

# Citizen Engagement Highlights Package

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



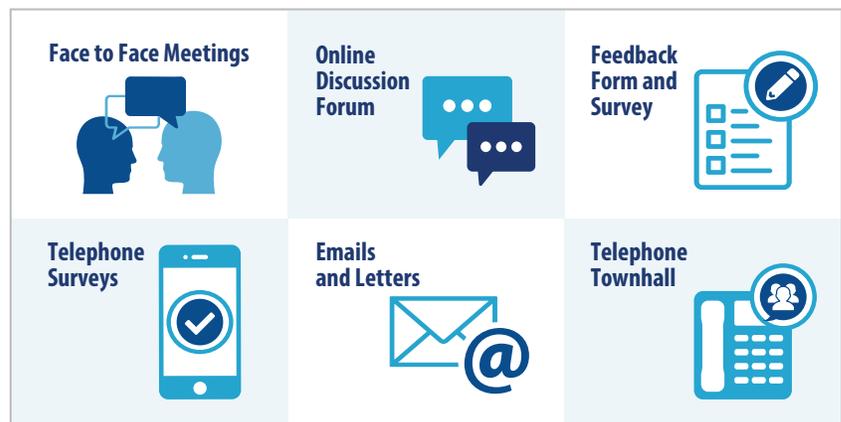
## Engagement at a glance

Public engagement is the process of gathering feedback from citizens about programs, services and policies that affect their lives. This document can be a useful resource for Ministries when planning a public engagement.

## A brief history of public engagement

Starting in 2012, the B.C. government put a concerted emphasis on involving British Columbians in the programs, policies and services that directly affect their lives. As a result, the Citizen Engagement Team was formalized to help ministries create engagement opportunities to meet our commitment to transparent, inclusive and responsive governance. Since then, the B.C. government has talked to citizens about a variety of topics that impact their lives through a variety of channels.

By providing options of ways to take part, we can be more inclusive of diverse perspectives. Some of the ways we have engaged include:



## Why engage?

Before starting any engagement, it is important to ask ourselves why we are engaging. Some considerations include:

- ▶ Good public engagement gives people a sense of ownership over issues and outcomes. Citizens should have a say in decisions that affect them and individuals are more likely to support outcomes when they have had a say in shaping them.
- ▶ We don't have all the answers. Addressing issues requires input from a lot of people to find positive long-term solutions.
- ▶ Listening to citizens helps us better understand peoples' interests and values. Knowing what's important to them helps us be more responsive and transparent.



## Why do public engagement well?

Bad citizen engagement can create frustration in communities and negative public opinion about programs and policies. In some cases, it can also weaken public trust. People want good services and decisions from their government, and they also want to be heard. By meeting those demands we can show:

- An openness to listening
- Support for change
- Informed decision-making



## Quality expectations

Government has committed to put people at the centre of decision making. Public engagement is an important avenue for meeting that commitment. Both Government Communications and Public Engagement (GCPE) and Government Digital Experience's (GDX) role is to apply a quality lens to ensure:

- The information about the engagement is timely, understandable, accessible and relevant
- That we explain a clear process for what will happen with the public's input
- That we report back to the public on what we heard and explain how the feedback relates to government action
- That we work hard to ensure that we are receiving diverse perspectives and opinions from all parts of the province, including looking at engagements with a gender-based analysis lens
- That engagements carry the message of government, are designed to build trust, and progress reconciliation with Indigenous people.



## Where to start?

The Citizen Engagement Team in Citizens' Services (CITZ) is a corporate team that is mandated to help to guide ministries through public engagement planning and execution. You must work with the team in a three-way collaborative partnership. The basic roles are:

- The Citizen Engagement Team (GDX/CITZ) brings the experience of managing over 300 public engagements. They provide expertise and advice, supply corporate digital tools, have a list of expert contractors to support public engagements, manage government's brand and web site look and feel, oversee privacy and security of the tools and help find ways to spread the word about each engagement. As the overall administrators and project managers of each engagement, Citizen Engagement ensures every engagement adheres to best practices including maintaining transparency by reporting on the results of an engagement and housing an organization-wide archive of all public engagement.
- Your Ministry's GCPE communications shop will manage communication with the public during an engagement. They help steer the messaging and manage issues, plan promotion and coordinate media. They also have a role in getting sign off and approval of Ministers early on and throughout a project.
- Ministry program areas bring expertise, knowledge of the subject, understanding of the policy or program and the audience, and connections to networks of people who care about the topic.



## Requirements

In 2020, each Ministers' mandate letter laid out the expectation that all elected representatives 'build thoughtful and sustained relationships through public and stakeholder engagement plans that connect with people to incorporate their perspectives early in the policy development process. These plans must include measurable outcomes and ensure active dialogue and ongoing outreach in your ministry's actions and priorities.'

In order to achieve this goal and before getting started, it is important to know there are **5 REQUIREMENTS** for BC government public engagement:

1. Before beginning any type of public engagement, Ministry staff must inform their Ministry Government Communications (GCPE) Director and the Director of Citizen Engagement at Government Digital Experience (GDX) about their desire or need to conduct public engagement. This is written into Core Policy, Section 22.3 and applies to all methods of public engagement, whether it is online or face-to-face, or both. The intent of this policy is to ensure there is central co-ordination of all public engagement activities, use of corporately approved tools and a consistent and government branded citizen experience.
2. Ministries must alert the GCPE Communications shop and Citizen Engagement Team about a public engagement at least 6 – 8 weeks prior to launch to allow for adequate planning time. Engagements coming forward with shorter time frames, such as a week or two weeks, will not proceed. Exceptions may be made by ADMs, in rare cases.
3. Public engagement in the B.C. government must be done using corporately approved and managed software, tools and technology and contractors. Exceptions or pilot projects must first be approved by GCPE and GDX, prior to going out to tender, and prior to Ministries having any conversations with vendors or contractors about purchasing or licensing.
4. All B.C. government public engagement opportunities must be posted on govTogetherBC – B.C.'s central hub for all public engagement activities.
5. You must hire from the Citizen Engagement Request for Standard Arrangement for Public Engagement Services list if you are seeking a company to do public engagement on behalf of the province.



## Hiring a contractor to do public engagement

The Citizen Engagement Team has a Request for Standard Arrangement (RSA) for Public Engagement Services list with 10 different categories of services from community meetings, to engagement report writing. This GDX list of approved contractors can help you to execute your public engagement. Ministries may use other contractors when there is rationale for their specific use and if an exception is made. For example, they are subject matter experts or have worked on the project previously.

The Citizen Engagement Team also has a list specific to contractors who can support virtual events.

To get started contact the Citizen Engagement team at:  
**[CitizenEngagement@gov.bc.ca](mailto:CitizenEngagement@gov.bc.ca)**