



# Engagement, Education and Outreach Handbook for Commonwealth Parliaments

*CREATING OPEN, ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT INSTITUTIONS*

7 December 2022

## Handbook Rationale

- Sustainable Development Goal 16 outlines a global ambition to “*promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*”.
- In contributing to these ambitions, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association committed itself to supporting its 180 member parliaments in strengthening their engagement, education and outreach work.
- The Handbook also represents the CPA’s ongoing commitment to open parliaments. The CPA’s endorsement of the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness and the CPA Benchmarks seek to encourage legislatures to engage the public in an open and transparent manner.
- The drafting of the Handbook was undertaken in a manner that would go beyond the existing comparative analysis on public engagement and parliaments and provides a more hands-on and practical approach to specific engagement activities.





## Parliament in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### Democracy today

- Recent reports have highlighted citizen disengagement and disenchantment with democratic institutions in many jurisdictions.
- Many factors can contribute to the disengagement of citizens, including a lack of political literacy, low satisfaction and/or trust in politicians, and increasingly complex governance arrangements leading to a lack of transparency.
- Placing outreach and engagement at the heart of strategic planning can uncover inclusive ways to open up processes, engage citizens and educate young people.

### CPA Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures

- Benchmark 10.1 recommends that Legislatures:
  - Be accessible and open to the press and citizens;
  - Promote the public's understanding of the legislature's work
  - Make efforts to identify and increase the participation of demographic groups whose perspectives are not well represented in parliamentary decision-making.

## Engagement during and post-COVID

Prior to the drafting of the Handbook, the CPA invited parliaments to feedback on their adjustments to operations in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Responses included:

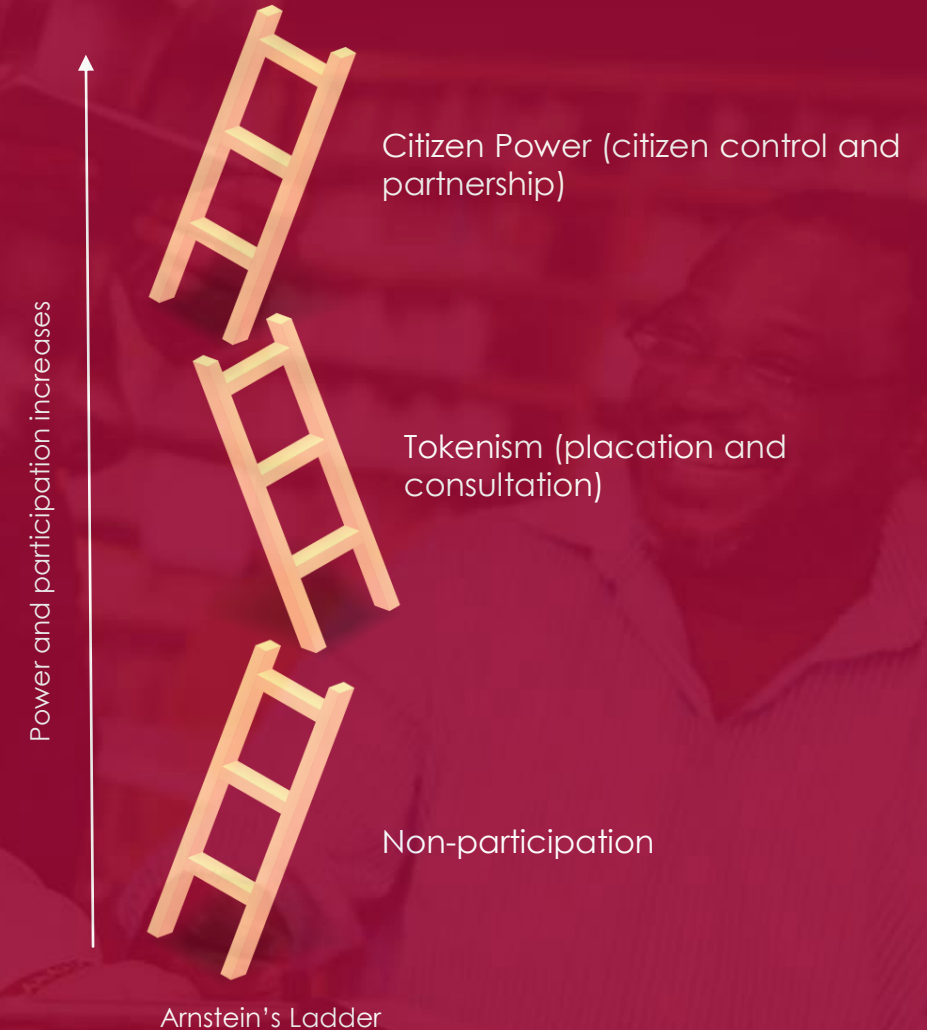
- *Conducting virtual proceedings of the legislature*
- *Launching websites, newsletters and social media accounts*
- *Using Zoom and Teams platforms to conduct online guided tours*
- *Launching a Digital Legislature Project that included hybrid and virtual platforms to engage the public*
- *Conducting a virtual youth parliament*
- *Creation of a 360-degree interactive tour*
- *Pre-recording public education initiatives digitally and sharing these with audiences*
- *Liaising with non-urban municipalities to cooperate in terms of use of venues and technology*

## Why Should Parliaments Engage the Public?

- Open, transparent and accessible parliaments are the keystone of a robust democracy.
- Parliaments maintain oversight over government activity, scrutinise legislation and represent constituents' interests to those in power.
- Parliaments **have** to engage, Parliaments **want** to engage, and ultimately **better decisions** will be made

### Parliaments Have to Engage

- The notion of representative government itself infers citizen involvement
- Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation illustrates the range of citizen participation in decision-making and is helpful when reviewing the work being done within Parliament.
- Citizens look to parliaments to step beyond tokenism and reach citizen power





## **Better Decisions Will Be Made**

- In 2020, the OECD concluded there are seven key reasons why representative deliberative processes can help lead to better public decisions and help trust. Specifically, such processes:
  - Can lead to better policy outcomes
  - Give decision-makers greater legitimacy
  - Enhance public trust by giving citizens an effective role in public decision-making
  - Signal civic respect and empower citizens
  - Open the door to a more diverse cross-section of people
  - Strengthen integrity and prevent corruption
  - Help counteract polarisation and disinformation

## What are the Main Challenges?

The CPA Survey highlighted a number of challenges to parliamentary public engagement, experienced by Commonwealth parliaments

### **Parliament resourcing and culture**

- A lack of skills, material, capacity and funding
- Institutional conservatism
- Difficulties in arranging activities around busy parliamentary schedules

### **Parliamentarians**

- Exclusion of Parliament from communications between Parliamentarians and citizens
- Opinions from parliamentarians that restrict the approach and style of engagement activities
- A lack of interest generally by parliamentarians

## What are the Main Challenges?

### **The Public**

- Inadequate profiling of the public participation programmes of the legislature
- Work, household or personal obligations deterring people from public engagement in parliamentary processes
- Public misunderstanding of the role of Parliament
- Disillusionment/disinterest in the work of Parliament

### **Technology**

- The urban/rural divide
- Other geographical obstacles to participation
- Existing communication infrastructure does not support broad digital engagement



## What Can Be Done?

The CPA Survey demonstrated that there exists:

- A need to change old rules
- A need to think outside the box
- A need to involve citizens
- A need to avoid prohibitive costs

More specifically...

## 1. Put Public Engagement at the Heart of Your Strategy

Referencing public engagement within your corporate strategy will highlight to all those working within Parliament, as well as your stakeholders, the public, how important it is to the wider work and goals of Parliament.

An example framework is provided in Appendix A of the guide.

To bring your strategy to life, consider:

- **Providing strong leadership and guidance on the big things** – vision, objectives, outcomes – but...
- **Leave the detail to staff close to the services and audience.** A rigid process will often not be as effective. Different things will work better in different sectors/regions/contexts and those close to the work and audience will often know best.
- Encourage a sense of experimentation and innovation. Pilot/test ideas, iterate, “fail fast”, adapt.

## 1. Put Public Engagement at the Heart of Your Strategy

- Collaborate internally and externally. Internally, involve Parliamentarians and staff – public engagement is part of everyone’s job. Externally, go to where people are, build partnerships and use trusted intermediaries.
- Let good practice shine through and celebrate successes. Be bold drawing attention to effective practice. Learn from what doesn’t work and build a “no blame” culture.



## 2. Join Forces and Learn From One Another

- Across the Commonwealth, many Parliaments have made innovations with their public engagement, outreach and education and are sharing these ideas and working together.
- Other agencies in your jurisdiction may have also made innovations with their public engagement, outreach and education or may be responsible for activities that are integral to your own work.
- For example, if you were looking to create a Youth Citizen's Passport for people reaching voting age, you would require the support and collaboration with a range of agencies responsible for different items. These could include:
  - *A birth certificate (births registry)*
  - *Voting registration (electoral management body)*
  - *Knowledge about how to vote (electoral management body)*
  - *Knowledge about how laws are made (Parliament, education department, schools and universities)*
  - *Knowledge about how to engage in the law-making process (Parliament, education department, schools and universities).*

### 3. Promote openness, transparency, accessibility and technology



- At all times, engagement work can be used to identify ways to increase openness, transparency and accessibility for all our citizens. In the 21st century, this will often include employing new technologies, and this may require a period of change and transformation for your teams, Parliamentarians and citizens.
- This approach is supported by the **Declaration on Parliamentary Openness** launched at the 2012 World e-Parliament Conference in Rome, Italy. An extract of the Declaration is included in the Handbook and provides a useful checklist for Parliaments with 44 principles of parliamentary openness to ensure that they are:
  - *Promoting a culture of openness;*
  - *Making parliamentary information transparent;*
  - *Easing access to parliamentary information; and*
  - *Enabling electronic communication of parliamentary information.*

#### 4. Carefully manage participant's expectations

- Individuals or organisations engaging with Parliament may expect an immediate response or change to result from their participation. Managing this expectation can be difficult, but ignoring it can risk disenchantment with the process or Parliament altogether.
- **Be realistic about the potential results.** What can they reasonably expect to happen (and when) after engaging with you?
- **Be honest about the complexity of the parliamentary process.** The time it takes to appropriately scrutinise a new idea or change from all angles and views can be frustrating, but it ultimately ensures Parliament makes the right decisions.
- **Be open about how change via democracy is often incremental.** Their action may be the first step in a range of events, discussions and ideas that eventually lead to a major change. It can take time, but it has to start somewhere.
- **Be clear about Parliament's role,** and that it is ultimately up to the government of the day to make the call on any changes to laws or policy. By engaging with Parliament, citizens views can be heard and raised.
- **Be a storyteller.** Sharing real examples of how a piece of committee evidence, a petition, campaign or letter has been a catalyst for change throughout your history can ensure people see that their input can make a real difference.



## Understanding your Audience

### Why start with the audience?

- It can be easy to fall into the trap of beginning an engagement project with a great idea; it could be an event, a campaign, a programme or a video. This content-first approach risks producing something that may be right for you, but not for your audience.
- By starting with understanding your audience, you will greatly increase the chances of delivering an activity or product that will lead to positive engagement with the right audience and a good investment of your time and public money.

## Understanding your Audience

### What are the potential barriers to engagement?

- The CPA Survey identified a range of challenges with engaging the public, including: work and household obligations, locations and accessibility of the parliamentary activity, a public misunderstanding of the role of Parliament and low engagement or interest levels.
- In these examples, putting the audience barrier at the heart of planning, for example changing the times of your activity, putting an event online or running information sharing sessions, could overcome all of these barriers. But you need to know which ones are relevant to your target audience first.
- Gathering up-to-date audience information, even on a small scale, will help you correctly identify which barrier/s impact your target audiences, identify positive opportunities, ensure you do not make assumptions about different groups and ultimately help you plan engagement activities that will suit your audience's needs.

## Understanding your Audience

### Who are you trying to engage?

First go back to basics and ask some key questions:

- Who am I trying to engage and why?
- What do I want them to know, feel or do?
- What will the benefit be to Parliament / the democratic process?



# Exercise

Having recently recorded historically low levels of youth interest and engagement in the work of Parliament, your Legislature has decided to explore the establishment of a Biannual Youth Parliament, that will involve inviting young people from across the state/territory/jurisdiction to the Parliament and introducing them to parliamentary practice and procedure in a hands on programme.

Using the framework included on [Page 13 of the Handbook](#), undertake an initial audience mapping for those you are looking to engage through this initiative.