A QUALITY OF LIFE
CODE OF PRACTICE

For effective community consultation and engagement in development, planning and design

Quality of Life Code of Practice
© 2024 by Quality of Life Foundation is licensed under CC BY-ND 4.0.

BE ACCOUNTABLE | BE EFFECTIVE | BE TRANSPARENT | BE INCLUSIVE | BE TIMELY | SUPPORT MUTUAL LEARNING | DEMONSTRATE IMPACT | PUBLISH FEEDBACK

modern
ctuary at
LASSWORKS
nfordquay.com
@greenfordquay.com
The Quality of Li
research organi
opportunity fo
and loc
ing part in th
uture plans for yo
QUALITY OF LIFE

01.

Introduction

02.

Why a code of practice?

03.

The code of practice

04.

Self-assessment, support and training

05.

Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.

Appendices

Contents

Contents 03

01 **Introduction** 04

02 **Why a code of practice?** 07

03 **The code of practice** 10

04 **Self-assessment, support and training** 21

05 **Background: the challenges of more efective consultation and engagement** 23

06 **Appendices** 26

Appendix 1: Frequently asked questions
Appendix 2: Glossary of terms
Appendix 3: Useful resources

07 Acknowledgements 32

01 INTRODUCTION

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

01 INTRODUCTION

What is community consultation and engagement?

Community consultation and engagement are both important parts of place-based projects, especially in the development planning process and with project teams. This is in the context of major planning applications, design codes, estate regeneration, infrastructure projects, local plans, masterplans, neighbourhood plans and town centre regeneration projects.

The Code of Practice provides 'good' and 'excellent' practice examples both as examples and to assess and compare practices. Consultation and engagement take shape in a range of ways, including in-person meetings, workshops and digital platforms. Importantly, 'consultation' and 'engagement' differ in their objectives, scope and level of involvement with local communities.

Community consultation typically involves seeking feedback from communities on planning proposals or projects, often on early concepts or on partially formed proposals.

Community engagement, on the other hand, is a broader and more collaborative process that involves working with communities throughout the planning and design process. This can be from the refinement of briefs and the generation of ideas all the way through to project implementation.

We would encourage consultation and engagement to begin at the earliest possible stage (i.e. before visions or plans are conceived or created) but understand that is not always possible in reality. When used at different stages in a project, community consultation and engagement will result in varied outputs, outcomes and impacts. They are also part of a much wider picture, where collaborative and participatory processes (of co-design, co-creation and co-production) involve working with stakeholders throughout the planning and design process.

Why have principles for community consultation and engagement?

We believe there are shared ethical principles that support effective consultation and engagement processes for all involved. We have brought these ethical principles together in our Code of Practice. We have created this in response to research and ideas gathered from ongoing conversations with industry stakeholders working in the field of community consultation and engagement.

The Code of Practice seeks to provide hands-on practical guidance on how to conduct community consultation and engagement effectively by adhering to its eight principles. More often than not there might also be assumptions that communities are being engaged with before planning when this is not the case. Therefore, these principles can be used for the neighbourhood development life cycle from pre-planning through to post-occupancy and throughout the design stage s of a strategic brief, design development, build process, and whilst in-use.

While the set of principles can be used to guide the work of practitioners, effective engagement requires effective commissioning and resourcing, which will often lie outside the power of practitioners to influence. The Code of Practice principles can support commissioning bodies to resource projects effectively.

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

Using the Code of Practice

We expect individuals and organisations to use this resource ethically, working with us to learn, adapt, and shape how the built environment industry engages and consults communities. Together, we'll make consultation and engagement more effective, ensuring communities are included in decision-shaping and decision-making.

The Code of Practice is designed to sit alongside and complement other resources from the Quality of Life Foundation (such as our Inclusive Engagement Toolkit and training and support) and case studies from otherorganisations.See Appendices.

Who is this for?

- For local **community groups and engagement practitioners** on delivery of neighbourhood plans and community-led development. This is aimed at authorised local community organisations e.g. community land trusts, parish councils or Neighbourhood Forums.
- For **project management teams and practitioners** on delivery of master plans. This is aimed at architectural designers and master plan developers.
- For **local authority commissioners** on development of local plans, design codes and stewardship strategies. This is aimed at local authority planning departments.
- For **housing associations** as service providers on their new build and regeneration projects. This is aimed at assets and development teams, and also resident involvement, community investment and neighbourhood teams.

Part of a broader programme

The Code of Practice aligns with our values and strategy as an organisation, and the training we offer in support of the Code of Practice is one of the services we offer through the social enterprise, Quality of Life Futures.

The Code of Practice principles are designed so that all stakeholders will be able to understand, sign up to, and engage with them, whether they are a community group, project manager, commissioning body or service provider working on a place-based or development activity, programme or project.

Do get in touch if you would like to find out more: mail@qolf.org

02 WHY A CODE OF PRACTICE?

Contents
Appendices

01.

Introduction

02.

Why a code of practice?

03.

The code of practice

04.

Self-assessment, support and training

05.

Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.

Appendices

02 WHY A CODE OF PRACTICE?

At the Quality of Life Foundation, we know that having a decent, affordable home in a safe, well-designed and resilient neighbourhood is the foundation for a happy and healthy life. We are committed to enhancing people's quality of life by transforming how the development industry and public agencies, working together with key organisations like housing associations, design, deliver, and care for homes and neighbourhoods. For new, existing and surrounding neighbourhoods and communities that are being formed, we must design, build or regenerate homes and places that support healthy lives, wellbeing, and resilience to climate change and climate-related extreme events.

A recognised Code of Practice for community consultation and engagement processes, which is inclusive and effective, does not yet exist in the mainstream. Our Code of Practice is aimed at raising and supporting professional engagement practice and supports a greater degree of transparency that should be expected and needs to be funded.

Every project and team that measures up well against this Code of Practice will have developed a good understanding of the distinct needs and wants of the place and its communities. These communities will then be empowered to affect change and decision-making in a far more customised manner; achieving greater sustainable development outcomes and community wellbeing and resilience than would otherwise be possible.

The evidence behind the Code of Practice

From 2021-23, the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)-funded Community Consultation for Quality of Life (CCQOL) project gathered evidence from the four nations of the UK to establish what good community consultation and engagement looks like.

The collaboration with the universities of Reading, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Ulster tested different ways of doing community engagement well, using digital mapping, urban rooms and community outreach. The project gathered data and engaged in conversations about what does and does not work, what challenges exist and what can be done to overcome them. We used the learning from this research to inform the development of the Code of Practice.

The benefits of effective community consultation and engagement

The benefits of effective community consultation and engagement are far-reaching. Community consultation and engagement provide opportunities for everyone involved to influence places and development for the better. This can help to promote social, environmental, economic, cultural and intergenerational values. When done well, it offers the opportunity for this process to be efficient and effective and in many cases meaningful. However, a cultural shift in the development industry at large, supported by professional standards, is much needed.

Contents

Appendices

01.

Introduction

02.

Why a code of practice?

03.

The code of practice

04.

Self-assessment, support and training

05.

Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.

Appendices

Collaborating and engaging positively, genuinely and continuously with the broadest range of local communities and other key stakeholders is central to a good process and outcomes. By proactively working with communities' needs and wants, community wellbeing and a place's sustainable development are supported more effectively and will evolve to reflect this.

For residents and communities: Having a sense of control over decisions affecting your environment is a key determinant of wellbeing – a way of energising individuals and empowering communities to shape the changes they want to see in the places where they live, work, study and socialise. Local people have lived experience, alongside skills and knowledge, that are often not unearthed or tapped into, but they are invaluable to shaping the changes taking place in neighbourhoods. Communities can and, when included, do play a crucial role in the design and planning process to bring about positive change for their local places. Given the right support and guidance, there are opportunities to hold developers, local authorities and housing associations to account by assessing their performance.

For developers and planning professionals: The benefits of better consultation and engagement are far-reaching. Planning applications that have gone through a process of meaningful engagement are more likely to gain assent. When community consultation and engagement is done well, in-person and digitally, it offers the opportunity for the practice to be more effective and the process to be more efficient. Effective community engagement also mitigates risk by creating solutions based on local needs and wants, avoiding expensive redesign at a later stage to incorporate those needs.

For us all: Community engagement encourages residents and local people to be effective, knowledgeable and motivated stewards of their local area, thereby enabling and sustaining community-led care. Generally, those who are disproportionately affected and at risk of being underrepresented have less influence, something that consultation and engagement done well can change through the Code of Practice principles.

03 THE CODE OF PRACTICE

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

03 THE CODE OF PRACTICE

In this section we set out the Code of Practice, explaining the eight principles, providing examples of what 'good' and 'excellent' practice looks like, and explaining the difference between consultation and engagement.

When we refer to 'good' practice this means meeting the minimum standard of consultation and engagement. This ensures that communities are heard and considered in decision-making processes. When we refer to 'excellent' practice this means going beyond the basic good standard of consultation and engagement and improving on this. This ensures that voices are integrated into decision-making.

1. Be accountable
2. Be effective
3. Be transparent
4. Be inclusive
5. Be timely
6. Support mutual learning
7. Demonstrate impact
8. Publish feedback

CONSULTATION is a way to start conversations in communities through:

- Seeking input through a series of engagements/ events
- Listening to and feeding back how their input is informing decisions
- Collecting information about their ideas, feelings or thoughts

ENGAGEMENT is encouraging people to get involved, in ways that suit them, and around decisions that directly affect them, through:

- Control to give people greater influence, foster a greater sense of ownership and encourage participation by valuing input
- Collaboration to create partnerships where power is shared, build relationships and trust with people and create possibilities for them to influence decisions affecting them
- Involvement to invite people to have genuine influence on decision-making, offer meaningful ways for people to get involved and understand people's aspirations and concerns

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

1. BE ACCOUNTABLE

Being accountable is about having a positive impact in communities and ensuring that practices are sustainable. This includes using both words and actions to engage with residents and listen to communities.

	WHAT DOES **GOOD** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?	WHAT DOES **EXCELLENT** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?
CONSULTATION	- Strive to create places that enhance the quality of life for current and future communities. - Agree a list of local sustainability objectives and commit to contributing to achieving them.	- Hold ourselves accountable for the impacts of our developments, working to minimise negative consequences and boost benefits for the wider community, local eco- and economic systems.
ENGAGEMENT	- Seek the views of local communities to understand their needs, what they value and the essential knowledge they can contribute. - Agree a list of local sustainability objectives and commit to contributing to achieving them.	- Hold ourselves accountable for the impacts of our developments. Engage communities in prioritising net zero and sustainable practices and outcomes, minimising harm to nature, economic and social structures. Co-design interventions and initiatives to support people's quality of life, the local ecosystem and their abilities to adapt and respond to climate change and climate related events.

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

2. BE EFFECTIVE

Being effective means having a clear purpose and routes for people to influence. This is also about collaboratively setting out the scope and limitations of the process, and gathering feedback that will genuinely shape outcomes in communities.

	WHAT DOES **GOOD** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?	WHAT DOES **EXCELLENT** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?
CONSULTATION	- Set out the scope and limitations of consultation and engagement processes early and proactively. - Provide clear and direct routes to encourage people to get involved.	- Tap into insights and connect with people to empower them to co-create desired outcomes. - Gather and act on feedback to shape development and design outcomes.
ENGAGEMENT	- Share the purpose of activities, how people can influence decisions, and ensure feedback. - Actively seek local knowledge and insights to inform decision-making and derive ways to collaborate in achieving agreed goals.	- Tap into insights and connect with people to empower them to co-create desired outcomes. - Involve people with the project and co-produce a design strategy that's meaningful and impactful, plus supporting people to look after places in the future.

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

3. BE TRANSPARENT

Being transparent is about sharing your (and where possible your client's) goals, ambitions and approaches, as well as learning from the invaluable community conversations that you/the project team will be having. It's a two-way process and is crucial for building trust and sustaining relationships. It's key for people to have clear routes for how they can get involved, shape the process, and have clear information to make informed decisions.

	WHAT DOES **GOOD** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?	WHAT DOES **EXCELLENT** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?
CONSULTATION	- Publish and share information about the project goals and ambitions, approaches and research, and consultation activities to promote accessibility, honesty, transparency, shared learning, and accountability, while also safeguarding data protection.	- Publish and share information gained from the community dialogues and consultation activities between the community members and project team members to ensure accessibility and honesty.
ENGAGEMENT	- Share the learnings from conversations with local communities. Share how those conversations have shaped the project, whilst ensuring data protection.	- Seek and maintain long-term open dialogue, two-way and ongoing positive conversations with communities to build trust and balance the power relationship between communities being engaged with and practitioners carrying out engagement, and maintain established networks.

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

4. BE INCLUSIVE

Being inclusive is about understanding the diversity that exists in communities and the range of perspectives that comes from lived experience, as well as respecting customs or traditions - all with the view of tapping into or unearthing what exists already.

	WHAT DOES **GOOD** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?	WHAT DOES **EXCELLENT** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?
CONSULTATION	- Develop a consultation strategy identifying key groups and channels to reach people. This is so they have the ability to engage, factoring in the opportunities to access and how to overcome barriers and ensuring community representation. - Meet people where they are (both online and in person) to reach a wider range of people, taking information, methods, and tools to them. - Actively encourage the participation of a wide range of people with differing abilities and from different backgrounds, including where a disability or language presents a barrier and those who are non-verbal and have challenging behaviour. - Use language tools for translations and account for lower reading abilities, confidence, and people's communication needs. Spoken communication can be useful for people with low literacy, lower reading ages or learning difficulties. - Ensure you also reach people who may not have a mobile phone or those who might not don't understand what you're asking them. - Provide well-presented, simple information with options that enable people to interact, relate and comment in ways that suit them. - Use evidence to understand the demographic make-up of the place and create character profiles based on insights. - Ensure the process includes a mix of people, to include them at different stages of the process rather than all of the time/ everytime. Publish statistics on inclusion and the numbers engaging.	- Develop your consultation strategy further to be supported by strategies for communications, print, online and social media. This is to ensure a range of digital and printed assets are available to provide avenues for people to get involved and remove barriers in their involvement.

Contents

Appendices

01.

Introduction

02.

Why a code of practice?

03.

The code of practice

04.

Self-assessment, support and training

05.

Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.

Appendices

ENGAGEMENT	- Seek to have conversations with a diverse range of local residents and other key stakeholders, valuing different perspectives and supporting fair participation for all. - Develop an engagement strategy, which is supported by other strategies, including communications and social media, as well as tools to support community asset mapping exercises to unearth and tap into underrepresented perspectives and seldom heard voices. Ensure that voices remain heard and valued, and that the places we build help positive social connections with existing communities. - Respect local customs and traditions.	- Upskill people who represent different groups impacted by a development to assist with our outreach and engagement. - Develop urban/rural rooms and mobile consultation formats to facilitate community relationships. This includes easily accessible physical locations to set up information and outreach to activities. - Incorporate local customs and traditions into engagement.

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

5. BE TIMELY

Being timely is about giving people the time to get involved to have meaningful discussions and also about providing feedback and insights throughout the project lifecycle and when it can shape things ahead.

	WHAT DOES **GOOD** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?	WHAT DOES **EXCELLENT** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?
CONSULTATION	- Give adequate time for people to voice their opinions - Gather feedback and provide recommendations at times in the project lifecycle when those conversations can shape forthcoming decisions	- Give people time to understand information, reflect, debate and see the impact of their involvement. - Give people the time and opportunity to share their knowledge and ideas and demonstrate to them the impact of how their involvement has shaped decision-making.
ENGAGEMENT	- Engage with local communities early enough to influence outcomes and build in scope to go back and tell communities what happened. - Make sure a wide range of people are included meaningfully in discussions throughout the process so it's always timely and continuously happening. The ability to do this is often dependent on project stages, funding and timescales.	- Establish early and ongoing/ regular lines of communication with a wide range of people, to ensure their insights, skills, knowledge, opinions can legitimately inform decision-making. - Show you are listening early on, to build trust and so people are genuinely so that people are genuinely involved, listened to and valued.

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

6. SUPPORT MUTUAL LEARNING

Supporting mutual learning is about learning from each other in a respectful way, through building trust and shifting the power dynamics through having two-way conversations.

	WHAT DOES **GOOD** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?	WHAT DOES **EXCELLENT** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?
CONSULTATION	- Offer clear and engaging, understandable information to support learning and enable people to make educated choices. - Where possible, build on existing community social media and pay for advertising. This is to extend the reach so more people have the opportunity to learn and more people can be learned from. - Ensure engagement is both online and in-person to reach as many different people and communities as possible.	- Use the ladder of participation model with tangible activities that are local to a place/ the community and have also come from local involvement.
ENGAGEMENT	- Support mutual learning and partnership working between project teams and communities throughout the project lifecycle - Find the right balance between voluntary participation and incentives. This includes compensating people for time spent in some form and/or making it clear how they will benefit from sharing their views. Pay people for their time/transport/food and therefore have a budget as part of this. - Understand how the project had an impact by learning through people's lived experiences and building trust with them.	- Use the ladder of participation model with tangible activities that are local to a place/ the community and have also come from local involvement. - Unearth, tap into and build capacity in communities so skills and knowledge go hand-in-hand with experience. - Build (long term) relationships to share information and encourage participation. - Create a clear statement about commitment to learning from each project, share your learning with stakeholders, invite feedback and use it to build best practice.

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

7. DEMONSTRATE IMPACT

Demonstrating impact is about defining and refining the project goals with communities (and in some cases consultation and engagement goals) and also sharing how/if their insights and feedback has shaped things.

	WHAT DOES **GOOD** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?	WHAT DOES **EXCELLENT** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?
CONSULTATION	- Research the local demographics at the outset, define ways to measure them and map out ways to share feedback on the impact. - Explain openly when ideas and concerns had an impact on decisions and when they could not or were not fully delivered on.	- Regularly review the impact of the consultation process and tailor tools accordingly to demonstrate how you are performing against them and whether you are reaching shared targets. - Explain and show the impact throughout the lifecycle of the project.
ENGAGEMENT	- Work in partnership with local communities on refining project briefs, altering and improving plans and places. This can include refining the brief, reviewing the scope, and what's creating social impact.	- Define ways to measure impact with communities. Create a set of social impact measures (that connect to Social Return on Investment and social value) to enable you to forecast, reflect and monitor measures over time.

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

8. PUBLISH FEEDBACK

Publishing feedback is about making sure that the communities being consulted or engaged have transparent and inclusive routes to learn about if and how their inputs are being taken forward, with tangible actions shared.

	WHAT DOES **GOOD** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?	WHAT DOES **EXCELLENT** PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?
CONSULTATION	- Provide digital and traditional channels to receive feedback and share insights, especially from seldom-heard voices, on proposals provided by a range of residents and other stakeholders. This will enable communication to be open, ongoing and closing the loops.	- Commit to seeking, listening to and responding to feedback from the full range of community participants and stakeholders. Ensure that digital information gathered becomes shareable and useful to people
ENGAGEMENT	- Publish information on the process of engagement and the progress of projects at key stages, regularly and proactively. This includes providing a clear indication of your approach, the number of participants and key demographics to show who has taken part. - With the feedback, and where possible, include measures and tangible actions to illustrate how contributions will inform decisions and timescales.	- Use feedback as an opportunity to continue and develop community learning and planning strategy to build and share best practice. - Ensure you're reaching people to continue the conversations long-term, providing context and traceability to support decision-making.

04 SELF-ASSESSMENT, SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

04 SELF-ASSESSMENT, SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Step 1: Code of Practice Self-assessment - (free to access)

You are committed to self-assess your community consultation and engagement practices and activities against the 8 Quality of Life: Code of Practice principles and to share this as good or excellent practice.

You will:

- Undergo an internal self-assessment
- If you would like to publicise your work as good or excellent practice, you can submit the self assessment for a light-touch review to provide the basis for a brief case study

These are examples of what we can offer to help you enhance your community consultation and engagement practices. We can work with you to tailor support and training to suit your organisational needs, focusing on specifics of the consultation and engagement process within your place-based context.

To find out more, get in touch: mail@qolf.org

Step 2: Code of Practice Support and Training - (paid for service through qolf consulting)

You are committed to embedding the Quality of Life: Code of Practice within your project, organisation and governance.

OPTION 1: For a PROJECT or STRATEGY, you will:

- Undergo an internal self assessment.
- Share your self-assessment in advance of a review session
- Take part in an initial online session to look at areas of improvement within good practice and ways to work towards excellent practice
- Take part in a follow up online session to review your practices in more detail

Your progress can be shared as an organisational case study of good or excellent practice standards in projects or engagement practices.

OPTION 2: For your ORGANISATION you will:

- Undergo an internal self assessment
- Undergo support and training on community consultation and engagement
- Commit to apply the Code of Practice
- Undergo Quality Assurance to help take your consultation and engagement practices to the next level

We will then share this as an organisational case study of projects or engagement practices for publication as good or excellent practice.

05 BACKGROUND: THE CHALLENGES OF MORE EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

05 BACKGROUND: THE CHALLENGES OF MORE EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

In the current planning and development system, the effectiveness of community consultation and engagement, and the value that's placed on it, varies. It can be highly dependent on the skills, knowledge and willingness of those who are commissioning, leading and facilitating these processes. The Code of Practice is an opportunity to engage, support and educate in the value of community consultation and engagement and improve the process.

There are many examples of excellent planning, design and development projects in the UK (see appendices for case studies), which advance the practice of more inclusive and effective community engagement. Many use methods that enable meaningful engagement, with a broad range of voices to be heard and experiences to be worked into co-designing plans and proposals with communities and with other stakeholders. They achieve this through using the principles and working with local communities towards more sustainable places, often putting health and wellbeing for people and the planet at the core of their ambition from the outset.

However, mainstream development industry practice is, at best, varied, often tokenistic or 'done to' community stakeholders. It is held back by an absence of a proper statutory framework and regulations that clarify rights and obligations, means of redress to right mistakes, codes of practice, benchmarks, monitoring and evaluation.

Public, private and third sector differences

Those who work in the public sector can refer to the four 'Gunning Principles of Fair and Lawful Consultation' and the 'Seven Principles of Public Life, the Nolan Principles', which operate as legal and ethical standards. These public sector standards may not always lead to inclusive and effective community consultation and engagement, but they do exist and should be met and scrutinised if necessary. The Consultation Institute's Consultation Charter (2017) provides a set of cross-sector and cross-industry best practice principles which offer helpful views from the perspective of the consultees and consultors on each of its seven core values.

Those who work in housing in the public sector and semi-public sectors can refer to the Chartered Institute of Housing's code of ethics. This includes behaviours, principles and values alongside self-evaluation questions to guide their members on what is expected from a housing professional's conduct, including when engaging with communities.

Specifically for social housing providers, The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 has introduced new measures to improve the consumer standards, safety and operation of social housing, and the management of neighbourhoods. The Regulators of Social Housing for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have new powers to make regulatory judgements, publishing assessments on how well providers are meeting the regulatory standards. The new reform and revised Consumer Standards provide an opportunity to align with the Code of Practice principles through the neighbourhood and community standard, tenant involvement and empowerment standard, and the Tenant Satisfaction Measures standard.

In the wider housing and development industry, the private and voluntary sectors lack a recognised community consultation and engagement code of practice altogether. RIBA has developed the Engagement Overlay to provide its members with guidance on engagement through each Plan of Work stage, which is designed to promote best practice engagement and better integration with the principle workflow of design-led projects.

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

The role of commissioners / commissioning bodies / clients

A recognised Code of Practice for community consultation and engagement processes, which is inclusive and effective, does not yet exist in the mainstream. Our Code of Practice is aimed at raising and supporting the professional engagement practice and supports a greater degree of transparency that should be expected and needs to be funded.

Commitments in organisations, contracts and shareholders have varying levels of support for inclusive and effective community consultation and engagement or for the delivery of projects that are shaped by local community and neighbourhood needs and wants. Briefs, programmes and contracts for projects rarely specify services and outcomes, such as inclusive and effective community engagement processes or improved health, wellbeing and resilience for current and future populations.

Differences across the UK planning systems

The importance of community consultation and engagement is acknowledged in planning guidance and policy across the four nations. These can be open to interpretation, and awareness around the community consultation and engagement process and how to use it effectively can vary across regions.

England: National Planning Policy Framework | 2023 update

"...Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process." "...Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot."

Wales: Development Plan Manual | 2020

The Development Plan Manual makes clear that, when preparing the local development plan, local planning authorities are expected to involve the right people at the right time, seeking greater consensus and strengthening community involvement in the plan making process.

Scotland: National Planning Framework | 2023

National Planning Framework 4 contains a cross-cutting outcome for 'a fair and inclusive planning system'. This includes the expectation that everyone involved in planning takes steps to ensure that a wide range of people are involved in shaping their future places. Opportunities for engagement in development planning 'should be early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate'.

Northern Ireland: Planning Engagement Partnership Review | 2022

The Planning Engagement Partnership recommended the use of a Pre-Application Discussion with a list of "key community stakeholders and interest groups" to tailor engagement, and for any pre-application community consultation report to "contain feedback on how issues raised by the community have either influenced the proposed development or why they have not."

We envisage that the Code of Practice will adapt and evolve in response to shifting landscapes (social, economic, environmental, cultural and political). Where priorities change and conflicts occur (locally, regionally and nationally), we hope that it will help to value and protect the consultation and engagement process, for example writing the Code of Practice into Neighbourhood Plans, Local Plans, Design Codes and Planning Policy and committing beyond a project strategy.

06 APPENDICES

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

APPENDIX 1: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How does the Code of Practice relate to digital, in-person and hybrid engagement?

There will be crossovers and distinctions in digital, in-person and hybrid community consultation and engagement in terms of their context, purpose, scale and format, which provides a range of positive opportunities. To be effective, the presumption in the Code of Practice is that community consultation and engagement should have a digital presence. This type of engagement provides reach, transparency and long-term public access to information, with updates and data that can be archived easily, which are essential for good practice. If done properly it can also make engagement more widely accessible for disabled communities and those who identify as having a disability, who cannot easily attend in person activities or events. Hence, digital, in-person and hybrid approaches each have an important place throughout the stages of the process: brief, design, build, use and post-occupancy.

What do 'good' practice and 'excellent' practice look like?

The Community Consultation for Quality Of Life research identified a need to differentiate between community consultation done well and community engagement done in a systematic and participatory way. This has provided an opportunity to set a guide for good and excellent practice through the Code of Practice using the eight principles, which can be adapted within any place-based context. Each step in the community consultation and engagement process serves a different purpose, with quality varying at each stage and influencing outcomes, either positively or negatively.

When we refer to 'good' practice this means meeting the minimum standard of consultation and engagement. This ensures that communities are heard and considered in decision-making processes. When we refer to 'excellent' practice this means going beyond the basic good standard of consultation and engagement and improving on this. This ensures that voices are integrated into decision-making. Ultimately, this is an opportunity to help practitioners move beyond the often transactional nature of community consultation and engagement, fostering more diverse and meaningful dialogues that lead to sustainable and equitable communities.

How do I use the Code of Practice?

Every community is unique, as are its people, and stakeholder dynamics add multiple layers of complexity. Some of the principles are very easy to apply, whilst the other principles are sometimes forgotten about, but they're just as easy to try out, build in, and adapt to your context. The Code of Practice guides you on applying its 8 principles, against the good and excellent standards, whether you're part of a project team leading consultation and engagement or working alongside clients to support the process. Using the Code of Practice as a benchmark for activities, programmes, or projects helps you assess your engagement efforts and gain a clear understanding of the community's needs and desires.

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

APPENDIX 2: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Accessible

Accessibility is one of many steps to inclusive community consultation and engagement. It can be understood as the quality of being easily used, entered, or reached by disabled people; and can refer to the design of products, devices, services, curricula, or environments. Any space used should be accessible to wheelchair users and for disabled people as well as those using pushchairs, amongst others.

Built environment

The built environment refers to the human-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, ranging from individual buildings to entire urban areas. The built environment influences various aspects of daily life, including social interactions, economic activities, cultural experiences, and environmental sustainability. Urban planners, architects, engineers, and policymakers often collaborate to design and manage the built environment to meet the needs of communities while addressing challenges such as population growth, resource consumption, and climate change.

Co-creation

is collaboratively designing together

Co-design

is the process of involving others

Co-production

is the sharing of power, ideas and knowledge to reach an outcome

Local Plan

Local plans are documents that set out a vision and a framework for the future development of an area. They are the starting point for determining local planning applications. Local plans are prepared by a local planning authority in consultation with its community. They must comply with national planning policy.

Ladder of Participation

Sherry Arnstein's 'Ladder of Citizen Participation' is a framework that was introduced in 1969 and is designed to categorise different levels of public involvement in decision-making processes that affect citizens' lives, particularly in urban planning and policy-making. It shows varying degrees of power that citizens hold when engaging with institutions and highlights that genuine participation only takes place when the public has a meaningful say in decisions.

Neighbourhood Plan

A neighbourhood plan is a document created by a community or parish that sets out planning policies for a neighbourhood area, a much smaller area than is covered by local plans. They must not contradict policies that are set out in local plans or national policy but focus on local issues, adding a layer of local detail.

Principles

Principles are the foundation underpinning the community consultation and engagement, in this context the 8 principles. It looks at the "why" behind the actions spanning behaviour, core values, practice and decision making across the sectors, within organisations and as part of roles.

Standards

Standards are the guidelines for community 'consultation' and 'engagement', in this context the 'good' and 'excellent'. It looks at "how" to implement these by ensuring that behaviour, core values, practice and decision making are consistent with everyone adhering to the same criteria, having the same expectations and evaluating with consistency.

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

Private sector

The private sector is made up of profit-making businesses and organisations that are owned and operated by individuals or groups of individuals.

Public sector

The public sector is made up of activities and organisations that are owned and operated by local, regional, or national governments using taxes and revenue to provide services and infrastructure to the general public.

Quality of life

The Foundation's definition of quality of life is a person's physical, social and psychological wellbeing. By placing more emphasis on health and wellbeing, we can create better places for people to live in.

The Quality of Life Framework 2.0

Our Framework provides an understanding of what makes a good place to live based on how it impacts people's quality of life in the long term.

Third sector

The third sector is made up of organisations that typically have a social, environmental, or cultural mission relying on donations, grants, and volunteers to fund their activities.

The Quality of Life Framework

Contents
Appendices

01.
Introduction

02.
Why a code of practice?

03.
The code of practice

04.
Self-assessment, support and training

05.
Background: The challenges of more effective consultation and engagement

06.
Appendices

APPENDIX 3: USEFUL RESOURCES

The Code of Practice is designed to sit alongside and complement other resources from the Foundation and also other organisations. Some useful resources are included below. This section includes case studies with toolkits designed to inspire, as well as help [engagement] organisations to show clients and how it can be done.

TOOLKITS AND GUIDES

This section provides further guides with ideas for practical tips and approaches.

- Crannis, Grace. “What is Planning?”. Wandsworth Council (2023). Accessed August 22 2024. https://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/media/13421/what_is_planning_booklet.pdf
- DSDHA. “Towards Spatial Justice: A Co-design Guide.” Accessed August 22 2024. https://www.dsdha.co.uk/research/645503b69b0f42000c91b41e/Towards-Spatial-Justice
- Edwards, Stephanie. and Purohit, Ruchit. “Inclusive Engagement Toolkit.” Community Consultation for Quality of Life (2022). Accessed August 22 2024. https://www.qolf.org/what-we-do/inclusive-engagement-toolkit/
- Our Place. “The Place Standard tool”. Accessed August 22 2024. https://www.ourplace.scot/About-Place-Standard
- RCKa. “RCKa secures planning for new campus addition for leading neuro-disability charity, The Children’s Trust”. Accessed August 22 2024. https://rcka.co.uk/rcka-secures-planning-for-new-campus-addition-for-leading-neuro-disability-charity-the-childrens-trust/
- RIBA. “Engagement Overlay to the RIBA Plan of Work”. Accessed August 22 2024. https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/resources-landing-page/engagement-overlay-to-riba-plan-of-work
- The Glass-House Community Led Design. “Designing Places with People: Tips for Your Community Engagement Strategy”. Accessed August 22 2024. https://theglasshouse.org.uk/resources/designing-places-with-people-tips-for-your-community-engagement-strategy/
- The Greater London Authority. “Effective Community Engagement: A Toolkit”. Accessed August 22 2024. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64639c1d737a8d26a4bf9c96/t/65bcfa02fca758277a56c534/1706883587980/GLA+Community+Engagement+Toolkit+%281%29+%283%29.pdf
- UK Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). ‘Digital Citizen Engagement toolkit’. Accessed 11 September 2024. https://www.localdigital.gov.uk/digital-planning/proptech/funding/proptech-toolkit/
- Wood, Jenny. Gaffney, Anna “A Place in Childhood: Co-creating Local Neighbourhood Plans with Children and Young People” (2024). Accessed August 22 2024. https://aplaceinchildhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/How-To-Guide_Final.pdf
- ZCD Architects, Grosvenor, TCPA and Sports England. “Voice Opportunity Power: A toolkit to involve young people in the making and managing of their neighbourhoods.” Accessed August 22 2024. www.voiceopportunitypower.com

We would like to thank the range of individuals and organisations who have contributed to the research, supported the Foundation, and participated at different stages of the journey by sharing their experiences and suggestions for creating a Code of Practice that can be adopted by the built environment industry.

We especially wish to thank:

Angela Koch of ImaginePlaces who advised and collaborated with us in drafting this Code of Practice.

Pepper Barney of BiBO Studio who advised and collaborated with us in further developing the self assessment matrix.

FUNDERS

UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council; The National Lottery

SUPPORTERS

UKGBC; RTPI Landsec/U+I; DLUHC; Connected Places Catapult; Civic Voice; British Property Federation

CCQOL PROJECT INVESTIGATORS AND TEAM

Flora Samuel - University of Cambridge; John Brennan - The University of Edinburgh; Lorraine Farrelly - University of York; Mhairi McVicar - Cardiff University; Ruchit Purohit - University of Cambridge; Saul Golden - Ulster University

PROJECT TEAM

Anna Skoura - Ulster University; Irina Taverna - The University of Edinburgh; Mike Saunders, Commonplace; Mymuna Soleman - Cardiff University; Nisa Unis - University of Reading; Shoruk Nekeb - Cardiff University; Stephanie Edwards, Urban Symbiotics

CONTRIBUTORS

Individuals and organisations who contributed to our research:

Anna Sabine - BiBO Studio; Chris Standish; Clare Mitchell - Savills; Daisy Narayanan - City of Edinburgh Council; Diane Dever - Folkestone Fringe and Urban Rooms Network; Elly Mead - formerly The Glass House Community Led Design; Fiona Macdonald - Matt & Fiona; Kate Bentley - Belfast City Council; Jo Morrison - Calvium; Kelly Watson - Hatch Regeneris; Max Farrell - The London Collective; Mollie McCulloch - Sustrans; Molly Stroyman - formerly East Herts District Council; Nicola Bacon - Social Life; Oliver Deed - ECF; Quintin Oliver - The Consultation Institute; Richard Blyth - RTPI; Rosie Pearson - Community Planning Alliance; Sadie Morgan - dRMM Architects.

CRITICAL FRIENDS

Individuals and organisations who provided objective feedback on the principles:

Clare Richards and Naomi Rubbra - Footwork Trust; Kate Greer - Rainbow Services Harlow;

Raj Kumar - One Enterprise; Simon Martin - Independent Housing Consultant; Sophia de Sousa - The Glass-House Community Led Design; Sophie Hayward - Head of Housing.

BETA TESTERS

Individuals and organisations who tested the principles and supporting resources:

Agustina Martire - Queen's University Belfast; Dinah Borat and Rallou Grigoropoulou - ZCD Architects; Jessica Lewis - Berkeley Group; James McGowan - RealWorth; Jo Harrop and Sam Heyes - PLACED; Pepper Barney - BiBO; Rebekah Paczek - Earls Court Development Company.

Also all who expressed an interest in using the Code of Practice and supporting resources.

© 2024 by Quality of Life Foundation is licensed under CC BY-ND 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/

Contact mail@qolf.org | 0204 548 3866
Quality of Life Foundation