suggested by participants as to how government could achieve a digitally-supported participatory democracy.

- Make access to government as inclusive as possible by giving free access to all govt.nz websites and data (like Work and Income does). Why should people have to pay to engage with government?
- Gamify<sup>10</sup> democratic interactions and government participation - how can we make it fun?
- Provide digital community hubs where people can participate.
- Become 'agency-agnostic' to solve problems - let's collaborate as OneGov!
- Trial citizen juries to develop ideas for social issues - these can be supported through both digital and non-digital channels.
- Trial legislative duty (like jury duty) - people get to have a week in the life of an MP.
- Innovative partnerships - government working with NGOs, open source societies.
- Blockchain - investigate the possibilities available for open delivery of information, while maintaining the integrity of the original intent.
- Augmented reality as a way to bring people excluded or in remote areas into the conversation.
- Trial participatory budgeting on a small scale, for example 5% of a recreation budget with a local council.
- Civics education - to help people understand government from an early age.
- Review the process and conventions for discussion documents. They can be a barrier to early engagement and not many people (the public or public servants) like them.
- Offer secondments for citizens into the public sector.
- Putting the Bills to go before Parliament online for people to vote on priority.

<sup>10</sup>The process of taking something that already exists – a website, an enterprise application, an online community – and integrating game mechanics into it to motivate participation.



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# What the research told us

## Common themes and opportunities

These are the common themes that came through from our interviews with people, agencies and other organisations.

### Meaningful engagement

- People want to be kept informed - through the process and of the outcome.
- Government needs to be a part of the conversation - it's about two-way communication.
- Time is a constraint - agencies feel they do not have time to engage, while people feel they do not have enough time to respond.

### Opportunities

- Model best practice engagement principles - trial tools using real engagements that support deeper two-way engagement and deliberative discussion.
- Iterate existing social media guidance on how to use it for better public engagement, and further investigate the benefits of 'scaled listening' (see Appendix 1).
- Build a feedback loop into the process to keep people informed - using digital and non-digital channels.
- Investigate creating an all-of-government database of insights to check what we already know about an issue, area or community to help combat consultation fatigue.

### Protect privacy

- People want to know how we will be using their information.
- Online digital forum - require a balance between anonymity versus verification, while moderation is required to avoid trolling or bullying.

### Opportunities

- Ensure privacy of personal data is a foundation piece in the draft engagement principles and guidance.
- Use the digital marketplace procurement process to assure privacy and security assessments cover digital engagement tools for all-of-government use.

### Inclusive and human

- Information, including context, needs to be provided in a way that is easy to understand and engaging.
- Most effective engagement achieved by going to where people are - both digital and non-digital communities.
- People want to engage through a variety of channels - both digital and non-digital with the ability to 'self-select'.
- When engaging with Māori and Pasifika, initial contact ideally should be face-to-face - also respect tikanga.

### Opportunities

- Promote the creation of inclusive, easy to understand content - through standards and guidance, and role modelling best practice.
- Use digital marketing techniques to make sure relevant information gets to the right audience, for example use Facebook data to develop personas for campaigns, then develop an approach for each persona.
- Invest time into building relationships with diverse communities who are traditionally excluded from government decisions and digital channels - for example Māori networks, Disabled People's organisations.

**Open & transparent**

- Relevant information and data needs to be publically available to help people make decisions about issues.
- People want to see government working in the open so they can trust the process.

**Opportunities**

- Ensure information and data around an issue is published - to support people's decision making and publically show the evidence behind why decisions are made.

**Collaborate**

- Government has to work collaboratively to share engagement best practice and support change.
- Partner-up to access more innovative practices and form closer ties to communities.

**Opportunities**

- Develop partnerships - work with other organisations (for example Toi Āria, ActionStation) who have existing expertise in democracy and design-thinking to provide capability.
- Take an all-of-government approach - join-up guidance and advice by working with the government agencies who have responsibility for leading best practice public engagement.
- Develop a centre of expertise for digital engagement - connect and support agencies with guidance, skills and tools.



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# **Our proposal for change**

GIS is recommending, assuming appropriate funding is granted, to take a test and learn approach to implement what has been learnt during the digital democracy discovery process. Using the International Association for Public Participation (iap2) spectrum of engagement (below) with a range of different types of consultations and engagements, we can test and demonstrate what's possible with new digital tools and human-centred design methods. With the knowledge of what works, we can move beyond informing and consulting, to a more empowering level of engagement like co-design.

The spectrum is designed to help select the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement programme. It shows that different levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. Most importantly, the spectrum sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level<sup>11</sup>.

#### Success will see engagements that:

- foster a trusted way to hear people's submissions
- build relationships with traditionally excluded communities as part of the stakeholder engagement
- test deliberative and consensus based decision making methods and tools
- create engaging content instead of a long, hard to read consultation documents
- use digital marketing expertise to test targeted messaging
- follow privacy and security standards
- use social media (or other relevant tools) to hear and respond to comments and feedback in an open space (if applicable), and
- proactively publish relevant material in an easy to understand, accessible format.

We'll take what works from the engagements we've worked on and build a suite of advice, guidance, tools and methods. This will support a system change where people are empowered by technology to both participate in government decision making, and lead topics for discussion.

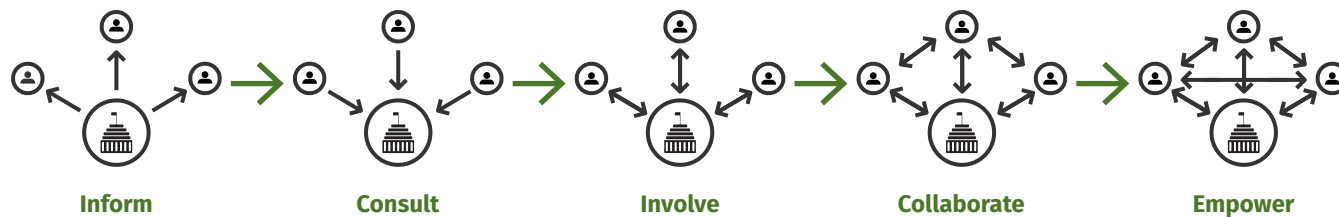


Figure 5. IAP2 Spectrum of engagement. ©International Association for Public Participation [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org).

<sup>11</sup><https://www.iap2.org.au/About-Us/About-IAP2-Australasia-/Spectrum>



# Framework for approach

GIS will provide a suite of tools, advice, standards and guidance to make it easy for agencies to increase and improve public participation. The suite of solutions will support a shift to collaborative and deliberative decision making, embedding system change and raising capability across the public sector. This work is part of a wider authorising environment, with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), as leader of the policy profession, the State Services Commission (SSC), who are responsible for culture and process across the State Sector, and Statistics New Zealand, who provide the data stewardship.



Figure 6. Framework for approach



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# **Discovery insights: Talking to people, non-government organisations and government**

## People

**We engaged with 195 people, asking them about their views on public participation in government.**

### From all these people we learnt:

- They felt they do have a say in what government does, but they are not sure how effective their voices are at a national level.
- People liked the range of ways to engage with government; from digitally, to face-to-face, to a mixture of both.
- They want information and government to be easy to understand and easy to access.
- People want to work with government, they want to partner-up and co-design.

### If engaging digitally, people said:

- Multiple channels and methods should be used; social media (especially Facebook, email, video).
- Digital platforms should not just be a way to inform, but also create conversations, a dialogue with a response and action.
- It needed to be safe (with a way to verify, but also protect identities) but open and welcoming to all.

## PĀTAKA and #WellyTech

At Pātaka and #WellyTech, we asked people...

### Do you feel you get to have say in what government does?

Most people felt they had a say at local level, but either felt removed or that it required larger numbers to be involved at a national level. Some felt more positive about being able to be involved with the new government. Some also felt that business had too much influence.

***“I would like to have a say, but feel the corporate world has usurped the right of the individual.”***

### Motivation - what would make people want to have their say?

#### Government being open to new ways to involve people

- Micro-voting - priority voting for bills due in parliament.
- Crowd-sourcing of ideas - “ask the experts”.

#### Information is available and easy to understand

- Make it interesting and easy to read.
- Have a visible, meaningful impact.
- Openness - include me in the process.

#### Future ideas

- Hold an event for youth to engage in conversation that involves a popular artist, such as Aaradhna.
- Power redistribution - “back to the people”.

## How do you want to have your say?

### Face-to-face and traditional media

Many people liked the opportunity to engage face-to-face.

- Being involved in person through my local community groups.
- Contacting my local MP.
- Find out more through local newspapers.

*“Great to see you out in the communities.”*

### Digital

- People of all ages use social media, particularly Facebook.
- Completing surveys - mainly online, people preferred them to be short.
- Video - short, sharp information, suggested using “familiar faces”/local heroes.
- Using a multi-channel approach, email, website, streaming video.
- Using visuals to support text - diagrams or statistics.
- Video chat.
- Choose the channel to suit.

### Work in partnership

- Co-design.
- Forums and focus groups for consultation at beginning - followed by digital.

### Be inclusive

- Be aware of people not being digitally literate or having access to digital.
- Creating a two-way conversation feels more authentic.
- Be accessible.
- Free internet!
- Use responsive design.

## Build trust

- In a safe and secure way.
- Use blockchain.

## Barriers - What might prevent people from having their say?

### Involved too late and not given enough time

- I don't have enough time.
- The time frame is too short.

### Digital divide

- Access to digital - not being able to afford data or devices.
- Digital literacy - not knowing how to use the devices.

### Motivation

- Apathy - “I don't care”.
- Inertia - “I'm not interested”.

### Engagement not being genuine

- Not keeping people informed during or after.
- Having a bad experience previously with engagement.

*“I don't think I'm being listened to.”*

*“My opinion won't make a difference or affect change.”*

*“My voice would not be represented or heard.”*

## Trust

- “Not sure if my information and identity is protected”.
- Anonymous but verified (and that's OK).

### Information is too hard to understand

- Too much information.
- Poorly written - difficult to read and comprehend.

### Awareness

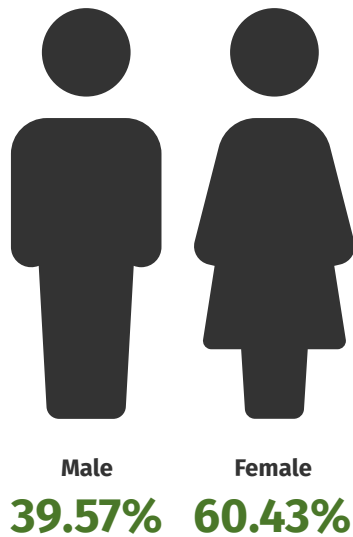
- “I don't know where to go”.
- Not enough information available early enough.

# People's view of participatory democracy

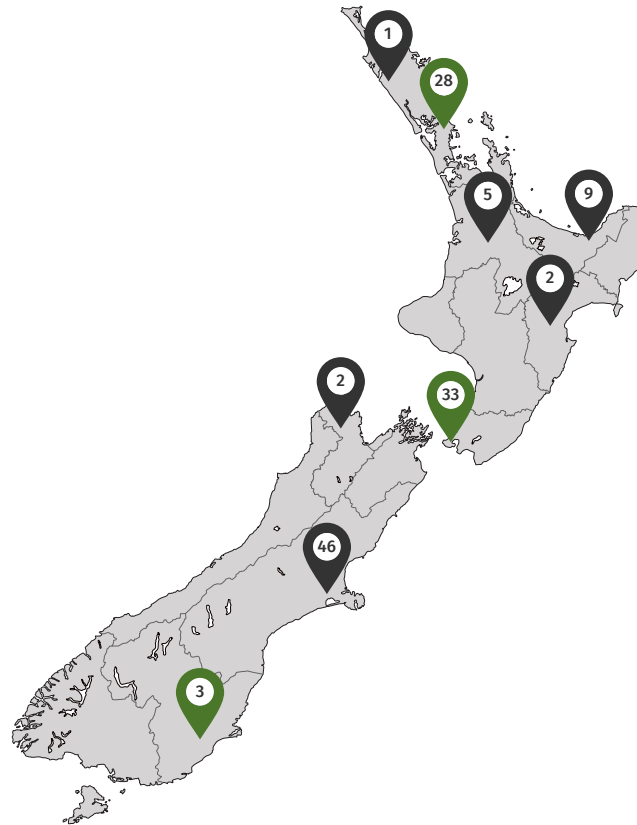
The purpose of this survey was to engage with a sample of the New Zealand public and collect thoughts and opinions in regards to a participatory democracy. Essentially, would the public like to participate more in government and if so: What methods would they like to use?

## Demographics of respondents

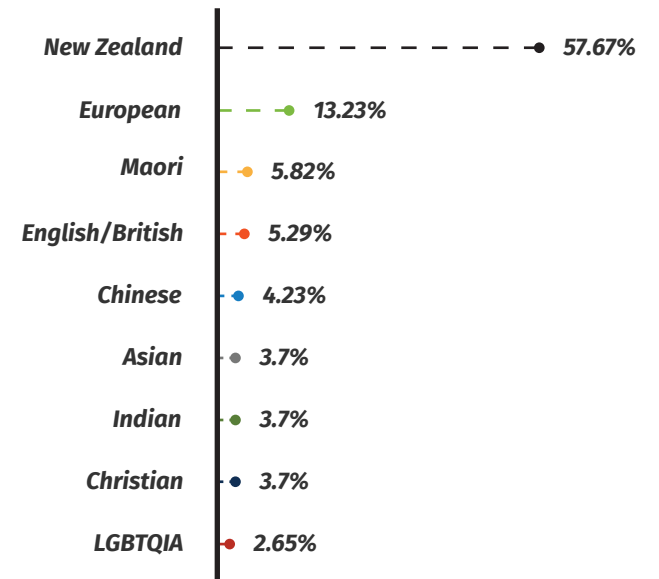
### Gender identity (self selected):



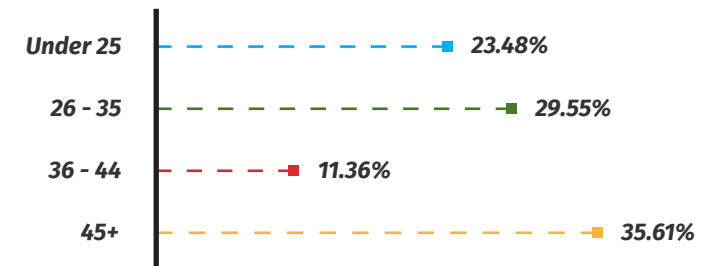
### Location:



### Cultural identity:

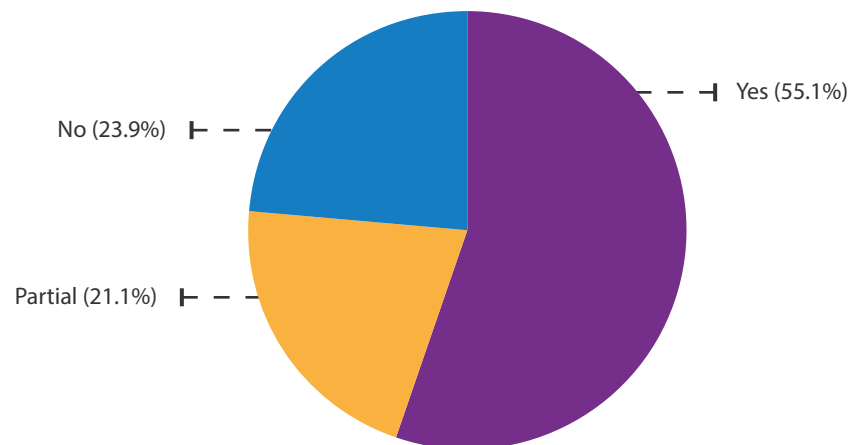


### Age range:

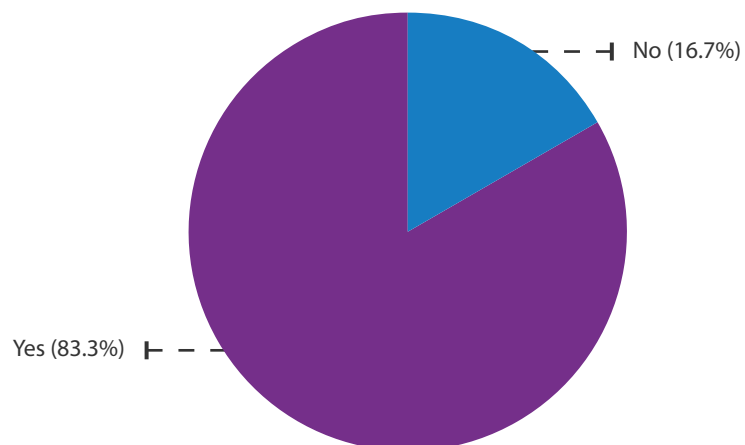


## What we asked

Do you feel that you have a say in what government does?



Would you like to have more of a say in what government does?



*“...so yes, I have had a say, but I remain unconvinced about the effect of that say.”*

What way would you like to have your say on issues that matter to you?

- 41% would like to see existing channels improved or look at new channels. These included online referenda and polling, social media, apps and email.
- 38% preferred ‘traditional’ means, for example elections, referenda, community meetings, submissions and polling.
- There was also a call for a dedicated and official online forum.

*“...I’m not going to walk into a public meeting or a politician’s office - it’s just not how I interact - but live chat (like Reddit or Facebook) would be a great platform.”*

*“Have an app or web page where you can vote on issues being debated in parliament or on things that should be brought before parliament.”*

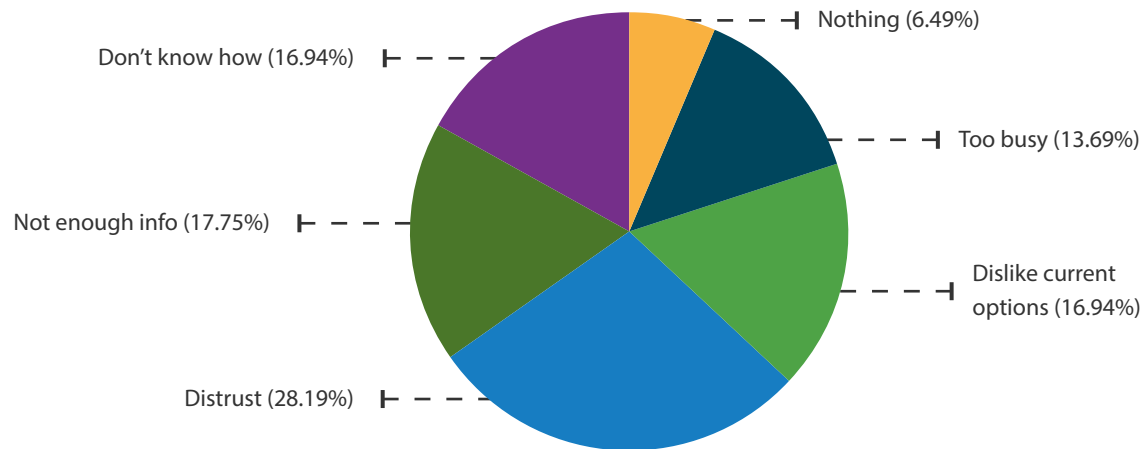
*“A digital web portal where people can raise their issues and concerns. A user friendly and well-moderated web portal.”*

*“Through text boxes since it allows me to make a point rather than a binary yes or no answer which doesn’t reflect one’s true feelings as accurately.”*

*“I think it would great if the government would approach policy-making from a design thinking perspective and make civic input a requirement.”*

## What we asked cont.

### What might prevent you from having your say?



*“The fact I believe it wouldn’t make a difference, my voice would get lost as government has an agenda as is merely looking to validate that rather than actually deliver what NZers want.”*

*“...I like to be fully informed before making a decision... But I also find it very hard to become informed enough to understand a concept fully- especially when talking about politics.”*

*“Being required to fill in a paper form and mail or deliver it. Ugh.”*

*“If it is in a public forum (for example social media) I can be reluctant to have my say as it can often cause conflict.”*

### What are different digital ways you’d like to have your say in the future?

- 38% online voting or polls.
- 25% website or online platform.
- 13% email.

People also expressed an interest in civics education and that government still needs to be aware of developing non-digital channels alongside digital.



## Prototype

We prototyped an idea of how people might want to digitally participate with government. The concept took inspiration from other tools we had seen and from our insights. It was used to prompt people's ideas and feedback.

*"It instantly makes me feel as though my opinion does matter - for example "how would you like to make NZ better"."*

*"I think it is a very good idea! I love the fact that you can read other people's opinions and write your own! Also it's great that you can 'create an issue' and bring up something that you think needs a solution! this means that it's not just the government starting the conversation, it's the people!"*

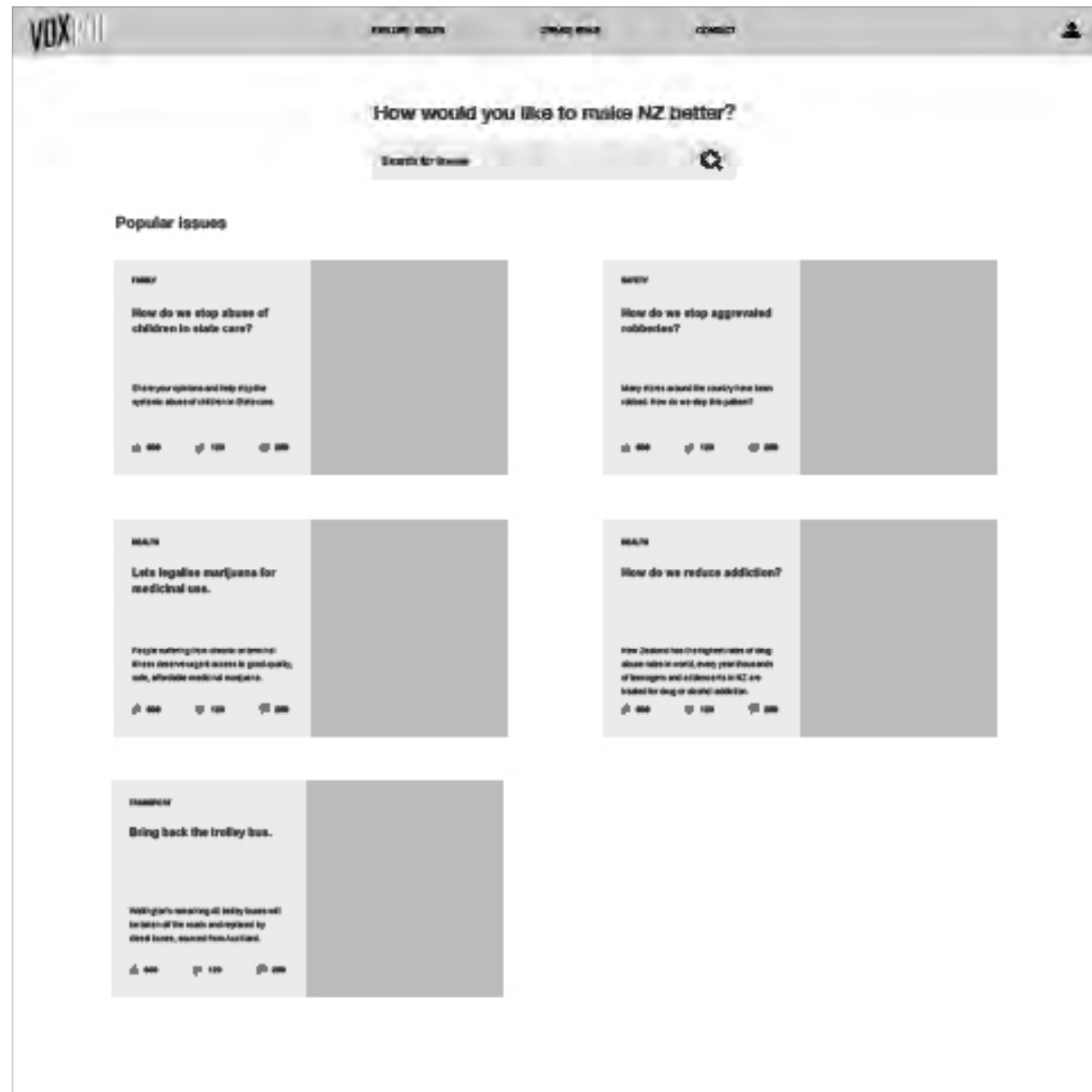
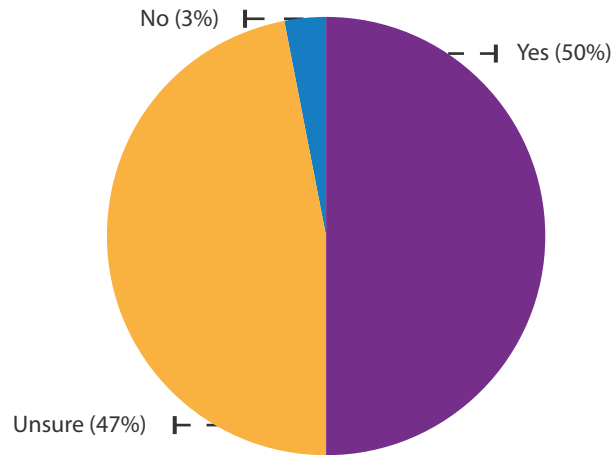


Figure 7. Prototype webpage.

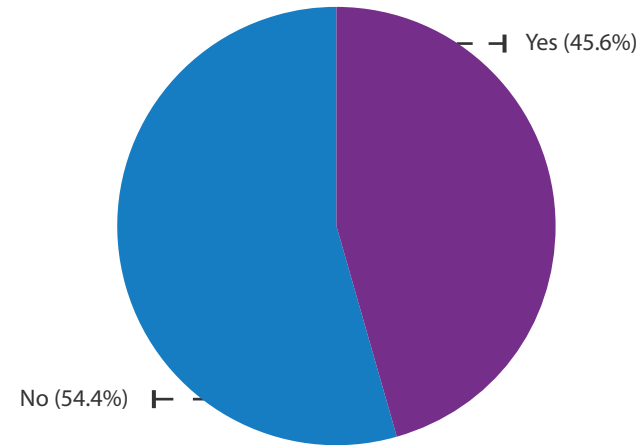
## Follow-up questions

Is this something you would want to use? Why/why not?



People's main concerns were comments leading to bullying or trolling, someone actually listening and doing something, moderation of comments and guarantee of security and privacy.

If this was a government site, would that change how you would interact with it?



People said they would participate more actively knowing they would be heard, while others said they would be more careful or reserved when commenting. There were still concerns about privacy and ability to comment anonymously.

***"I would need to feel safe in expressing my views. That my privacy was protected."***

***"If it's from the government, it would be credible, so I'd feel like my answers would be heard, so I'd be more active in having my say as opposed to if this was made by a third party company."***

What personal information do you feel comfortable having on display?

There is a tension between the desire to be anonymous and be identifiable to avoid trolling.

- 47% were prepared to share first name only.
- 26% would like to be able to post anonymously or use a nickname/login name.

People were also provided with three issues on which to comment - they were more likely to comment if it could be anonymous, with the level of anonymity increasing as the topic became more controversial.

Other ways you would like to provide your views?

- 29% would like to see more background information on an issue.
- 17% like the idea of providing comments through video or voice message.
- 16% liked the idea of quick polls or voting on different solutions to an issue.

"Video and images! If you can capture something to show, which can provide more proof in your views, then that would be even better."

Once you've provided your views, what would you like to happen next?

- 31% wanted to see direct feedback or action.
- 30% would like updates from the website.
- 21% wanted to receive official feedback from the government.

People also wanted transparency over the process and to access information relating to the results.

## Representatives communities (NGOs)

### Barriers to good engagement with government

#### Involved too late and not given enough time

- People don't have the opportunity to get involved early on.
- Short time frames aren't a good way to start relationships.

*“Main problem is that we're being consulted too late in the piece.”*

#### Information isn't provided or is hard to understand

- Information written by government is hard for people to understand. Huge benefits in creating more engaging content.
- Information either isn't provided or isn't given early enough to give people a chance to discuss it and make an informed decision.
- If government doesn't supply the context, other organisations will, along with their own agenda.
- When information is published, it's often in inaccessible formats.

### Government processes aren't well understood

- People need help using processes, for example making Official Information Act requests.
- Current system biased towards organisations that know how the system works.
- Ways of engaging (tools and methods) are inconsistent across government.

*“What does a minister do vs. what does a ministry do?”*

#### Engagement sometimes isn't genuine

- Already an agenda.
- Lack of transparency about decision making.
- Make sure you only ask people for feedback on things they can actually impact.

#### Not being kept informed

- Don't complete feedback loop.
- People need to see the fruits of their participation. How do you get people to feel okay about a decision that doesn't go their way?

#### Culture of risk aversion

- Self-censorship goes on too much in the public service.
- Nervous of consulting on ideas because of potential to get slammed for u-turns or left-field ideas.
- Social media difficult for government as it needs more authentic interaction - not so much 'government speak'.

*“Need to be brave and create opportunity for participation and dialogue.”*

## Use of channels and digital tools

### Multi-channel approach required

- Community organisations feel okay with digital, but people they work with more likely to be digitally disadvantaged.
- Māori engagement is about building relationships, which is best done in person.
- Digital engagement is good for specific needs, for example using Facebook closed group as a follow up to a sensitive topic (confidence that it was safe).
- Only take people off their preferred platform, for example Facebook, when you need to keep them safe, such as when protecting privacy.
- Multiple digital tools can be used to support face-to-face engagement, for example Kamo “Place Race” used Google maps to help people track where they wanted reserves, then take photos and load on to Facebook.

## How can government make it better?

### Work in partnership

- Need to work across government, community and private sector on issues. GovHack is an example of the benefits of bringing different people together.
- Partner with organisations who have already got the trust and mandate from their community.
- Partner with groups who have the skills missing from government, for example the Data Futures Partnership worked with Toi Aria to facilitate workshops and build an online platform.

### Engage differently

- Go where people are (democratise access to government), for example use local events, Facebook groups.
- Big issues need mix of approaches - blend face-to-face with use of targeted focus groups and surveys.
- Relate issues to what people know. For example, Toi Āria workshoped scenarios with people that they could relate to and got them to physically ‘map’ themselves to their own levels of benefit and trust. The same exercise could be done online.
- Shift away from short term engagements towards an ongoing conversation. This makes it easier to discuss issues quickly with communities as trust has been built.
- Use digital marketing tools (data, analytics, personas) to create targeted, appealing content for campaigns.
- Strong need to create more understandable, engaging content around issues under discussion.
- Gamify<sup>12</sup> digital engagement and offer instant reward for participating. For example Our Data, Our Way provided a summary of where your response sat compared to the average response.

***“If you invest in the relationship with your community communications can happen at anytime.”***

<sup>12</sup> The process of taking something that already exists – a website, an enterprise application, an online community – and integrating game mechanics into it to motivate participation.

### Build trust

- Provide people with reassurance that their stories and data will be kept safe.
- Trust frontline staff to respond - they know a lot about issues faced by their communities. Police are a good example of how they are using social media to build relationships with communities.
- 3rd parties (like NGOs) can provide safety or independence to those with low trust in government.
- Keep to tight, known timeframes and always update people with progress.
- Make sure that the people most affected by the policy get heard.

***“Know who people are before you start talking.”***

## Government agencies

*“Finding a common ground to connect is important.”*

### How they are engaging with people:

#### Digital

- Social media, websites, surveys, email, Select Committee.
- Using engagement tools such as Loomio, Bang The Table and Consult 24.

*“Digital tools can help us have better conversations.”*

#### Non-digital

- Workshops, huis, contextual enquiries, town hall meetings, phone, face-to-face interviews, pop-ups, community groups, education resources, newspaper, TV.

*“Communities often prefer face-to-face engagement.”*

#### Multi-channel

- Ministerial responses, petitions, contact with MP, press releases, voting, third party engagement, Customer Relationship Management, mix of online and offline channels.

*“Meet the people where they’re comfortable (physically and digitally!)”*

### The most effective ways to engage:

#### Know your audience (and your audience knows you)

- Know who to engage, know their history, providing context around the engagement.

*“Context is everything!”*

#### Going to where people are (both digitally and physically)

- Some prefer online channels to have their say, while physically going out to communities helps people feel truly heard.

#### Personalise the way people can engage

- Being able to adapt to your audience and how they want to engage.

*“Easy engagement for those that want it, more complex for those that want it.”*

#### Face-to-face

Building and looking after relationships are important. For engaging with Māori and Pacific communities, the initial establishment of the relationship ideally should be face-to-face.

*“First method of engagement is usually face-to-face, then through Facebook because it is easier in terms of communication and language.”*

#### Co-design - with communities and develop ‘champions’

- Use existing relationships, for example with community leaders, to help decide what questions to ask and who to ask.
- Creating champions or “ambassadors” will strengthen community relationships, agency understanding of the community, and helps with ongoing conversations.

*“To get to the people, you have to have someone who knows the people.”*

#### Iterative

Test out initial ideas with the people in small ways, creating building blocks.

#### Using informal channels, such as social media

This ties in with going to where people are - agencies find social media like Facebook a great way to engage on a more “human” level.

#### Dedicated resource

Able to commit proper time and resource to meaningful engagement and relationship management (for example dedicated team within the agency looking after significant stakeholders).

## Government agencies cont.

### Barriers to good engagement with the people

#### Knowledge gaps

- Government does not have the skills or know where to get the support.
- Unsure of the best channel to use.
- Not having access to software, or know what tools are available for procurement.
- Not engaging people early enough in the process or knowing when to engage.
- Not allowing enough time for engagement.
- Not knowing how to ask for the information, for example questions are poorly worded.
- Not knowing what to do with the information.

***“Barriers lie with the ability to aggregate and categorise data held by various agencies (and non-government agencies) and then to draw insights from the data.”***

***“Information is everything so it must be treated as taonga, preserved and protected.”***

#### Insufficient support

- Lack of collaboration (internally and across agencies).
- Procurement process, for example risk assessments.
- Either have no money for engagement, or it can be expensive.
- Lack of clarity on the intent or who to engage.
- Government is risk averse or resistant to change.
- Government is ‘time poor’ or has restrictions on time.
- Don’t recognise our own “unconscious” bias.

***“We’re not able to work ‘smart’ on pieces of work (i.e. collaborate with other agencies) because of funding models”***

***“Who needs to be there?”***

### Barriers for the people

- People don’t want to engage.
- Aspects of the legislative process can be a barrier.
- Too much information or bad quality information for people.
- Lack of awareness - people don’t know what they can do.
- People do not have access to digital channels.
- People don’t know it affects them.
- Accessibility issues, aren’t considered, for example deaf, literacy.
- Consultation is not genuine - there may be a predetermined solution.
- People are not kept informed throughout the process.

***“Level of detail can be overwhelming.”***

***“Difficult to reconcile disparate or contradicting info.”***

***“Most of our whānau don’t have access to internet, data, or only have small phones.”***

***“Not being able to demonstrate that their input will matter.”***

***“We don’t enable people to be involved across process, from idea to implementation.”***

### Future government

At the agency workshops, we asked the groups ‘What does a future government look like in a participatory democracy?’ They said:

- It’s “human” and kind.
- Inclusive and accessible.
- Listens and acts on what it hears.
- Has conversations early (from the classroom).
- Can anticipate needs, be predictive.
- Is “porous” - data and information is connected and flows easily around government.
- Government is trusted to look after this information.
- Government is a consistent, cohesive “whole”.
- The line between government and the people is “seamless”.
- Policy is less complex and co-designed.
- Co-design, end-user, “design thinking” is applied throughout all levels of government.
- Thinks long-term, and beyond the three-year cycle.
- Flexible, in the way it works, who it works with (including with NGOs) and spends money.
- Government is a facilitator and up-skiler.
- Recognise big issues represent big opportunities, such as A.I.
- More open and transparent - shares what it knows and has learned.

***“People don’t need to understand how government is structured.”***

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## Insights overview and themes

To meet people and organisations' ambitions for an inclusive, and open participatory government, government itself needs change. Culture and processes need to be flexible and open to allow for a speed of responsiveness that technology enables, and for more authentic communications that show a human face.

It also needs to invest in building long term, two-way conversations and relationships. This commitment is critical to building trust with communities which traditionally have high rates of digital exclusion and low engagement, like Māori and Pasifika.

There are a significant number of traditional consultations happening across government agencies at any time. An audit from 2017 found 60% of consultations government did were in the low maturity inform and consult space and involved putting a PDF discussion document on a website with an email.

We want to be moving beyond informing and consulting to a more sophisticated level of engagement, including public participation in co-creation of policy, co-design of public services and products, and citizen-led initiatives.





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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Local research

### Global trends

- Fall in trust in government.
- Decline in democratic participation (for example drop in voting rates - especially for young people).
- High rates of social media use. In NZ 88% of the online population aged 15+ are using social media (Facebook and YouTube the most popular).

### What we tested

- We<sup>17</sup> tested the assumption that there's value in government listening to what people are saying on social media (in this case twitter). This is something that's been done in Taiwan with the idea of using digital for 'scalable listening'.
- Can 'scalable listening' be used to make feedback something that happens automatically, not something governments have to "go get"?

### What we did

4 hashtags found in an initial crawl of the #nzpol hashtag were selected for further investigation:

#OIA  
 #fixtheOIA  
 #OfficialInformation  
 #GovtTransparency

Each of these appeared 48 times, except #OIA which appeared 49 times. At first glance it looks like a good discussion. However, they were one tweet by @domesticanimal and 47 retweets.



The tweets were analysed using two methods:

- Afinn - weighted words
- Sentiment - positive and negative

Using two methods provided a more robust way of analysing the data. We wanted to identify trends in behaviour. Is the person normally negative? Or is it just about political issues? This information could be used to moderate the data - how do you interpret many tweets from one person vs one tweet from someone else?

- Moderation can be used to pick up signals from a broader base of quieter voices, or to identify points of consensus within complex issues.
- Getting past 'the noise' is an issue voiced by Auckland and Wellington Councils, and ActionStation.

### Insights

People are talking about political issues on Twitter. Overseas evidence shows that people are encouraged to participate in democracy, especially young people, if they're active politically in social media.

There's value in doing some more deep dives into the data to see if government can do 'scalable listening' in an open way. Ideally, look to moving from discussion to decision making.

We need to keep in mind that:

- There is the potential for people to 'game' or manipulate it.
- Volume levels in NZ are low compared to overseas, which makes
- sentiment analysis more difficult.
- You need some statistical/data crunching skills to produce
- robust insights.

<sup>17</sup> Subject matter expertise and technical work was done by Jay Gattuso, Digital Preservationist, from the National Library. Many thanks to Jay for his invaluable help.

## Appendix 2 : Organisations that support democratic engagement

The three below organisations have developed and challenged methods of engaging people. They are independent from government, but often work with or for agencies, to better improve public services.

### ActionStation

Established in 2012, ActionStation has since collected together an active, diverse and digitally engaged community.

They are an independent, not-for-profit organisation.

This independence has helped them build a high trust profile, especially key when talking to people about what can be political and/or sensitive social issues.

ActionStation are effective in using direct marketing and peer-to-peer conversations to engage, talking offline and online, with Facebook being a significant tool of use. They go to where the people are.

As a result, they have built a database of over half a million people. ActionStation make sure to collect only the minimal amount of demographic information from their users, scraping from Facebook or using information volunteered to them. From this they build personas, which they use to help carefully shape what is asked of their community.

The people in the database are regularly engaged on

ActionStation's key topics of interest (human rights, the environment, democracy and the economy).

They have found:

There is a need for agencies to create engaging content, with

- good design.
- Make and keep to a timeline, when will it start, finish, and who will be involved and when. This helps people better understand the expectations around their engagement.
- You should ask people for things that they can actually have an impact on.

### Design+Democracy

The Design+Democracy project was created by Massey University's College of Creative Arts in response to declining voter participation levels. They built apps and sites including On the Fence and VoteLocal, which have contributed to an increase in youth voter participation.

Design+Democracy have been working in this space ever since, focusing on youth engagement and developing user-centred design.

People are more likely to engage if they see others also participating. If someone is able to share the results of their quiz on Facebook, this can facilitate a discussion with friends and family, creating more engagement opportunities.

### Toi Āria

Also based out of Massey University's College of Creative

Arts and focused on human-centred design, Toi Āria have led countrywide research into better improving public services.

Toi Āria's research required them to go out to a diverse range of communities and learn from the people how government services can be improved. This meant seeking out community hubs and community leaders that could facilitate encourage people share their feedback.

In balance with this face-to-face method, which was adapted and honed to each community, a digital channel was also developed. It also adapted, based on feedback that was received throughout their projects.

Sharing was also an important part of Toi Āria's process. Like the Design+Democracy applications, the online tools that Toi Āria developed could be shared across social media, but you could also see immediately how you compared with others who had also participated. This was a replication of what happened with the in-person interactions, where groups could see how individuals had responded to scenarios, sparking discussion and even developments in opinions.

## Appendix 3: Draft participation principles

We drafted a set of Principles for Participation from our insights. These principles build on the current Online Engagement Guidance and could link in with the Digital Service Standard being developed. We recommend collaboration across agencies to agree on and adopt the principles. This can be part of the framework to support agencies and help build capability.

- **Be genuine and meaningful** - make people feel they are providing value, being heard and avoid 'engagement for engagement's sake'.
- **Be clear on your intent** - provide information and context to people that is easy to understand.
- **Collaborate** - work together with other government agencies, organisations and people while identifying new partnerships.
- **Go to where the people are** - use existing networks and communities, both digital and non-digital while developing 'community champions'.
- **Be open and honest** - let people know what you are doing, how you are doing it and what you will do with the information.
- **Personalise the way people can engage** - provide digital and non-digital ways for people to engage that they can 'self-select'.
- **Keep people informed** - provide regular updates, advise of the outcome and set clear expectations.
- **Respect diversity** - think about the different people you need to engage with, be aware of cultural needs and honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- **Respect the information** - we are guardians who are privileged to have people share their stories and need to maintain their trust.

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## Appendix 5: Acknowledgements

Throughout the discovery research we have been supported and assisted by a number of organisations.

We would like to thank the following:

### Non-profit sector

Align Limited  
GovHack  
Com Voices  
Design + Democracy, Massey University  
Hui E!  
fyi.org.nz  
Volunteering New Zealand  
Letting Space  
Toi Āria, Massey University

### Companies

Delib  
Engage2  
Behavioural Insights Team  
Action Station

### Government

Department of Internal Affairs  
Oranga Tamariki  
Office of the Children's Commissioner  
Ministry for Pacific Peoples  
Statistics New Zealand  
Pharmac  
Te Puni Kōkiri  
Electoral Commission  
The Treasury  
State Services Commission  
Wellington City Council  
Radio New Zealand  
Office of the Clerk  
Ministry of Justice  
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment  
Ministry of Health  
Office of the Ombudsman  
Ministry of Primary Industries  
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet  
Parliamentary Counsel Office

### Citizens

Pataka interviews  
WellyTech event  
Assurity research