

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MAPPING ACROSS LONDON

Greater London Authority

The Social Innovation Partnership 2023

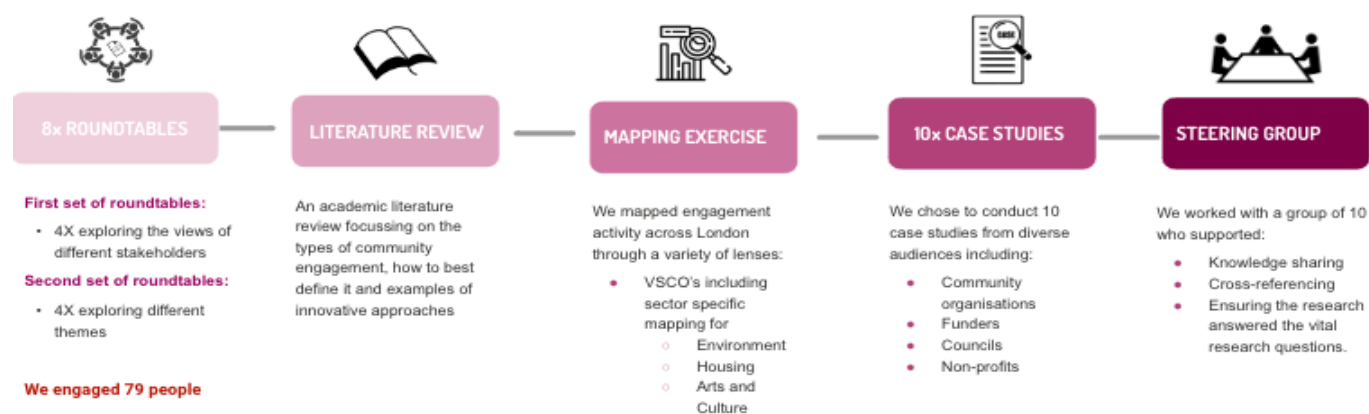


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community engagement describes activity and interactions between local communities and decision-makers, aiming to shape and influence the policies that affect them. As London is one of the most diverse cities in the world – with over three hundred languages spoken – there is vast demand and also opportunity for community engagement activities to connect local people, policymakers and infrastructure organisations. Despite this urgency, there is a prevalent disconnect between the communities and policymakers involved. In this report, you will find that communities are described as both general (e.g. people living in a certain area) and specific (e.g. people from a similar ethnic and or religious background). However, most participants who shared their insights during our research are not just part of one community but of several different communities in tandem. Our purpose is to shed light on this disconnect by examining the current barriers and opportunities that influence engagement, as experienced first-hand, and to highlight best practices from across the city, to standardise and inform practices moving forward.

The figures below sets out the roadmap of this research project and our key research activities:

Figure 1: Project roadmap and key research activities



Findings from the Roundtables

Effective community engagement relies on trust

Policymakers across London recognised the need to manage expectations as a key factor in creating an optimal ecosystem for effective community engagement. During a series of roundtable discussions, key themes were heavily discussed; these included accountability, clear communication, understanding the problem at hand, and trust. It was understood that building and nurturing relationships takes trust, time, and transparency. For example, funders of a Southwark-based and community-led participatory grantmaking fund, [The Giving Lab](#), shared their approach of building trust around funding opportunities. This involved prioritising developing clear expectations of the offer and ensuring that communities understood the vision and direction of the fund, as opposed to only bringing them along once the funder was ready. The Giving Lab works to bring local people and organisations together to share and develop ideas around community health and to successfully develop trusting relationships with local people. In this way, communities and policymakers feel they can depend on one another and trust each other to deliver on promises made.

Effective community engagement relies on clear communication and understanding

Clear communication was continually highlighted as a cornerstone of effective community engagement. The process of communicating should be clear, direct, and consistent throughout ideation, that is, from the conception of ideas or policy to their implementation, to a post-delivery stage. Community groups and policymakers reflected on the importance of a feedback loop at the post-delivery stage, to ensure communities were aware of how their participation had shaped activity and strategies. This ensures that, at each stage, communities across London are placed at the centre, in order to shift dated and ineffective approaches to community engagement. Reflecting on how they are human-centred or included, stakeholders noted that it was essential to do this with care and within a wellbeing framework. Throughout our discussion, it was observed that when policymakers engaged with communities with an extractive approach, that is, taking information from residents rather than engaging meaningfully and putting the needs of local people at the centre, engagement activities were often ineffective. To mitigate this, community organisations and policymakers suggested the following:

- Sharing solutions that meet the needs of local people, e.g. providing childcare support to allow parents and guardians to participate fully in engagement events.
- Inclusive approaches to engagement that are accessible and culturally appropriate.
- Ensuring that the community is able to steer the direction of the engagement activity, which requires a degree of flexibility from policymakers/funders.
- Ensuring that engagement activities begin with a list of principles that communities and policymakers can be accountable for.
- Sitting with discomfort and increasing internal and professional bandwidth to have difficult conversations.
- Actively listening and meaningfully prioritising wellbeing, particularly when communities give voice to concerns and hesitations.

Findings from the Literature Review, Council Mapping, and Sector Review

Literature review and council mapping

TSIP conducted a literature review to kickstart the research, mapping community engagement across London. This research was intended to help us understand what good practice looks like, and to examine how the conditions for good engagement is or is not produced by institutions and organisations, as well as how community members find current methods effective.

Past research has shown that broadening inclusion and enhancing participation among less visible groups are both often difficult to achieve in practice. Formal participatory channels tend to be dominated by articulate, educated and wealthy individuals and social groups. People from marginalised backgrounds and lower socio-economic groups continue to be at the margins of the policy-making decisions that would impact them the most. Moreover, approaches to community engagement by political institutions are primarily concerned with research and consultation.

As a tool to understand community engagement, the 'Ladder of Participation' developed by Arnstein (1969) proposes that engagement at all levels can be categorised by the level of citizen power that is deployed to communities. At the highest level of the ladder, citizens can maximise opportunities through citizen power (better known as co-production), whereas the middle levels represent more tokenistic forms (consultation or informing) and the lowest form is considered to be non-participation or a form of manipulation. Local authorities engaging communities in meaningful ways emphasise collaborative methods of working and centring relationships. For instance, Southwark Council employs an 'Asset Based Community Development' focus to their community

engagement methods, which essentially prioritises four key principles: community strengths rather than problems and needs; utilising individual and community resources, skills, and passions; being driven by the community from the inside out; and building engagement on the development of relationships. Collaborative inclusion and building trust in relationships were a central theme across the community engagement approaches and principles happening across London, and the UK more broadly.

The Ladder of Participation and its successor developed by the Co-Production Network for Wales cover only those activities that are initiated by statutory structures or other structures with formal power, such as private sector companies, universities, funders or large charities. However, our research unearthed several examples of community engagement activities initiated by communities or by organisations that support and represent those communities. Through community organising, campaigning or advocacy, these communities and/or organisations were able to amplify their voices and, on rare occasions, push at statutory organisations for shifts in policy or practice. This shift from a ladder to a spectrum also opens up questions about how all levels of the spectrum, from left to right, can be tokenistic or extractive as opposed to empowering. Concerns about extraction, taking from the community rather than a two-way exchange, came up in conversations related to all aspects of the spectrum, including co-production. One case study in this report put forward the term ‘co-washing’ to describe an engagement process that was labelled as ‘co-design’ or ‘co-production,’ but in which decision-making power was not appropriately devolved to the community.

We found innovative approaches to be situated within the uniqueness of each community and grounded in principles of validating the expertise of community members based on lived experience, exercising the power of voice, transparency, deep listening and trust. This was highlighted when councils incorporated ‘local’ as opposed to ‘expert’ knowledge into their urban planning or regeneration processes.

All in all, the research found the landscape of community engagement across London’s local councils to be varied. The council mapping exercise showed that there is no single approach to effective community engagement or co-production. However, the councils who are leading in best practice can be clearly distinguished from those that are lagging behind. The former are councils who take proactive steps to implement long-term visions and strategies specific to their localities, while the latter do not venture far from the statutory minimum and ‘tick boxes’. For community engagement to be effective at building trust and positive outcomes with communities, it must be proactive and intentional, with clear purposes in mind.

Cross-sector review

For this research piece, we chose three sectors to spotlight: Arts and Culture, Housing, and the Environment. We specifically looked for organisations that collaborated directly with policymakers and funders to engage with local communities delivering activity or co-producing local change. We measured influence by looking for examples of where their activity had changed policy, either through strategy changes documented by the local authority, or through mention of impact from the local organisation.

Arts and Culture:

- In this sector, we mainly saw activity around community outreach and information, and around service-user involvement. We also found, and illustrate in this report, more examples of co-production and co-design than in other sectors, as well as more participatory grantmaking (see classification below).

- Organisations tended to partner with one another and with specialists, e.g. art therapists, to deliver engagement activity.

Housing:

- In this sector we mainly saw a high level of **community outreach and engagement** types of activity, alongside some **community campaigning** examples.
- Community engagement activity ranged in type from direct support with emergency housing to organising with residents to achieve community action. We saw more examples than in the other two sectors of community engagement revolving around justice and recognising the poor housing conditions of many marginalised communities.

Environment:

- In this sector we found many examples of community campaigning and advocacy, alongside frequent activity around community outreach and information sharing (linked from [classification](#)).
- Community engagement activity ranged from advocacy and awareness-raising to direct action with local authorities. As with the culture sector, the environment sector also used creative engagement methods to engage local communities; these were not seen used as widely in the housing sector review.

Classification

From our research and mapping of the different kinds of community engagement across London, we propose the classification shown below to help distinguish and categorise activities.



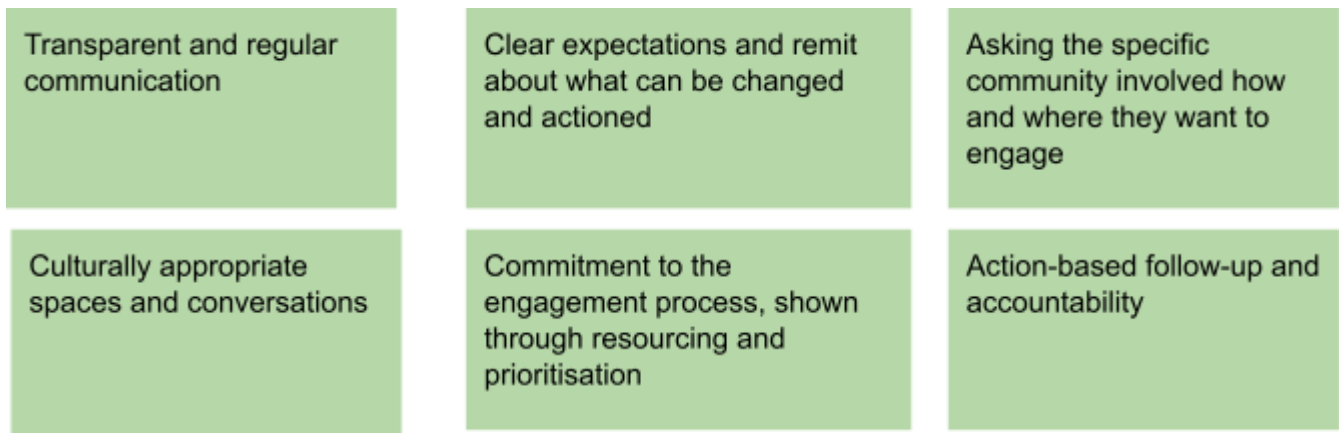
While the Ladder of Participation has been crucial to informing how policymakers involve communities in decision making, the hierarchical structure can often present limitations. There can be a tendency to view lower rungs on the ladder as ‘less advisable’ than higher rungs, although lower-rung methods of collaboration may be more suitable and feasible in certain situations.

We have adopted a non-hierarchical structure to define community engagement, identifying when and where engagement styles can be used. We have included it in this report as we believe it to be of value for bridging both expert and non-expert audiences (at the GLA and elsewhere) in helping to frame a broad spectrum of community engagement. Furthermore, we hope this typology can shape the ways in which policymakers engage with local communities based on need, resources and objectives.

Key Findings on Effective Community Engagement Barriers and Enablers

Across our research, we found three key areas determining effective engagement: **trust and mistrust**; **accessibility concerns**; and issues around **capacity and making engagement a priority**. From the mapping, we summarised the conditions all stakeholders can contribute to in order to build effective community engagement. This is shown in Figure 2 below

Figure 2: Conditions for building effective community engagement



Across all our conversations with key stakeholders and qualitative research, **trust and relationships** came up as integral to nurturing meaningful collaborations and doing good community engagement. Our key finding is that all stakeholders – community groups, infrastructure organisations, funders and policymakers – want to take more **relational** approaches to working in communities. This would mean interacting and communicating with respect, inclusiveness, honesty and cooperation. Currently, the default mode of interaction is transactional, driven by existing ways of doing things, looking to get the job done, rather than driven by values. This has significant implications for the level of trust between policymakers and communities, particularly those who have historically been excluded. As it stands, the structures of large organisations – councils, infrastructure organisations and funders – tend to not be conducive to relational approaches. Further challenges include systems, norms and defaults that serve to deprioritise relationships and relational approaches. Community groups also mentioned a greater need to engage organisations in earlier stages of project development to ensure that the needs of local people are included throughout the project, instead of being added as an afterthought. Such engagement would need to be supported with adequate time and other resources to sustain these relationships, with clear expectations set by both policymakers and community groups.

Accessibility was raised as a central issue by community members during our roundtables. As it stands, barriers to engagement relating to accessibility are varied:

- Accessibility can be greatly affected by where the engagement is taking place. For some groups, we saw accessibility increase over the Covid-19 pandemic. For many groups, the move to digital engagement made engagement easier.
- Other communities feel increasingly excluded in an online environment. Some groups, such as older people or some from low-income backgrounds, may not feel digitally confident.
- Language issues can be a real barrier to engagement for many community members. Language may also be an issue for policymakers when designing engagement strategies.
- Policymakers, community groups and funders alike felt that the amount of data collected and shared was limited.

Capacity and Prioritisation was an issue felt by all stakeholders we spoke to, albeit experienced in different ways. Many frontline organisations were overstretched and exhausted, reducing their capacity to participate in engagement opportunities with funders and policymakers, especially when these opportunities were unpaid. For policymakers, infrastructure organisations and funders, funding for engagement is often project related. This has a limiting effect, as there is less scope to prioritise community engagement or building processes and structures for engagement outside of projects. Finally, we found community engagement often part of marketing and communications rather than given separate value, with few specific dedicated roles to carry it out. Community engagement requires greater prioritisation by those in senior roles, and the amount of in-person engagement with the community by government bodies and their personnel should be increased.

Clarity and good communication. One feedback concerned frequent miscommunication between community organisations and policymakers/infrastructure organisations around their remit and what could be changed as a result of community engagement. This could lead to a growing sentiment of distrust. The lack of good communication has led to depersonalisation – when engaging with local councils or policymakers, communities are unsure who to contact; they often have a contact number but not the name of a person. This was one of the key reasons causing engagement to feel transactional rather than relational.

We found that consultation was often experienced as a tick-box exercise by community groups, while co-design was the most impactful type of collaboration. TSIP emphasises how **rebuilding trust, improving accessibility, and embedding co-design** into ways of working are necessary steps to overcoming these barriers. As a first step, communities need to feel that their experiences and voices are being valued.

Building a relational approach between communities and policymakers can be helped in a number of ways: firstly, being more open and transparent around roles, responsibilities and expectations; secondly, improving the feedback loops around action and accountability; thirdly, continuing conversations after activity has taken place.

Key Recommendations

TSIP has developed recommendations for policymakers/funders and for community organisations to use in their future work.

Recommendations for policymakers/funders

- Go back to basics. While we had discussions about innovative ways of engagement in this mapping process, we often found the most effective methods to be the simplest. **Go to where communities are, and ask them what they need.**
- Policymakers should **prioritise a relational approach to community engagement**. This approach will help rebuild trust within communities. When organisational infrastructure poses a barrier to relational engagement, cultural and infrastructural changes within organisations are required.
 - This can look like **protecting time and capacity for staff members to engage with communities and deepen relationships.**
- **Improvements are needed in the knowledge-sharing landscape** to ensure innovation and best practice is captured and shared.
 - **We need a London-wide network of participatory grantmakers.** Many are interested in the process of participatory grantmaking but are unsure of best practice.

- **Feedback loops need to be in place to ensure the community knows how their participation has helped shape services/strategy.** Feedback methods should take the community's needs into account and, where possible, the approach should be co-created with communities directly.
- **Community engagement should be everyone's responsibility.** Community engagement often falls within the remit of a few departments within local authorities/funding organisations. If the role of an organisation, such as a local authority, is to serve the needs of the community, there should be an organisation-wide commitment to be visible and actively engaging with communities.
 - In many instances, relationships with community members might solely be the role of a handful of officers or grantmakers within an organisation. It would be helpful for **organisations to map who holds these different relationships.**
- **Policymakers should improve accessibility** by reducing red tape around funding and having more unrestricted grants, allowing organisations more flexibility and autonomy. They should also engage in more active listening to better understand and action community needs, building trust and greater participation.
- **Communities should be remunerated for their engagement.** While many organisations actively remunerate community engagement, there is varied practice in the sector.
- **Policymakers should use a mixed-method approach to engagement** to ensure they target a wide range of voices within the community.
- **Policymakers should be transparent and ensure clear communication.** They should be open with communities about their remit to manage expectations and be clear about what can and cannot be taken forward and actioned. They should also close feedback loops by communicating how decision-makers have acted on what they have heard from the community. They should be accountable where necessary, acknowledging and apologising to communities for inconveniences and mistakes.

Recommendations for community members/organisations

- Both communities and policymakers would prefer a more relational approach to engaging with one another; this can take time and patience to develop. **It is important to express concerns and ideas clearly and directly, so that policymakers can consider and address these concerns properly.** If community members take a relational engagement approach when interacting with policymakers, this can foster better communication and understanding between teams.
- When engaging with policymakers, community members should ensure that they are **clear about their expectations and remit** to avoid miscommunication and unrealistic expectations.
 - We have heard of community organisations developing a local charter of commitments. This can be adapted to project needs.

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1. WHY ARE WE DOING THIS RESEARCH? WHY NOW?

Context

In recent years, the need for community engagement, and the impact it can have when done meaningfully, has been increasingly apparent. The Covid-19 pandemic produced a cultural shift in how community engagement is done, with the introduction of online engagement tools and an urgent need for collaboration between communities and policymakers. Councils now have a window of opportunity during the current recovery period to re-examine their approach to community engagement, while balancing ongoing concerns about the cost of living crisis affecting communities.

Research Aims

The Greater London Authority's (GLA) Community Engagement team commissioned TSIP to deliver this piece of research, mapping community engagement across London. The aim of the research was to explore more collaborative and innovative community engagement methods, as well as co-production methods for practising more shared decision making between community members and policymakers.

Our Approach

Increasingly, there is a challenge to top-down approaches to public decision making,¹ with an emphasis on the lived experience of community members being at the forefront and local knowledge influencing decision-making processes. In our research, TSIP scanned across sectors, met with various relevant stakeholders, and conducted focused case studies to collect knowledge and good practice examples of community engagement approaches. We found innovative approaches situated within the uniqueness of each community. We also found them grounded in a number of principles: validating the expertise of community members based on lived experience; exercising the power of voice; transparency; deep listening and trust.

Who did we speak to?

We identified four main stakeholder groups that routinely carry out community engagement: **policymakers, infrastructure organisations, funders and community organisations**. We used these categories to map what each stakeholder was doing around engagement and how they interacted with one another. However, it is important to note there are other actors involved in engagement activities who may not be represented in this research. We also note that stakeholders may not fit into one role only within engagement. For example, policymakers are also community members themselves and have experiences from both sides of engagement practices.

It was apparent that different communities might have different priorities, needs and experiences. As one community organisation member highlighted in our roundtable discussions, **"I think it's especially hard to define community, and people define community in different ways."** As a result, we have been careful not to over-generalise in this report. However, there may be instances where we have identified common patterns across multiple contexts and communities in London.

¹<https://granicus.com/blog/what-is-community-engagement/#:~:text=Sustainable%20Development%20Goals,-,Community%20engagement%20requires%20intentional%20interactions%20between%20communities%20and%20public%20decision,approach%20to%20public%20decision%20making>.

Based on our findings and analysis, we aim to support the positive work the GLA does and broaden their evidence-base for best practices in community engagement across London.

About the GLA Community Engagement Team

The GLA's Community Engagement Team's mission is to bridge the gap between City Hall and London's communities. The team delivers a range of programmes and projects which aim to support Londoners to have a voice in City Hall and an opportunity to shape the future of London.

The team champions the use of non-traditional data in policy and programmes and facilitates the sharing of best practice in community engagement with the aim of improving practice and addressing barriers to participation.

The work of the GLA Community Engagement team includes:

- **The London Engagement Collaborative** – a pan-London, cross-sector group for those interested in working together to involve communities in the work to make London a safer, greener, and more prosperous city for all Londoners.
- **Civic Futures Programme** – a fellowship programme designed to bring together people from across London's civil society to explore the skills, tools, methodologies, and relationships needed to build emerging futures for our city.
- **Future of Participation** – an event series with the aim of challenging how we think about and 'do' community engagement. The aim is to inspire the development of deeper and more nuanced systems and practice for policy thinkers, local authorities and the organisations working with communities.
- **Connecting Community Insights to Policy Guidance** – a resource co-created with community partners for those interested in collecting lived experiences that can have impact in a policy setting, and for policy and decision makers to better understand the process of working with non-traditional insights.

Read more about the work of the GLA Community Engagement team here: [Community engagement | London City Hall](#).

If you would like to get in touch with the team please email Community.Engagement@london.gov.uk.

About The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP)

TSIP aims to address structural inequalities by enabling a more equitable sharing of power in traditional systems. Community engagement and place-based working are at the heart of our approach. We put communities in the lead through and within our joined-up service areas:

- 1) Research, learning and evaluation
- 2) Funding
- 3) Service design and co-production.

Our team is unique in bringing together people with first-hand experience of social issues and frontline work with communities, in combination with technical specialists in research, evaluation, strategy and service design. We excel in supporting our partners and clients of all sizes to better understand the issues they care about in order to increase their impact. We are specifically familiar with community engagement approaches, rooted in Arnstein's 'Ladder of Participation' (see below pages 17-18). We understand the nuances and intricacies of co-production, and the barriers that need to be overcome for co-production to be truly inclusive.

Examples of our work include:

- Co-designing the Mayor's VAWG Fund 'by and for' minoritised groups
- Working alongside community researchers to amplify voices in community health
- Redressing inequity in traditional grantmaking systems by co-designing and delivering [The Giving Lab](#), a place-based community-led fund based in Southwark.

This breadth of experience in community-led research and participatory approaches, as well as our knowledge of social policy, together with our network of community organisations and funders, made TSIP an ideal learning partner for supporting the GLA's community engagement mission.

2. METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Core Research Questions

Our mapping spanned three different phases of data collection across a short timeframe. Using a 'grounded theory' approach – which starts with existing practices and characteristics to frame the research – we modelled our mapping of community engagement to build on our emerging findings. Our core research questions were:

- 1) What is the current extent of engagement work across London? What types of community engagement work is taking place across London, and in which localities?
- 2) Which community engagement approaches are best suited to facilitating collaborative decision making between policymakers/decision-makers and communities?
 - In what way do these methods support collaborative decision making?
 - What is the theory underpinning the approach?
 - How are the projects and approaches delivered in real life?
 - What challenges and barriers exist and how are they dealt with and/or overcome?
 - What are the outcomes and the impact?
- 3) What learning and recommendations can be gained from previous community engagement initiatives that can help shape and improve future community engagement approaches?
- 4) Are there any particular approaches, tools or resources that are needed to support and improve engagement with regional, decision-making organisations?

Project Phases

In the table below, we have outlined the project phases, which ran from April 2023 to September 2023.

| Phase 1 |
|---|
| A. As an exploratory piece, we began with a literature review to examine community engagement across London, to understand what good practice looks like, and how institutions and organisations do or do not carry it out. We also explored how effective community members find current methods of engagement. |
| B. We did a rapid review of local authority websites across London to map how local governments currently engage with their residents. The purpose was to highlight multiple possible theories about what makes engagement effective in relation to policy-making. |
| C. To begin exploring and mapping community engagement, we conducted two sets of roundtable discussions with different stakeholders. The first phase hosted four roundtables with key stakeholders: community organisations; policymakers; infrastructure organisations; and funders . Each roundtable was asked to share their community engagement experiences, their views on what is needed to make community engagement effective, and perceived characteristics of 'innovative' community engagement. |
| D. Our steering group was also established during this phase. We describe this in more detail below, page 14 and 15. |

| Phase 2 | |
|---------|---|
| A. | TSIP held an internal analysis session to pull out key themes and concepts. As our literature search and mapping work focused on possibilities drawn from the emerging insights, our second set of roundtable discussions focused on thematic areas which were open to different individuals and groups per session. Our four themes were: trust and relationships; funding competition; what communities want from engagement; and electoral politics as a potential hindering factor to engagement. |
| B. | In conjunction, our research undertook a sector specific review to locate the community engagement work happening across the Environment, Housing, and Arts and Culture sectors. The GLA team was keen to focus on these as the three policy areas in which they were eager to increase engagement activities. |
| C. | We also conducted 10 case studies focusing on organisations involving historically excluded groups and which illustrated more radical and collaborative approaches. These case studies provided nuanced insights into approaches best suited to facilitating collaborative decision making in the policy space and the challenges, barriers and learning from those approaches. Our steering committee set criteria that enabled us to shortlist the case studies from an initial list of 35, and they approved our final selection. |
| Phase 3 | |
| A. | The final phase of our work centred around analysis, reporting, and co-production of outputs. |
| B. | We ran three interactive workshops : an event at the GLA's Future of Participation week; an internal Lunch and Learn with the GLA Community Engagement team; and a workshop with the London Policy and Strategy Network. During our session with them, the GLA team were asked to feed into our recommendations on effective engagement and the tools that could be of use to them when carrying it out. |

Steering Group

Throughout this mapping, TSIP worked with a cross-sector steering group to guide our research and shape our findings. We recruited community group representatives, policymakers and funders who had experience or expertise in collaborating with regional/local government in a community engagement process.

Having the experiences of Londoners at the heart of our research was important to centre our thinking, as well as that of policymakers and infrastructure specialists, to ensure the outputs we created would be utilised effectively. We had five meetings with the steering committee, with four analysis review sessions after points of data collection and output creation:

- **Session 1:** Early May – review of research plan and set-up of ways of working for the group.
- **Session 2:** Late May – co-analysis session following the first set of roundtable sessions.
- **Session 3:** June – co-analysis session to refine session plan for second set of roundtables and decide case studies.
- **Session 4:** July – co-analysis session following second set of roundtables and to plan the Future of Participation event.

- **Session 5:** August – interactive discussion on our draft report and creative outputs.

Specifically, the steering committee helped to highlight emerging themes from the roundtable discussions, shortlist our selection of case studies, and refine our final report.

Taking into consideration the stretched capacity of community organisations, we remunerated community members/organisations for their time taken as part of the steering committee, recognising they might be losing other paid work opportunities.

| Organisations in the Steering Committee | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| London Councils | GLA |
| King's College London | Camden Giving |
| Bulgarian Centre UK | Havering Volunteer Centre |
| BetaMinds CIC | LGBT+ Consortium |
| Pembroke House | Granville Community Kitchen |
| London Borough of Newham | |

Mapping Limitations

As with every mapping, there are a number of limitations to the research methodology, either built-in or which arise throughout the project. These can be summarised as the following:

- **Limits to visibility.** Research for the sector-specific reviews was limited, as evidence is based on how organisations publicise their work; organisations with limited resources are less likely to keep up-to-date information about their engagement work.
- **Limits to availability/capacity.** Engaging a variety of stakeholders throughout the phases of the project was dependent on their availability and capacity. As community organisations targeted for mapping often had stretched resources, their participation was not as readily available.

The quotes included in this report are drawn from participants across the different strands of the research. These are kept anonymous except where participants specifically consented to being named.

3. FRAMING AND MAPPING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

What is Community Engagement

and what theoretical frameworks can we use to map it?

Our research did not find one single or exact definition of ‘community engagement,’ nor, indeed, of ‘community.’ Communities can be place-based (neighbourhood, locality or region) or can be defined (by themselves or others) through a variety of shared characteristics. Not all people who live in a place consider themselves to be part of the community of that place, and they may have primary identifications with other *types* of community or even with communities in other places.

Throughout this research we have defined a ‘community’ using both place-based and shared-characteristic definitions. This means that communities can be grouped into general geographical categories as well as by characteristics such as ethnicity and race, religious identities, disability, sexual orientation and gender expression. All participants, voluntary and infrastructure organisations, policymakers, funders and others who took part in this report are part of communities through their lived and professional experience. Definitions of community are broad by design. However, in order to understand the ways in which individuals relate to policymakers and one another, definitions need to consider nuances of intersectionality, taking into account how communities are affected by a combination of factors, such as race, class, gender, socio-economic conditions and other factors. Where possible, we have reported the source of our insights into the community, so as to obtain an intersectional understanding of them in the contexts in which they were shared.

In a report published by the Health Foundation (2009), it was noted that efforts to define community engagement should steer away from attempting to theorise an exact definition, and instead focus on the principles that facilitate good engagement and reduce barriers to disengagement. In later sections of this report, we explore these principles in more depth.

Our Working Definition

Although a unified definition of community has not been possible, it has been necessary to contextualise our work and frame our research activities, having a clear *general* definition. Throughout this research, we define community engagement as **the interaction between local people and public service agencies, based on the need to improve these services and increase community involvement in local governance.**

We explored academic theories of community engagement in our research to supplement the learning around the approaches, methods and lived experiences that we found on the ground. We use theory here to illuminate, rather than to define, the realities of community engagement in practice.

The Ladder of Participation

A starting point for mapping

Arnstein’s ‘Ladder of Participation’ (1969) is used by community engagement practitioners across several countries as a reference point for mapping and exploring community engagement. The ladder maps out community engagement by the degrees of power delegated to the community at each rung on the ladder, as set out in the diagram on the next page.

This ladder sets out a value judgement about the types of participation that are genuine, versus those that are merely ‘tokenistic’ or that are not participation at all. Arnstein defines the top of the ladder as ‘citizen control’, when “participants or residents can govern a program or an institution, be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which ‘outsiders’ may change them.” Our research did not find any examples in which full citizen control was evident in the policy or public sector space, but that does not mean that it does not exist.

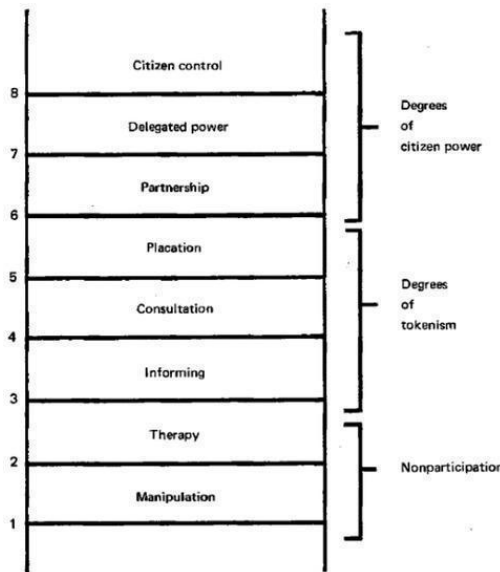


Figure 4: Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969)

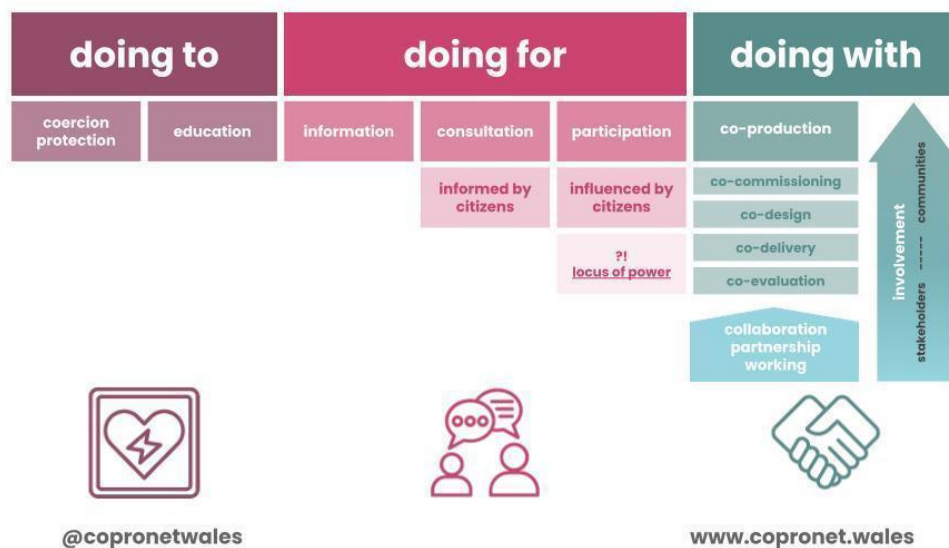
Iterations of the Ladder

Later versions of the ladder, including that produced by the Co-Production Network for Wales, turn the ladder on its side so that it becomes a spectrum rather than a ladder.

This reflects the reality that there may be times when it is

appropriate to do ‘for’ or ‘to’ communities and that value judgements should not necessarily be attached to this. It also identifies co-production, rather than delegated power or citizen control, as the far end of the spectrum.

Figure 5: A Spectrum of Interactions (source: Co-Production Network for Wales)



Here, the middle part ‘doing for’ of the spectrum loses its association with tokenism, and becomes a potential area for genuine, if limited, engagement.

This shift to a spectrum from a ladder opens up questions about how all levels of the spectrum, from left to right, can be tokenistic or extractive, as opposed to empowering. Concerns about extraction, taking *from* the community rather than a two-way exchange, came up in conversations related to all aspects of the spectrum, including co-production. This statement from a representative of a local authority policymaker was typical of concerns about extraction and tokenism:

When you do work with community organisations, it's about how to make that process non-extractive and ensuring that people who provide insights to communities or to local

councils, their insights are actually taken more seriously and that they're the ones with the intelligence.

Policymaker, Electoral Politics Roundtable

Policymakers understood how extractive working practices had previously damaged the relationship between themselves and community organisations. A sector-wide push to ensure that the process of engagement is as non-extractive as possible has been recognised in some local authorities. This has also been borne out by other researchers, notably in the 2023 Future of London report [Making the Case for Co-Production](#). One case study in this report puts forward the term 'co-washing' to describe an engagement process that was labelled as 'co-design' or 'co-production,' but in which decision-making power was not appropriately devolved to the community. Without the willingness to give up power, co-production can become as meaningless as tokenistic forms of consultation. Therefore, it is helpful to keep the terms 'citizen control' and 'delegated power' in mind as a check on what co-production should entail.

Limits to the Ladder

Voice, power and organising outside statutory structures

The Ladder of Participation and its successor developed by the Co-Production Network for Wales cover only those activities that are initiated by statutory structures or other structures with formal power, such as private sector companies, universities, funders or large charities. However, our research unearthed several examples of community engagement activities initiated by communities or by organisations that support and represent those communities. Through community organising, campaigning or advocacy, these communities and/or organisations were able to amplify their voices and, on rare occasions, push for shifts in policy or practice at statutory organisations.

A Classification of Community Engagement in London

From our research and mapping of the different kinds of community engagement across London, we propose the classification shown in Figure 6 below to help distinguish and categorise activities.

Figure 6: Classification of community engagement activities



While the Ladder of Participation has been crucial to informing how policymakers involve communities in decision making, the hierarchical structure can often present limitations. There can be a tendency to view lower rungs on the ladder as 'less advisable' than higher rungs, although lower-rung methods of collaboration may be more suitable and feasible in certain situations.

We produced this classification to support our research activities, as we encountered many diverse forms of engagement, each serving unique needs, purposes and goals, and using different approaches. We have adopted a non-hierarchical structure to define community engagement,

identifying when and where engagement styles can be used. We have included it in this report as we believe it to be of value for bridging both **expert** and **non-expert audiences** (at the GLA and elsewhere) in helping to frame a broad spectrum of community engagement. Furthermore, we hope this typology can shape the ways in which policymakers engage with local communities based on need, resources and objectives.

The tables on pages 20-26 provide a description of each of the eight classifications. The description, benefits and potential challenges and considerations are all drawn from understandings built through our mapping process including: online desk research; sector specific reviews; roundtable discussions; and case studies. Each activity type is illustrated with examples.

When organisations or policymakers are deciding which type of activity to use (based on their intended outcomes and resources available), they should note that, while some engagement activities may fit into multiple classification types, it will be useful to consider the specific benefits and challenges of each type. The classification is built upon the findings from our research and our working understandings; it is therefore subject to interpretation. The typology of community engagement in the tables indicates that policymakers and communities can combine different types of engagement to ensure objectives are met.

Table 1: Community Engagement Typology: redefining community engagement in London

| Type | Description | Benefits | Challenges and considerations | Examples |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| Service user involvement in voluntary sector organisations | Voluntary sector organisations directly involve service users, whether through advisory groups, trustee boards, as staff members in 'by and for' organisations. Service users take leadership and decision-making roles in these organisations. These organisations have varying degrees of involvement or power with public sector bodies and policymakers. | <p>Ensures that voluntary sector organisations are embedded within the community and that services meet community needs.</p> <p>Supports experts by experience to play a key role in decision making.</p> <p>Supports community members from marginalised groups to build power to advocate for themselves in a range of settings.</p> | <p>Smaller and more grassroots organisations serving poorer or less powerful communities still lose out to larger organisations in terms of funding or access to decision-makers within councils and regional or national government.</p> <p>Depending on the context, adjustments and adaptations need to be made to support full participation.</p> <p>Power dynamics can still play out – often in complex and subtle ways.</p> | <p>Safer London's Youth Board</p> <p>Tonic Housing's Community Panel</p> <p>Shadwell Citizens campaign to reuse land for affordable housing</p> <p>CREW Energy: volunteer-led team delivering interventions to tackle fuel poverty</p> <p>SAAFI</p> <p>Poetic Unity</p> <p>Latin Elephant</p> |

| Type | Description | Benefits | Challenges and considerations | Examples |
|-------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Community-led research | Communities (supported by community groups or voluntary sector organisations) are commissioned to undertake research into aspects of their lives that are important to them, and to share the findings with policymakers or voluntary sector organisations. This research seeks to overturn the dynamic of researchers flying in and flying out of the community. In some cases, research organisations may be commissioned and then recruit community researchers. | <p>Communities can make decisions about appropriate research questions and methods, and how research will enhance rather than extract from communities.</p> <p>Develops research skills and research literacy among individuals who are closely involved with or leading the research.</p> <p>Research findings can go deeper than, or challenge, mainstream perspectives.</p> <p>For some, just being heard or having the opportunity to tell their story is beneficial in itself, especially if this is done with dignity and respect.</p> | <p>Those commissioning the research may not be those who most need to hear the results – research take-up is still limited.</p> <p>Communities can experience research fatigue, especially if the same issues continue to receive attention.</p> <p>Research tends to be (though is not always) qualitative, participatory and creative – which is undervalued by a culture of ‘what works’. Participatory research includes a range of methods, such as peer research, participatory action research and creative practice.</p> | <p>Toynbee Hall’s Community Observers programme</p> <p>Newham community research network, Newham</p> <p>States of Mind’s Breaking the Silence project</p> <p>Greenwich Citizens working with Create Streets Foundation to influence local housing policy</p> <p>Community-led housing providing capacity for organisations and local authorities to create opportunity for community housing</p> <p>More than just education: A Participatory Action Research project on adult education in London</p> |

| Type | Description | Benefits | Challenges and considerations | Examples |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| Participatory grantmaking | Communities decide where and how an allocated pot of funds should be spent. This can be done in several ways, from participatory budgeting (including large-scale voting) to co-designed projects sharing the funds. Participatory grantmaking is extensive across London with several borough-wide schemes. | <p>Funding goes to smaller, more community-led organisations (sometimes).</p> <p>Community members decide how money is spent to benefit their community.</p> <p>Changes the norms of grantmaking.</p> | <p>Can still advantage organisations that have more fundraising capacity or ability to leverage votes, depending on structures.</p> <p>Funding pots can be (not always) small and short term, so change is not always sustained. (This is also an issue for other funding models.)</p> | <p>Camden Giving</p> <p>Barking and Dagenham Giving</p> <p>The Giving Lab</p> <p>Southwark Council Equalities Grant</p> <p>We Walworth</p> <p>Newham Co-Create</p> |
| Community outreach and information | Public, voluntary and/or private sector organisations provide outreach and information to the community in a variety of formats. They do not necessarily expect the community to feed back or contribute ideas – rather, the intention is to keep the community informed of key developments and make sure that they can take the appropriate actions. | <p>An essential precursor to many other forms of community engagement – if communities are not informed, they cannot take appropriate action.</p> <p>Can be important for building trust for other forms of community engagement.</p> | <p>There may be issues with accessibility – language, jargon and meeting other access needs.</p> <p>Can be experienced as tokenistic if not linked to other engagement and feedback mechanisms.</p> | <p>Bangladesh Youth Movement</p> <p>Island Advice Centre</p> <p>Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network</p> <p>Black Cultural Archives</p> |

| Type | Description | Benefits | Challenges and considerations | Examples |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Community consultation | Public, voluntary or private sector organisations hold formal or less formal consultations with the community on initiatives or plans that are in development. These are usually primarily designed by the consulting organisation, rather than the community. The community's feedback is considered and incorporated (to a greater or lesser degree) in the finalised initiatives. | <p>Can be easier to manage and control than a full co-design/co-production process, especially if parameters are already set or plans are already in development.</p> <p>Depending on how it is set up, it can be an effective and time-efficient way to gather community views.</p> | <p>Can come across as a 'tick-box' exercise.</p> <p>Can be inaccessible with a lot of jargon or complex forms (especially in planning /development/housing but not limited to this).</p> <p>If trust with a community is limited, they are unlikely to participate in consultation.</p> <p>Feedback is not always clearly shared after a consultation.</p> | <p>Transport for London</p> <p>Local planning authority consultations, e.g Hackney planning consultations</p> <p>Local councils, e.g Richmond Community Parking Zone consultation process</p> <p>Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum with the Harlesden Neighbourhood Plan</p> <p>Wapping Women's Centre community garden project</p> |

| Type | Description | Benefits | Challenges and considerations | Examples |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| Co-design and/or co-production | A varied group of stakeholders with interest, lived and learned experience in an issue or initiative come together to collectively design and implement an initiative, plan or solution. Co-design refers just to the design phase, while co-production could also include co-delivery and co-evaluation. Stakeholders may include public, private and voluntary sector organisations, academic organisations or individual researchers, community groups and individuals. | <p>Potential for shifting/sharing power, changing relationships, creating solidarity among different stakeholders, bringing people together.</p> <p>Community assets and lived experience are clearly valued.</p> <p>Can be a highly creative and often enjoyable process.</p> | <p>Risk of 'co-washing'.</p> <p>All stakeholders may need support, resources, and information to engage fully with the process.</p> <p>Can feel risky, especially in high-control or hierarchical work environments.</p> <p>Results may not be predictable.</p> <p>Needs significant investment of time and resources to be done well.</p> <p>Communities may experience co-design or co-production fatigue.</p> | <p>The Outside Project – Emergency Hotel and Outreach for homeless LGBTQ+ people</p> <p>Claudia Jones Organisation - The Thinking Space, working with East London NHS Foundation</p> <p>Groundwork UK</p> <p>TILT and Whittington Hospital – co-design of pharmacy</p> <p>Clever cities - co-design of nature based solutions with citizens</p> |

| Type | Description | Benefits | Challenges and considerations | Examples |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Digital engagement | Community engagement (primarily outreach or consultation, sometimes co-design) takes place primarily or entirely in a digital environment. This could be via a dedicated website, social media, or conferencing platforms such as Zoom or MS Teams. | <p>When done well, can reach those who cannot access in-person consultation.</p> <p>Allows for consultation using emails, letters, forums etc, as well as through methods such as video conferencing and chat rooms, with different benefits to each.</p> | <p>Risk of further excluding those who are already digitally excluded.</p> <p>Much more difficult to build new relationships online.</p> <p>Many communities prefer in-person engagement (though not all).</p> | <p>Newham Co-Create</p> <p>Climate in Colour - online education platform</p> |

| Type | Description | Benefits | Challenges and considerations | Examples |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Community campaigning and advocacy | Communities gather together around a key issue of concern or interest and raise this with key policymakers or larger organisations. They may do this in-person or online and through a range of methods, including petitions, community arts initiatives, co-ordinated letters or direct action. | <p>Issues and solutions come from the community who are most affected.</p> <p>Community connections, relationships, voice and power are built.</p> <p>Individuals may develop influencing, lobbying, leadership and advocacy skills.</p> | <p>Likely to feel more confrontational and adversarial.</p> <p>Can lead to frustration when voices are not listened to.</p> <p>Risk of communities being co-opted and losing independence or power.</p> <p>Communities may not have the resources or experience to navigate the system and get their voices heard – the system is designed by and for those who are already powerful.</p> | <p>Climate Action Lewisham, particularly Lewisham's Draft Waste Management Strategy</p> <p>LGBT consortium</p> <p>Just Space – lobbying on the London Plan</p> <p>Green Elmbridge</p> <p>How NW3 CLT started and how it's going – community-led housing, London</p> <p>Latin Elephant – engaging migrant and ethnic groups in urban change processes.</p> |

Council Mapping Exercise

What does community engagement look like for local councils in London?

Throughout this research, we sought to understand how communities and policymakers engage across London. A key part of this activity involved developing a map of community engagement activity across all 32 local councils. We scanned published reports, web articles and papers on local authority websites, recording explicit mentions of community engagement activity.

The landscape of community engagement across London's local councils is extremely varied. Under section 18 (1) of the Planning and Compulsory Act 2004, all local councils are required to prepare and maintain a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). This outlines the council's standards for community participation in the planning process and identifies the ways they will achieve these standards. While it was clear that some councils kept to this minimum statutory requirement, our research revealed that other councils go well beyond this by setting out their own bespoke and extensive strategies. This is shown in the following examples.

| Borough | Community engagement initiative |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Hackney | Involved local people and organisations in the development of the council's Community Strategy 2018-2028, which sets out their future vision for communities and the steps they will be taking to achieve it. |
| Haringey | Has its own Community Engagement Framework (CEF) which includes clear principles for local organisations to use when carrying out community engagement in the borough. |
| Hammersmith & Fulham / Newham | Have both created dedicated spaces and initiatives to support community co-production, pushing well beyond the public consultation used by councils historically as the predominant form of community engagement. <i>A full case study of Newham Council's digital engagement tool can be found on page 58-59.</i> |
| Barnet / Enfield | Have implemented interactive mapping software to help residents flag issues and set priorities for the council. |

Since trust is a critical component for effective community engagement, many councils such as **Bromley** and **Islington**, have been building accountability with residents using 'You Said, We Did' or 'Let's Talk' reporting frameworks that make explicit how the council has responded to community feedback. Some councils have employed dedicated Community Engagement Officers or Teams with the sole responsibility of ensuring that community voices are heard.

Other councils have appointed external organisations to carry out similar functions. For example, **Camden Council** used Groundwork London to perform community engagement with residents to inform designs for greening and public realm improvements. While outsourcing to external organisations like this may offer greater transparency, accountability and rigour to the process, it could risk distancing the council further from community issues and introducing additional hurdles and trust issues.

More positively, **Bexley** and **Barking** councils, among others, have looked instead to members of the community to act as champions and advocates, helping to support the council's engagement by harnessing community skills, local talent and assets.

What do councils have to say about co-production?

We also scanned for instances of co-production across all of London's 32 local councils. As with explicit mentions of community engagement, the findings were varied.

While there is a statutory requirement for councils that explicitly mentions 'co-production' (part of the SEND reforms of September 2014), it is limited in scope to young people and parents of young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This duty for SEND services to be continuously developed by and for the families they serve is referred to by councils as the 'Local Offer'. Almost all instances of co-production referenced by councils were in relation to this statutory requirement. In many cases, there was poor explanation of how councils performed co-production and, specifically, how it differed from other engagement. However, as with community involvement, some councils do seek to harness co-production methods for more than just the minimum requirement, as shown in the following examples.

| Borough | Co-production initiative |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Barking and Dagenham | The Co-production Lab is a cross-sector collaboration between the council and the Participatory City Foundation, focused on how institutional services, businesses and organisations and the expanding participatory network integrate. |
| Camden | Camden's Participation Team set up Camden Co-Production Network: a bi-monthly space where people and organisations can share ideas, approaches and learn new tools and techniques to change the council's ways of working |
| Hammersmith & Fulham/ Newham | Have both created dedicated spaces and initiatives to support community co-production, pushing well beyond public consultation as the predominant form of community engagement used by councils historically. |
| Newham | Has a well-established co-production structure, supported by an in-house co-production team and external providers. They also have a Co-Production Forum for engagement and decision making on important health and social care issues. |

Taken as a whole, the community engagement landscape across London's local councils is a varied one. The council mapping exercise showed that there is no single approach to effective community engagement or co-production. However, the councils who are leading in best practice can be clearly distinguished from those who are lagging behind. The former are councils who take proactive steps to implement long-term visions and strategies that are specific to their localities, while the latter do not venture far from the statutory minimum and 'tick boxes'. For community engagement to be effective at building trust and positive outcomes with communities, it must be proactive and intentional, having clear purposes in mind.

CASE STUDY 1: Camden Council and Camden Giving, London Borough of Camden

Theme(s): Collaboration, genuine long-term policy impact

Classification(s): Community outreach and information, participatory grantmaking

The North London borough of Camden is renowned for its vibrant and diverse cultural scene, making it a popular destination for both tourists and residents alike. The area is also associated with a vibrant and diverse community of non-profit organisations, charities, and volunteer groups that play a crucial role in addressing various social and community needs. The VCS sector collaborates closely with local government and other stakeholders to create innovative solutions to social challenges. One such example of this collaborative spirit is Camden Giving, a charitable foundation committed to connecting resources and support to local projects and initiatives through an innovative participatory grant-making approach. TSIP conducted an interview with Gillian Marston, Executive Director of Camden Council's Supporting Communities programme, and Natasha Friend, Director of Camden Giving, to gain insights into successful engagement practices in the borough and to illuminate the influential role of council culture in this context.

"I think there is a cultural commitment to community power across the whole of the council that extends beyond what they do with us [Camden Giving]."

Successes, Challenges and Lessons Learned

Dedication to citizen empowerment resonates throughout Camden Council, reflecting an ethos that permeates from its leadership all the way down to its council staff and officers.

"We don't just do one bit of participation. It's a constant. In all my previous council roles, I've never worked in a council that is so driven by communities".

Citizen Assemblies represent just one departure from traditional engagement methods at Camden by serving as inclusive forums where randomly selected residents convene to discuss and offer input on significant matters, fostering a more extensive and diverse public role in decision-making. Several assemblies have been held, with the initial one focusing on the climate emergency, leading to the formulation of the council's action plan, and subsequent meetings have been convened to assess progress, introduce fresh ideas, and maintain accountability. The Council also recruits dozens of Community Engagers from estates across the borough to further their commitment to accountability and to hear from voices that aren't often captured by traditional structured approaches.

"Residents do not want to make their own borough worse. The care that residents take in the work we're doing blows me away every time."

Furthermore, council staff are not afraid to acknowledge when things are broken, whether from a council or a resident's point of view; and because of their close ties with the community, they are able to give feedback more openly. This open and collaborative approach to fostering relationships in Camden seems to have significantly enhanced mutual trust within the borough, strengthening the bond not only between community members and the council but also instilling a deeper sense of trust within the council's staff towards community assets, expertise, and the unique positionality and value derived from lived experience.

The Camden case study shows just how influential the role of council culture is in delivering genuine long-term policy impact by involving communities at the heart of decision-making.

Cross Sector Review

Different approaches to engagement by community organisations and voluntary sector organisations

Exploring the varying approaches that organisations use to involve and engage with their local communities for funded activity has been a cornerstone of this research. Community organisations are funded or asked to take on an intermediary role to ensure that the needs and perspectives of local people are captured in service design and delivery.

Our community engagement mapping across the charity and voluntary sector involved completing an online search of community organisations to understand their roles and contributions, as well as the influence of policy on their activities. Evidence for this might be funding for a project to inform the development of specific policy. Additionally, we drew on information from organisations that might not have appeared in our online searches, but which featured in our roundtable discussions, steering group meetings and case study interviews

We found community organisations using traditional forms of engagement, such as discussions, in the form of coffee mornings, ‘lunch & learns’ or roundtables. These can be effective at gathering a wide array of perspectives, with insights garnered from these events often synthesised in formal reports published on community and local authority websites. Conversely, some community groups used alternative creative methods to engage local communities. These approaches can include art installations, or using poetry and spoken word to connect people to environments.

Example: Brixton, London Early Years Foundation (LEYF) engaging in air pollution activity

LEYF is a chain of nurseries that deliver services across London. In Brixton, a resident group of parents whose children attend a LEYF nursery are working to raise awareness around air pollution and promote healthier streets. LEYF have partnered with Imperial College on the Breathe London Campaign and developed a community blog, seeking to engage local people, the local authority and senior stakeholders in the air pollution agenda.

The Kingston Society has delivered an urban room pilot, ‘Open Frame’, funded by Kingston Council. The pilot demonstrates how place-based urban rooms can provide a unique and engaging forum for communities to engage with important planning matters.

CASE STUDY 2: Kingston Society, Kingston upon Thames, Pilot Urban Room: Open Frame

Themes: Useful tools; collaboration

Classification(s): Community consultation, community outreach and information

The Kingston Society is a civic society representing the interests of community members in the borough of Kingston upon Thames. It concerns itself with planning and conservation matters while encouraging public participation through a wide range of public events and activities. In January 2023, the society came together with partners to pilot the borough’s first urban room initiative, Open Frame, providing residents with an open space to come together and discuss future plans for the borough. Peter Karpinski, Kingston Society’s lead for the project, explained:

It [the approach taken] was quite calculated on our part. We were using the draft local plan as an opportunity, but at the same time they needed help drumming up interest in it.

Peter spoke further with us about the urban room initiative and how it served as a useful tool for engaging the community.

Successes, Challenges and Lessons Learned

After campaigning for an urban room in Kingston for nearly six years, efforts finally came together for Peter when the Kingston Society and leaders from the North Kingston Neighbourhood Forum and New Malden's and Chessington District Residents' Associations wrote a joint letter to Kingston Council. The approach coincided with the development of their new Local Plan, the council were open to the idea and willing to put in some staff hours and resources to support the initiative. A series of eight lunchtime talk sessions was planned over a two-month period covering the eight chapters of the new plan. The design of the urban room was developed in partnership with undergraduate and postgraduate students from Kingston University, who competed against 20 other teams to come up with an innovative design. The winning design, Open Frame, was piloted in Kingston town centre in January 2023 and was well received by over 200 members of the community.

While there were positive messages from the pilot, there were also limitations and lessons learned during the project. The project had to be drastically cut short due to various constraints by partners and the venue, and planned engagement with community groups, such as faith groups, could not be achieved in a meaningful way. Those engaged did not represent the diverse communities in Kingston Borough. In addition, the urban room acted primarily as a forum for one-way consultation, with many of the displays passive in nature.

Despite the challenges, Peter still felt that initiatives such as the Kingston urban room gave people an essential opportunity to have their say on important issues, whereas many local government consultation exercises go below the radar. The pilot project highlighted the need for new and innovative tools for engagement to help bring important planning matters to the heart of communities.

Community Engagement in Context

Peter acknowledged the challenges of the pilot, such as its limited reach, community representation and pressured timeframe but, given that multiple ways were now used to reach new audiences, and that organisations and communities now operated firmly in a digital era, he felt optimistic about the opportunities to build on the tool. He recognised that many councillors did not see themselves as community engagement experts, but as having a specific job to do, of which community engagement was a single element, and often following a constrained statutory process.

From the Kingston Society's experience, Peter felt that civic actors involved in public consultations with developers and the council would benefit from a concise code of good practice going beyond the often vague statutory Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs). Unless community engagement was made a priority from the top down, including relevant upskilling and training for councillors across the board, it would continue to be downplayed and regarded as a chore.

In our research, we noted that there were several cultural institutions engaging significantly with local communities. By contrast, the communities might have been less likely to engage with policymakers. This could be due to scope, capacity or organisational agendas. Even without

engagement with policymakers, there are lessons that policymakers can learn from these activities to inform their own engagement approaches. We explored this further in our community engagement classification typology which defines how community engagement and participation operate in London.

In our mapping exercise, we found several examples of communities engaging with their local communities and policymakers. During our roundtable discussions, sector reviews and case study conversations, several organisations noted their work and the work of colleagues, engaging with local communities and policymakers, which had led to a change in their local communities. This might not always be visible as local organisations did not always have the capacity to publicly document all their work on websites or social media. Local authorities also might not always have the capacity to publicly note the impact on local policy made by conversations and projects with community groups. While we know that a significant amount of community engagement was being completed across London, this deficiency in recording activity limited our ability to fully map engagement activities. We encourage community organisations and policymakers to continue to reach out to us and share their [stories](#) to give an even broader perspective of engagement practice in London.

Example: Museum of the Home Tomorrowland project – reimagining Hackney in 2050 with local children

The Museum of the Home partnered with artists and two local schools in Hackney, St Paul's and St Michael's, to reimagine Hackney as home in 2050. Children used drawings, and spoken and written words to creatively imagine a Hackney future. The project's posters and podcasts were developed into a series and displayed in the museum and on the website.

Example: London Transport Museum young person summer film project.

The Museum partnered with Holborn Community Association to deliver a set of creative workshops aimed at 14- to 21-year-old young people. The workshops explored participants' relationships with journeys and transport. From this they developed a short film which was displayed at the museum.

Example: Flashy Wings ministry

Flashy Wings is a Christian charity supporting women with advice and information. During a roundtable discussion, a team member shared that Flashy Wings work with local authorities, developing outreach projects to ensure that services are co-produced to meet the needs of service users and close the feedback loop. However, due to capacity constraints, they have not been able to update their website to reference this.

Sector Specific Reviews

Community engagement under the spotlight

For this research, we have focused on three sectors: **Arts and Culture**, **Housing**, and the **Environment**. We specifically looked for organisations that collaborated directly with policy makers and funders to engage with local communities delivering activity or co-producing local change.

We measured influence by looking for examples in which their activity had changed policy. We looked for evidence of this either through local authority documentation of resulting strategy changes or where a local organisation had mentioned the impact of their activity. As mentioned previously, we noted that community engagement activity was often not well documented on voluntary sector organisation websites even when we knew through other sources that it was

happening and was having strong positive impacts. This is likely to be the result of resource constraints. This invisibility limited the extent of our research, and also highlights the importance of providing funding and support to small voluntary sector organisations to document the often excellent work that they do in this space.

We categorised engagement activity in the three sector reviews reported in the pages 34-46 that follow as either 'high influence' or 'medium influence'.

| Influence measure key | |
|-----------------------|---|
| High influence | Direct mention of engagement activity shifting local policy, strategy or mindsets. High influence indicates that the organisation has directly mentioned their work with a local authority or funder and its impact, and/or this has been mentioned directly in papers or on a website, known by the team, or directly mentioned by the local authority itself. |
| Medium influence | Direct mention of community engagement activity being funded by local authority/funder. Medium influence indicates that there was no mention of the impact of activity on local policy on a website/ local authority papers etc, or although the engagement was funded, it did not change as much as had been hoped. |

Arts and Culture Sector Review

- In this sector we mainly found activity around community outreach and information, and service-user involvement. Our mapping picked up more examples of co-production and co-design than in other sectors, as shown in the table below; there was also more participatory grantmaking. [\(linked from classification\)](#).
- Organisations tended to partner with one another and with specialists, such as art therapists, to deliver engagement activity.

Table 2: Community engagement activity in the arts and culture sector

| Organisation | Area | Activity | Classification type | Influence measure |
|---|-------------------|---|--|-------------------|
| Latin Elephant | Elephant & Castle | Latin Elephant's work addresses systemic inequalities embedded in the planning system, with their work highlighted by local and national government, local organisations and professional bodies. They focus on economic activity and support for small businesses, and on cultural activity. | Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community campaigning and advocacy; community-led research. | High |
| Magic Me | Tower Hamlets | Magic Me partnered with Bancroft Tenant Management Co-operative to create a community mural, uniting diverse generations in London. The project enhanced an important space for residents, fostering connections between different age groups and cultures. It brightened up the estate and built resilient, integrated communities in response to COVID-19 challenges. | Co-production or co-design; community outreach and information; service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots). | High |
| Bulgarian Centre for Social Integration and Culture | Enfield | Bulgarian Centre for Social Integration and Culture is based in North London and supports the Bulgarian community based there. It aims to reduce social isolation, address current issues, and to promote quicker integration of Bulgarians into British society. | Service-user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community campaigning and advocacy; community-led research. | Medium |
| The People Speak | East London | The People Speak is a group of international artists, cultural producers, science communicators and activists | Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community | Medium |

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| | | based in East London. They have 25 years' expertise in helping people to understand each other. | consultation; community campaigning and advocacy; community-led research. | |
| Black Curatorial | London | Black Curatorial exists to push Black curators and creatives to play more in their practice. The FLY ME OUT FUND is one of their ways of supporting Black curators / visual artists in Barbados, Jamaica and the UK by enabling them to experience a new curatorial project, exhibition, biennial, or cultural event. | Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community campaigning and advocacy; community-led research; community outreach and information; participatory grantmaking. | Medium |
| Black Cultural Archives | Brixton | Black Cultural Archives' mission is to collect, preserve and celebrate the histories of people of African and Caribbean descent in the UK and to inspire and give strength to individuals, communities, and society. | Community campaigning and advocacy; community-led research; community outreach and information. | High |
| Comzi | London | Comzi has worked with Southwark Council to conduct and design urban research across a number of council estates, helping the council to deliver its objectives for the Great Estates Programme. They have worked with Somerset House to understand how they can create a digital tool that explores Black British culture within the context of Somerset House. | Community-led research; community consultation. | High |
| The Claudia Jones Organisation | Hackney | The Claudia Jones Organisation (CJO) counselling service provides culturally sensitive 1:1 support to African and Caribbean women and their families. The service addresses unique community issues, such as the impact of migration on families, sent-for and sent-away children, and the specific challenges faced by black councillors. CJO documented its unique approach, developing a framework for working with cultural sensitivity, tailored to the African and Caribbean community. Good practice has been embedded through clinical supervision, cultural awareness, and understanding of racism and discrimination. | Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community campaigning and advocacy; community-led research; community outreach and information. | High |

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| Peckham Palms | Peckham | Peckham Palms is involved in a participatory grantmaking process with Southwark Council. The Palms is the UK's first dedicated Black hair and beauty destination, purpose-built for Afro hair, beauty and lifestyle start-ups, serving as an Afrocentric retail space and community hub. It is a good practice model of urban renewal – offering subsidised and affordable rents, and providing a legacy home to the established community of independent Black hair stylists. | Participatory grantmaking; co-production or co-design; community consultation. | Medium |
| Bangladesh Youth Movement | Tower Hamlets | Bangladesh Youth Movement (BYM) has worked with Tower Hamlets youth for over four decades. BYM holds the annual Berner Youth Festival, planned and delivered by volunteers from the local community. | Service-user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community campaigning and advocacy; community-led research; community outreach and information. | High |
| LGBT+ Consortium | London (UK wide) | LGBT+ Consortium is an infrastructure and membership body, with engagement as the foundation to their work. In London they support and continuously engage over 200 LGBTQIA+ community organisations, groups and projects both in day-to-day work and across strategic planning and delivery. Their most recent London-focused community engagement piece is the LGBTQIA+ Plan for London, which they co-designed with 95 LGBTQIA+ community organisations across the Greater London Area. | Service-user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community campaigning and advocacy; community-led research; community outreach and information. | High |
| South London Gallery | South London | The South London Galleries residents' programme works with and for the Gallery's close neighbours who live on Elmington, Pelican and Sceaux Gardens estates, to deliver a long-term public art and learning project. | Community-led research; community outreach and information; co-production or co-design. | Medium |
| Poetic Unity | London | Poetic Unity provides support and services for young people across the UK. Their vision is to give young people a voice and to empower them to reach their highest potential. They use poetry as a tool to support young | Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community campaigning and advocacy; | Medium |

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| | | people's mental health, education, physical health, community cohesion, and personal development. As part of a campaign to raise awareness of air pollution in Lambeth and Southwark, Poetic Unity collaborated with Purpose Foundation to create three poems allowing young people to voice their concerns, and their ideas for cleaner air to be a reality in the future. This led on to an event and open letter to local councils. | community-led research; community outreach and information. | |
| <u>Middle Eastern Women and Society Organisation (MEWSO)</u> | North/ North West London | MEWSO focuses on improving the physical health of women in Islington. They provide online Zumba classes in English with translations in Arabic and Farsi. While the women attend these exercise sessions, advisers are available to offer advice and support in other areas of their lives if needed. MEWSO is funded by the Mayor of London and Comic Relief. | Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community campaigning and advocacy; community outreach and information. | Medium |
| <u>E17 Films Emerging Talent</u> | East London | E17 Films Emerging Talent works with the residents on community, collaborative, multigenerational, and multimedia visual arts projects including animation, film and virtual reality documentary formats to create an <u>archive</u> of the regeneration of the area. | Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community campaigning and advocacy; community outreach and information; digital engagement; co-production or co-design. | Medium |
| <u>The Kurdish & Turkish Community Centre</u> | North London | The Kurdish & Turkish Community Centre are involved in community engagement work through their services to Kurdish-speaking and Turkish-speaking people in London. Services include advice and information, health access, supplementary school and parental support. They worked in partnership with local authorities and with faith and other groups in carrying out Covid-19 support work. | Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community outreach and information. | High |
| <u>Joy of Sound</u> | Pan London | Joy of Sound practices and promotes social inclusion through music and creative arts. With National Lottery funding, they were able to support some of the most vulnerable people during the pandemic. | Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation. | Medium |

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| Nova New Opportunities | Kensington & Chelsea | Nova New Opportunities have worked with the Science Museum to evaluate Medicine: The Wellcome Galleries, a suite of five of the world's largest medical galleries. | Community consultation; Community-led research. | Medium |
| Little Angel Theatre | North London | Little Angel Theatre works in partnership with Great Ormond Street Hospital, with funding from BBC Children in Need and NESTA. In 2020, they visited 163 children in hospitals around the country to help brighten their day with puppetry. | Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots). | Medium |

Arts and Culture Sector

A case study

CASE STUDY 3: Latin Elephant, Southwark, engaging policymakers and community organisation to develop a cultural centre in Elephant & Castle

Themes: Minoritised voices coming through; collaboration

Classification(s): Community outreach and information, community campaigning and advocacy

Founded in 2014, Latin Elephant is a registered charity based in Elephant and Castle in south London. The neighbourhood has one of the highest concentrations of Latin Americans in the city and has been experiencing a growing wave of regeneration. Many residents felt they did not understand the regeneration process but experienced the personal challenges it was bringing. The purpose of Latin Elephant is to demystify the development regeneration process and promote a space where participation, engagement, and decision making by community members can be exercised. Part of their mission is to advocate for the small businesses that have contributed to the area in terms of its economic, social, cultural diversity and strength.

Engagement with policy makers

Latin Elephant is part of the Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK, a coalition of voluntary sector organisations aiming to provide a collective voice for the Latin American community in the UK. This includes a campaign for official recognition of Latin Americans as an ethnic minority. Latin Elephant has campaigned and engaged with the local council, for example, for a cultural centre, following the demolition of the shopping centre. As a result of their campaign, the Labour party incorporated the demand for a cultural centre into their policy agenda before the 2022 local elections.

Challenges, successes, and learning

In campaigning for a new cultural centre, Latin Elephant acted as an intermediary, facilitating communication between the local community and the council. They used grassroots consultation approaches, providing opportunities for community members to express their view. Methods included inviting local politicians to a community meeting in Southwark, so that community members could have direct contact and in-person conversations. Collaborating with different by-and-for organisations with shared concerns, such as SLAN and REACH, gave more opportunity for community voices to come through. Latin Elephant felt that community engagement became powerful in this way, with politicians listening to people and seeing first-hand the effect of policy decisions on livelihoods and their emotional, physical, and mental health impact. The impact of research could get lost when produced as reports or other text. On the other hand, community engagement gave community members voice and confidence, and a sense that knowledge and expertise lay not just with policymakers or in academia, but with the community members living in those places.

Latin Elephant recognised that there was a weariness around community engagement, but councils needed to be both proactive and consistent in trying to reach communities. In a broader sense, two-way access should be at the forefront for councils, taking steps to bridge the gap by, for example, removing language and digital barriers.

Housing Sector Review

- In this sector we mainly found a high level of community outreach and engagement activity, alongside some community campaigning examples (linked from classification).
- Community engagement activity ranged from direct support with emergency housing to organising with residents to achieve community action. We saw more examples of community engagement revolving around justice and addressing the poor housing conditions of many marginalised communities.

Table 3: Community engagement activity in the housing sector

| Organisation | Area | Activity | Typology classification | Influence measure |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|--|---|-------------------|
| Shadwell Citizens | Tower Hamlets | This is a community-led change organisation campaigning for local community voices to influence policy. They | Community campaigning and advocacy; community | High |

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| | | <p>campaigned with Create Streets in 2016 to reuse some land for affordable community homes – a locally driven campaign endorsed by Transport for London, local mayors and others. They started a co-design process with local people for the brief for the site, with members continuing their involvement.</p> | <p>led research; co-production and co-design.</p> | |
| Community Led Homes | Pan London | <p>This is the infrastructure body of the Shadwell Citizens group. They work with community groups and London councils to create opportunities for community housing. They promote meaningful community engagement and consent in the development process and manage housing projects that build decent and affordable homes for communities (more information on their website).</p> | <p>Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation.</p> | High |
| Bangladesh Youth Movement | Tower Hamlets | <p>The Bangladesh Youth Movement has worked with the youth and community of Tower Hamlets over four decades. They offer free advice on housing and are recommended by Tower Hamlets Council as an advice provider.</p> | <p>Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community outreach and information.</p> | High |
| Island Advice Centre (IAC) | Tower Hamlets | <p>IAC offers free, confidential, accessible advice services across the borough, including advice on benefits, debt and housing. They delivered a project based in five GP surgeries across the borough, including appointment-based sessions for welfare rights, housing and debt advice.</p> | <p>Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation; community outreach and information.</p> | Medium |
| Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network | Tower Hamlets | <p>THCAN is a partnership of local advice centres providing free advice and representation in areas of social welfare law. Advice centres work together through THCAN to ensure that residents of Tower Hamlets have access to free, high quality advice on welfare benefits, debt, housing and other areas of social welfare law.</p> | <p>Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community consultation, community outreach and information; digital engagement.</p> | Medium |
| The Outside Project | London | <p>The Outside Project provides emergency accommodation for LGBTQ+ people living in London who are homeless and/or experiencing domestic abuse. Funded by MOPAC (The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime) and the Winter</p> | <p>Service user involvement (voluntary/grassroots); community outreach and information; digital engagement.</p> | Medium |

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| | | Transformation Fund. | | |
| Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum | Harlesden | Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum is a group of local people working together to make Harlesden a better place in which to work and live. Their Neighbourhood Plan was ratified by referendum and adopted by Brent Council in June 2019. <i>'This is a document that clearly states what we, as a community, want to see happen in Harlesden in terms of planning and development.'</i> | Community campaigning and advocacy; co-production and co-design; community consultation. | High |
| Tonic Housing | London | Tonic Housing is focused on creating vibrant and inclusive urban LGBT+ affirming retirement communities where people can share common experiences, find mutual support and enjoy their later life. They developed A Manifesto for London LGBTIQA+ Community Housing as part of the London LGBTIQA+ Community Housing Coalition (LLCHC), and as part of their engagement with mayoral candidates ahead of the mayoral election 2021 campaign. | Community campaigning and advocacy; co-production and co-design; community consultation; service user engagement. | High |
| Kiran Support Services | Waltham Forest | Kiran Support Services provide safe, temporary accommodation to Asian women and their children and are the only agency of its kind in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. Through collaborative working with councils, and testimonials from their service users, KSS have supported community engagement strategies to ensure robust and demand-led services. | Community campaigning and advocacy; community outreach and engagement; community consultation; service-user engagement/ | High |

Housing Sector

A case study

CASE STUDY 4: Tonic Housing, London, affirmative retirement provision for older LGBT+ people

Theme: voices of marginalised voices coming through

Classification(s): Co-design and co-production, service user involvement in voluntary sector orgs

Tonic Housing is the UK's first LGBT+ affirmative retirement community, recognising the particular social and housing needs of older LGBT+ people. The organisation aims to connect better housing provision with support to older LGBT+ people, where they can be valued in their identities, free from discrimination and celebrated in their communities. Since its formation in 2014, Tonic Housing has worked with a community panel of older LGBTQ+ people, carefully selected to represent the diversity that exists within the LGBT+ community, embedding community engagement and co-design into the organisation's principal ways of working.

Community engagement with policymakers

In Spring 2021, Tonic Housing secured a loan of £5.7 million from the London Mayor's office for the purchase of 19 apartments in Lambeth, south London for offer to their service users. Some 400 applications of interest demonstrated the need and demand for this service.

Bob Green OBE, the Head of Operations at Tonic Housing, recalled how engagement with the GLA was years in the making. When the community panel was formed, they discussed the type of housing they wanted, the existing gaps and the kind of care and support needed as part of the provision. This resulted in a 'community panel wish list'. Initially, what was offered was shared ownership and rented accommodation dependent on registration with the Social Housing Regulator at a later date. However, the discussions with the GLA gave the panel a way to voice more complete goals for housing for an older LGBT+ community. The community panel continues to inform Tonic Housing on its direction and advises them on other services they could develop. This is crucial as Tonic Housing can share messages from community members to policymakers through its membership of the London Housing panel, a network of community groups speaking directly to the GLA..

Successes and challenges

One frustration for Tonic Housing was the lengthy and uncertain process experienced by community groups. Frustration was further fuelled by a felt lack of understanding and consistency.

You get so far and then policymakers either don't understand and/or the policymakers change and suddenly there's a different director or a different officer and they don't really champion the LGBT+ housing that other staff have done.

Tonic Housing found the engagement process easier where there was a direct willingness by policymakers to listen and attempt to understand community issues and lived realities. Given the little data available despite a growing body of research, it was important for councils to draw on personal testimonies from the LGBT+ community, pointing up the gaps in provision.

Community engagement in context

When asked about the current state of community engagement, Bob highlighted the limited community capacity to engage because of the need to prioritise daily struggles in the context of the cost-of-living crisis. It was a further deterrent when this was not understood.

Environment Sector Review

- In this sector, we saw many examples of community campaigning and advocacy, alongside frequent activity around community outreach and information sharing (linked from classification).
- Community engagement activity ranged from advocacy and awareness-raising to direct action with local authorities. Both the climate and culture sector utilised creative engagement methods to engage local communities, which was not seen used as widely in our mapping of the housing sector.

Table 4: Community engagement activity in the environment sector

| Organisation | Area | Activity | Typology classification | Influence measure |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---|--|-------------------|
| Groundwork UK | UK wide (but London focus) | Infrastructure organisation working with community organisations in the green space to train and work on local issues. They have many London-specific projects under specific themes related to healthier lives. They also empower local projects through place-based engagement, consultations. | Community outreach and information; digital engagement; community campaigning and advocacy; community consultation; co-production. | High |
| Just Space | London | Focused on planning activity – lobbying on the London Plan – convening a network for community groups. In the last two years Just Space has collaborated with the Planning and Regeneration Committee of the London Assembly which, in turn, has put pressure on the Mayor of London and secured a new policy document and website. | Community campaigning and advocacy; community outreach and information; community consultation. | High |

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| <u>CREW Energy</u> | South-west London | Helping communities across south-west London to become environmentally and financially sustainable. The government has significantly reduced local councils' budgets, causing uncertain futures and financial insecurity. People are losing trust in the government to effectively protect people's futures. CREW Energy has found a local and accessible way to fight for systemic change by advocating for community energy and bringing power into the hands of the people. | Community campaigning and advocacy; community outreach and information; community consultation. | High |
| <u>Friends of the Earth UK</u> | London-based (UK wide) | Friends of the Earth local action groups are part of the largest grassroots environmental campaigning network in the UK. | Community campaigning and advocacy; community outreach and information; community consultation. | High |
| <u>Westminster Citizens Climate Action Network</u> | Westminster | Collaboration on actions aimed at arresting the decline caused by climate change and promoting biodiversity, environmental protection, and a sustainable planet. | Community consultation; community outreach and information; digital engagement. | High |
| <u>Green Elmbridge</u> | Elmbridge | Green Elmbridge works collaboratively with Elmbridge Council through discussion, sharing, planning and joint action with the community to amplify impact. Elmbridge Borough Council has pledged to become a carbon-neutral organisation by 2030. Green Elmbridge encourages all residents and businesses to share this target throughout the community | Community outreach and information; digital engagement; community campaigning and advocacy; community consultation; co-production. | High |
| <u>Climate Action Lewisham</u> | Lewisham | Climate Action Lewisham is a local residents' action group working to support and generate initiatives in Lewisham that reduce our collective carbon footprint, and to promote healthy and thriving neighbourhoods in the face of our climate and ecological crisis. They work with the Lewisham Council Sustainable Development Select Committee. | Community outreach and information; digital engagement; community campaigning and advocacy; community consultation. | High |
| <u>Climate in Colour</u> | UK; London-based | Climate in Colour is an online educational platform and community trying to make climate conversations more accessible and diverse. They work with Brixton Cinema to | Community campaigning and advocacy; community outreach and information. | Medium |

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|---|-------------------|--|---|--------|
| | | deliver climate conscious activity. | | |
| Clean Air Bayswater | Bayswater | Clean Air Bayswater is an environmental organisation focused on air pollution. They run frequent events bringing together schools, parents and young children into the conversation. They also run regular webinars to raise awareness and share information and connect local business owners | Community outreach and information; digital engagement; community campaigning and advocacy. | High |
| Brixton London Early Years Foundation | Brixton | A community-led blog promoting community engagement through shared learning on air pollution. They engage councils and key stakeholders in the respective boroughs. | Community outreach and information; digital engagement; community campaigning and advocacy. | Medium |
| Thames Life | Barking Riverside | The Resident Planning Forum is a regular meeting of residents, hosted by Thames Ward Community Project and Planning Aid London, to identify issues, opportunities and concerns relating to planning in Thames Ward. It is a safe space for all to work and learn together, to better influence planning in the local area. They work by 'talking to people in our community and identifying priorities and negotiating issues with the local authority.' | Community consultation; community outreach and information. | High |

Environment Sector

A case study

CASE STUDY 5: CREW Energy, South West London, SWLEAP/The Energy Redress Scheme

Themes: Challenges and barriers; collaboration

Classification(s): Community campaigning and advocacy

CREW Energy is a registered community benefit society and group of volunteers based in south-west London, committed to making their corner of the capital an exemplar of a low-cost low-carbon energy future. They use an innovative community-led model to deliver energy efficiency and renewable energy projects to local councils and communities. Toby Costin, one of CREW's directors, told us about the challenges and barriers they had faced when collaborating with local councils in driving forward the net zero agenda.

CREW Energy partners with the environmental charity Habitats & Heritage through the South West London Energy Advice Partnership (SWLEAP), providing free energy advice across the London Boroughs of Richmond, Wandsworth and Merton, funded by the Energy Industry Voluntary Redress Scheme and the London Boroughs of Richmond and Wandsworth.

Successes, challenges and lessons learned

While there had been a successful rollout of 1,500 interventions targeting fuel poverty, Toby reported differences in how the councils collaborated with CREW. Although it was hard to 'break into' Richmond and Wandsworth councils initially, he praised them for taking energy matters seriously, and putting CREW in touch with the relevant internal teams. These fruitful connections and collaborations with the different council teams resulted in new and innovative initiatives, including one highlighting the intersection of energy issues and young people, not often addressed by the community sector.

CREW's experience with another council contrasted with the positive progress made with Richmond and Wandsworth councils. Toby pointed to council culture as the key determinant of willingness to collaborate with external organisations. Difficulties stemmed from inaction at the top and a failure by senior managers to empower staff: *They're so scared of their own shadows because senior management hasn't empowered them to ever make a decision*".

Toby reported that voluntary sector organisations such as CREW could not afford to spend substantial time and resources chasing reluctant clients and council staff, while the underlying issues persisted for communities. He felt that some council staff might hesitate to act for fear of potentially making the wrong decision; but the mistake was a lack of action. Risk-averse council staff should accept they would get some things wrong, but getting 60 percent to 70 percent of things right was important.

4. WHAT MAKES EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Barriers and Challenges

What gets in the way of community engagement?

Our research brought to the surface several barriers and challenges to effective community engagement, often overwhelming strategies intended to mitigate them. In this section, we explore some of these challenges and begin to outline strategies that communities, funders, councils and others have taken to overcome them.

Much of the learning in this section is taken from our second set of roundtables. The four topics were:

- Trust and mistrust
- Funding competition and the funding landscape
- How communities want to engage with decision-makers (if they do)
- The impact of electoral politics on community engagement with elected bodies.

From our data collection, four themes emerged as pressing areas that community organisations and policymakers had to navigate when trying to engage well with the community. We then analysed the issues that arose from the roundtable discussions to hone in on three types of challenges to effective community engagement. These challenges had been raised repeatedly across all eight of our roundtables: **trust and mistrust; accessibility; and capacity and prioritisation**. We look here at ways that different groups have responded to some of these challenges, as well as to wider systemic issues.

Trust and Mistrust

Undoubtedly, trust and relationships are at the heart of good community engagement and nurturing meaningful collaborations. We have heard from both community organisations and from policymakers that the lack of trust between these groups is a central barrier to good community engagement.

Community groups, infrastructure organisations, funders and policymakers all want to take **more relational approaches** to working in communities. However, our evidence about the challenges experienced demonstrated how the structures of large organisations – councils, infrastructure organisations and funders – tended to be uncondusive to relational approaches. The default mode of interaction is **transactional** rather than **relational**, and this had significant implications for the level of trust between communities, particularly those who had been excluded historically, and policymakers.

I've been involved in a couple of different projects which has drawn me into really digging into what trust and relationships mean and... how I can work with communities in a non-extractive way to really ensure trust and good relationships are built at the very start of projects... meaningfully. (Trust and Relationships Roundtable)

This lack of trust can have direct and immediate consequences. Some community organisations felt they were unlikely to engage as they did not feel their views were being properly respected or valued.

I don't like to participate very much because what I find is, if I'm giving away information, that information is picked up; that translates into funding using our data and then that funding

goes to another organisation. So I feel like, you know, we're not really included. (Community Organisation Roundtable)

| Challenge | Opportunity |
|--|---|
| <p>Community organisations mentioned that communities often felt as though they had been engaged as an afterthought. Policymakers' capacity or resources assigned to community engagement on a specific project can impact how they respond to the need to engage organisations in earlier stages of project development, embedding local needs throughout the project. Some communities felt that engagement is currently seen as a prescriptive tick-box exercise to policymakers. This can make engagement activities feel inauthentic and laboured – a direct consequence of prioritising transactional over relational engagement.</p> | <p>Meaningful trusting relationships with local communities should be built prior to engagement cycles or events. This would need to be supported with adequate resources and time to sustain these relationships, with clear expectations set by the policymakers and community groups.</p> |
| <p>Often community groups did not feel their inputs were valued and did not have positive experiences around engagement, potentially deterring them from looking for future engagement opportunities. Service users or communities might find it difficult to express themselves and do not feel safe to share their experiences.</p> | <p>Community groups may have negative experiences due to engagement being rushed, or the remit of the engagement not being communicated efficiently. A lack of cultural sensitivity and tailored approaches may also feed into negative experiences. It is important for policymakers to ensure that they are able to evaluate the quality of the engagement they have conducted and gather feedback from community members. This is especially pertinent in spaces where power imbalances exist or where groups have been historically mistreated or marginalised by mainstream institutions. Without the investment in building relationships prior to formal engagement interactions, such as co-design groups or consultation meetings, it is difficult to build the level of psychological safety needed for people to speak up on difficult issues. It is also important to directly address power imbalances that may exist within interactions.</p> |
| <p>Community groups felt that there was often a lack of mental health awareness or that engagement approaches did not place care at the heart of their purpose. This can lead to growing friction between community groups and policymakers if community members feel they may be in spaces affecting their mental health adversely.</p> | <p>The need for speed and urgency can sometimes make it difficult to prioritise care and relationships – and this can be particularly challenging for communities where historical trauma is widespread. In these cases, it is even more important for policymakers to openly address these experiences before re-engaging community members and to construct engagement approaches which ensure these incidents are not repeated. Trauma-informed</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| | approaches are crucial to ensure that engagement does not trigger or re-traumatise participants. |
| Extractive approaches and techniques break down trust. Some community organisations felt that they had previously shared their knowledge and data that was subsequently used by the council or by a funder with no accreditation or follow-up given to that community group. | A lack of follow-up from policymakers can leave community members feeling that their views have been extracted and unsure what the result of a consultation process has been. It is important for communication around timelines to be clearly set at the beginning of an engagement process; this can be difficult when timelines develop iteratively as projects progress. |

In some cases, funders or policymakers will have a select number of trusted organisations they consult as representing a wider community. While this may provide useful insights, it can also create a system of gatekeeping and prevent a more in-depth engagement approach. **Some organisations may also want to avoid insider status.** With community mistrust around institutions, taking on an insider role might weaken the trust between themselves and their own community.

The case study of SAAFI, below, illustrates the challenges presented to community engagement by levels of community mistrust, particularly within ethnically diverse communities. While challenges persist, collaboration between policymakers and local communities that have relational approaches to engagement at their centre can help bridge gaps in communication.

CASE STUDY 6: SAAFI, Brent, capacity building support for local organisations

Themes: Collaboration; challenges and barriers

Minor theme: minoritised voices coming through

Classification(s): Participatory grantmaking

The Somali Advice and Forum for Information (SAAFI) is a Somali-founded and led community organisation. They aim to help all local people with English as a second language through advice and training. SAAFI is located in Church Road in the London borough of Brent, home to a large community of Black and other people from the Global Majority and recognised as one of the most deprived areas across several national indices of deprivation. In 2021, SAAFI was awarded funding to support local groups in partnership with other community-based organisations, through the GLA High Streets for All Challenge Fund. SAAFI operates as the primary lead and distributes funds to local organisations supporting residents. The fund is helping local groups without sufficient resources and structure to ensure stability and sustainability to build their internal capacity, which is often stretched by demand.

Successes, challenges and lessons learned

SAAFI's CEO, Rhoda Ibrahim, explained how the project successfully put together a comprehensive community programme, with funds directly helping to transform local organisations, and how organisations had to learn how to work with one another and be patient during the ideation phase.

We distributed funds to organisations to help with capacity building. Some used this to hire bid writers and fundraisers to support their ability to apply for even more funding.

Despite the success of the project and an appetite by organisations for additional work, there were several internal challenges impacting the project's initial stages. Changes in local authority personnel meant that community groups were often not clear about any individual council contact specifically

assigned to the local area, with resulting delays to the project start. A direct piece of learning was the development, involving all organisations, of an agreement document listing roles, responsibilities and a working code of conduct. SAAFI and other community organisations needed to work closely with the local authority to ensure project success. At the same time, SAAFI often experienced the relationship as paternalistic: that their position as community experts was not valued and their own efforts to understand how the council worked were not reciprocated. Expectations placed on community groups were at times hard to deliver.

Community engagement in context

Community engagement in Church Road faces significant challenges, exacerbated by the current cost-of-living crisis and its heavy impacts on residents. SAAFI felt that the local authority's existing approach lacks cultural awareness, treating the community as monolithic rather than faceted, and disregarding historical and contemporary insights that community organisations have into intra-community dynamics.

The local authority's expectation about community members' participation in webinars and activities without prior consultation was not well received by the community, who felt their input had not been genuinely valued or considered. Further, some council-organised events and workshops were not aligned with the community's preferences and methods of collaboration in terms of logistics.

There are times, for example, when stay-at-home mothers are more likely to be available, say from 10am - 1pm during school and nursery hours. If you are hosting a workshop from 2pm, [for women] men are more likely to attend. You will struggle to get women to attend.

The project illustrated to SAAFI the importance for local authorities to adopt a culturally-sensitive and inclusive approach, recognising the community's unique characteristics and historical context. More meaningful and effective collaboration should be based on mutual respect and active involvement of community members in decision-making processes.

Accessibility and Data

We heard in our roundtables that engagement was not always perceived as accessible by community members; where access was difficult, members felt that engagement was not something they could become involved in.

We have broken down accessibility and data issues into areas around:

- Lack of understanding around the roles and responsibilities of both policymakers and community members
- Mismatch of language used in engagement activities
- Engagement often not tailored to the audience it is intended to serve – whether that be the right 'place' or 'space' – serving to exclude certain communities
- Struggle by both organisations and policymakers to share data, reducing the opportunity for collaboration.

A local authority representative spoke about the lack of understanding:

So that's really key. I think one of the barriers is sometimes understanding what...the council does and what its limitations are. And obviously one of the key issues I think is, we are now [into] well over a decade of very tight level government budgets. And, unfortunately, I think that maybe councils turn, in the eyes of VCS and community organisations, into the people who say no, because we are the ones saying actually no, we've got no money. (Electoral Politics Roundtable)

Example: Metro Charity

Metro Charity works with people with disabilities to engage with local authorities. They have been working with the local authority in Greenwich's health and adult services to develop their strategy. A representative said that the council had been "quite open to it" because Covid-19 had "revolutionised co-production and engagement, because it meant that people didn't have to leave their homes," which was very important for people with disabilities.

They used online tools to create a virtual space to get people from the community and the local authority into the same room. The first step was to enable people to get to know each other on a human level and address power imbalances.

| Challenge | Opportunity |
|--|--|
| Language issues | |
| Language issues can present a real barrier to engagement for many community members; people whose first language is not English may feel unable to participate in engagement activities. Language may also be a barrier for policymakers when designing their engagement strategies. | Using online tools, there is frequently an option to provide a language translation alternative. In-person translators are crucial for in-person activities. |
| Language style can serve as a barrier around engagement. For example, some language being used by policymakers or funders around engagement can appear as overly academic or difficult to understand. | Simple and clear language is more accessible for community members. The use of more creative techniques that do not rely on language can also be effective in overcoming barriers around both language barriers and language style. |
| Engagement not tailored to audience | |
| Accessibility can be greatly affected by where the engagement takes place. Physical and time constraints can limit some people's ability to access certain types of engagement. Similarly, not having readily accessible information can reduce awareness and so limit the scope of engagement. | We heard evidence of how councils were prompted by the pandemic to try online engagement approaches that could be cost-effective, and were successful in engaging community members they had previously not reached. The move to online engagement and awareness has made some engagement types more accessible for harder to reach communities. |
| Digital exclusion has meant that other communities have felt increasingly excluded in an online environment. Older people, for example, may not feel digitally confident, and technology may not be an affordable option for people from low-income backgrounds. | Councils have been able to reduce the risk of isolating certain groups and individual residents by providing in-person engagement options and/or providing technology training opportunities for community members. Additionally, trust may be rebuilt more efficiently around community members unable to engage online if government bodies and personnel prioritise and increase engagement with communities in person. |
| Struggle to share data | |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Lack of data transparency and sharing can act as a barrier to engagement. Some community groups have found that, where it has not been easily accessible, they have been unaware of research carried out or data collected.</p> | <p>It is important for policymakers, funders and other infrastructure organisations to share publicly the research and data they collect. This can improve a sense of trust with community members if they feel that the feedback loop around data collection has been transparent. It can also allow for smaller grassroots organisations with less capacity and resourcing to be able to use this data and enhance their own work.</p> |
| <p>Many local authorities reported working in silos and a lack of cross-departmental sharing, leading to duplicate research processes potentially taking place at the same time, and duplicate data collection. This can harm relationships with local communities, who may feel over researched.</p> | <p>Creating structures that allow for cross-departmental learning and data sharing are crucial to allow for engagement learning and for outputs to be shared across internal departments in local authorities.</p> |
| <p>Local authority staff and policymakers feel a lack of confidence around sharing data and around engagement practices that involve data collection.</p> | <p>Some council representatives that we spoke to have said that GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) has meant that engagement practices have been more difficult due to the fear of getting fined or mistakenly breaching protocols. Knowing who or how to contact people can be difficult in order to share data appropriately.</p> |

Capacity and Prioritisation

In our evidence about barriers, it was clear that a prioritisation of community engagement by both community organisations and policymakers, and the capacity to carry engagement out, was a prerequisite to overcoming other barriers and taking up opportunities around community engagement.

Greater prioritisation and consistency in community engagement by policymakers and infrastructure organisations will provide greater opportunity for more relational, therefore more effective, approaches.

I think it's also about maintaining that [consistency] and continuing to build an ongoing relationship with communities, you know, outside of a particular consultation. That's what, certainly for me, that's what I'm learning – sharing things, getting to know, and to understand the individual outside of what they have contributed to in terms of the consultation.
(Infrastructure Organisation and Funder Roundtable)

The following case study shows how, after historical local authority neglect of their neighbourhood, residents were able to engage proactively with the local council in long-term planning.

CASE STUDY 7: Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum, Brent, Engaging residents to develop the Local Plan

Theme: Collaboration

Classification(s): Community consultation, community-led research

Harlesden is a vibrant ward in the north-west London borough of Brent. In 2014, residents and community members created a local Neighbourhood Forum, with the purpose of establishing a Neighbourhood Plan for Harlesden. This plan clearly states what the residents of the neighbourhood want to see in terms of planning and development. Ilaria Esposito, the Coordinator of the Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum told us more about their process of community engagement.

Community Engagement with Policymakers

The Localist Act of 2011 facilitated the devolution of decision making from local and central government to individuals and communities living in a specific area. The now defunct Harlesden Town Team was created from local people and local churches coming together to discuss a future vision for Harlesden, including affordable housing options, high street businesses, and the protection of green spaces. The Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum, as the planning arm of the Harlesden Town Team, developed the plan for a five-year period via several meetings with stakeholders, including high street businesses, community groups, local councillors, and local authority planning experts. In June 2019, Brent Council's Old Oak and Park Royal Corporation supported and ratified the Neighbourhood Plan.

Successes, Challenges, Learnings

In our talks with community members, they reported the local authority's historical neglect of Harlesden. Many community members, particularly residents living in the borough for 40 to 50 years, felt they had been given false promises in the past, or they had observed a lack of action, fuelling scepticism about community engagement with local political processes.

The Neighbourhood Plan consultations reached out to a wide and diverse group of people living in Harlesden by using well-frequented spots, such as Tavistock Hall, schools, places of worship and local pubs. This provided more opportunity for collaboration and connection between community members and the local authority. Through the process of engagement, many residents felt they now had a better grasp on how to lobby councillors and "get things done a little quicker now than before." Ilaria emphasised that, in order to make the engagement truly successful, they needed to build on the process and continue it.

You need to demonstrate your existence and the effectiveness of your existence...that you are there to make sure the plan is implemented.

Community Engagement in Context

Currently, the Neighbourhood Forum is seeking to expand its bounds to include residents of Church End and Roundwood and make the forum larger. A key factor leading to the forum's impact was the powerful unity among its community members. Ilaria noted that a lack of designated community space when carrying out community engagement made it more difficult, as pubs and schools might not be accessible for everyone. A lack of funding for community engagement also made it more difficult to be impactful.

We have heard from policymakers in our roundtables that the development of engagement-specific roles has allowed for local authorities to embed community engagement within their work:

And so that went really well to develop the vision. And they actually got as far as developing a co-production lead role, which they've started to recruit for... But it's been a bit hard [for the council] to move forward. It has been hard to get somebody to go behind it and galvanise it and make it, you know, we need to get this post in post, we need to get moving...So I

suppose not to underestimate the capacity that it takes to do this work, you know, that would be the lesson. (Infrastructure Organisation and Funder Roundtable)

| Challenge | Opportunity |
|---|--|
| Many frontline organisations are overstretched and exhausted . This can reduce their capacity to engage in engagement opportunities with funders and policymakers – especially when these opportunities are unpaid. | Tension around capacity and available resources has been further impacted by the cost of living crisis. This is especially true for community members who are from marginalised or low-income backgrounds, making it more difficult for them to prioritise engagement activities with local policymakers. Remunerating engagement opportunities properly will allow for community organisations to be more likely to be able to participate in engagement around policy development. |
| Funding for engagement is often project related . This makes it difficult for many policymakers, infrastructure organisations and funders to prioritise community engagement or build processes and structures for engagement outside of projects. | In our review, we often found community engagement as part of marketing and communications rather than given separate value, with few specific dedicated roles to carry it out; we infrequently saw senior roles prioritising community engagement. If senior roles did have engagement as a prioritised part of their role, such activity would be more likely to be embedded organisation wide. |
| A shift in political representation after election cycles can also mean a shift in priorities and focus for policymakers . This can make community engagement difficult if funding is cut or focus areas change quickly. | While it is difficult to avoid shifts in policy prioritisation, if more local authority roles embed engagement and a relational approach, this itself will allow for more transparent communication with the community about policy shifts. |

Overcoming these challenges

What conditions do we need to invest in to make participation equitable and create good practice?

Rebuilding Trust and Improving Accessibility

Our evidence demonstrated that genuine collaboration requires trust. As there is currently a lack of trust between many policymakers/decision-makers and communities, one of the central questions we aimed to answer was: **How do we rebuild trust?**

Important to rebuilding trust is ensuring that communities feel that their experiences and voices are being valued. Remuneration for people's time is often left out of the engagement process, leaving people feeling undervalued.

Many organisations said that during the pandemic they felt that they had better support around funding, and more flexibility and autonomy to run programmes. Less red tape around funding and providing unrestricted grants can be a useful tool to rebuild trust. Many of the funders and policymakers we spoke to said it would be difficult to introduce less red tape around funding or more

unrestricted funding. However, we found examples of councils willing and able to take this approach.

In times of stress, actually the very first organisation that anybody would go to is their local council. So all the answers have to be with the council, but actually what we need to do as local councils is to enable the community. Our answers need to be with the community, and particularly the voluntary sector partners, and showing that we are working in partnership and it's not always seen as an even partnership. And we need to be able to get that evenness out there a little bit more to say that actually the community can lead on certain subjects on how we move forward. (Electoral Politics Roundtable)

The importance of the **feedback loop** cannot be overstated. Many councils we spoke to brought up methods such as 'You Said, We Did' as good approaches to show how they had acted on what they had heard from the community.

One of the most important things is having an effective feedback loop...We talked earlier about the frustration of consultation fatigue – it's about getting back to people and saying, okay, not only thank you for your contribution, but here's what we did with it and as a result of it. And even if you get back to people and say, we find this from our experience and say, "sorry, we can't do what you want, and here's why we can't do what you want" people are more likely to engage in this the next time because they've been given a reason.(Infrastructure organisation and funder roundtable)

The feedback loop in action: examples of

Example: Queen Mary, University of London Community Engagement Grants

Grants are designed to provide up to £600 of funding to support activities which engage with community-based organisations; uses research, teaching, or the core business of Queen Mary to develop and deliver projects that address needs identified by the local community. This scheme encourages researchers to provide remuneration to their participants.

Example: Croydon Council

The council carried out a consultation around the use and ease of their website. They then altered their website based on community feedback and used the 'You said, We did' exercise to explain and evidence the changes they had made.²

Example: Camden Council VCS Grants Programme, 2024 to 2031

This grant is a Community Partner Fund which will provide unrestricted funding to Camden organisations who are deeply rooted in their communities.³

It takes time to build relationships, and trust is not built overnight. Collaboration does not take place in a linear way and it is essential to understand that there may be setbacks. Moreover, the lack of prioritisation and proper resourcing of engagement can negatively impact collaborative processes. In co-production, for example, there needs to be a genuine and authentic desire on the part of the commissioning organisation, as well as the participants, to engage. There also needs to be flexibility on the part of the commissioning organisation to adapt if things do not go as planned.

² <https://localoffer.croydon.gov.uk/kb5/croydon/directory/advice.page?id=3enkdFzLXE>

³ <https://www.camden.gov.uk/voluntary-and-community-sector-in-camden>

Many funders and policymakers are committed to ensuring they can provide effective community engagement. In our roundtable discussions, we heard from one funder that, frustratingly, this can take time:

As a foundation we need to make some fundamental decisions about how we change the way we look and feel and how we engage with communities. So we're just at the beginning of that, but I think it's pretty slow thinking. (Infrastructure organisation and funder roundtable)

While rebuilding trust may take time, taking accountability and apologising for mistakes can be important in starting to rebuild the right foundations for engagement. **Active listening** is also a useful tool for rebuilding trust. We have seen many examples of policymakers and other infrastructure organisations using these tools to begin the process of a more relational approach to engagement with communities.

Humility ensures good community engagement. If you don't storm in and assume you have all the knowledge, you learn more by taking a back seat most of the time. (Titania Krimpas, Climate Action Lewisham)

I'm gonna use the example of the recovery programme where, you know, I think GLA or the other partners have sort of embraced the idea of engagement across the whole sort of the process really. Which is something that we never really did before. I'm not saying it's perfect, but it's certainly a move in the right direction. And I think one of the things that had the most impact was that when we went to engage with the communities on what the program should look like and then we actually reflected back to the communities like, this is what you told us and this is what we've done as a result of that. I think that was incredibly powerful. (Trust and Relationships Roundtable)

It's listening first to the community and really listening to what their needs and aspirations are and then making a move – a positive move to support them or to enable them or to co-design work with them. (Trust and Relationships Roundtable)

Example: South London Listens

South London Listens is a conglomerate of local authorities, three mental health trusts, universities, schools, colleges and community groups. The initiative focused around active listening and understanding local people's voices and feelings. They listened to 6,000 people across South London to understand what was happening during the pandemic and post-pandemic, and to gain insights into what was putting pressure on people and their families. The findings of the listening exercise led to an action plan, produced in 2022, and to direct initiatives and action to provide support to people.

Example: London Fire Brigade

The London Fire Brigade created a community engagement team after the tragedy of the Grenfell Fire. Following recommendations from the inquest around how they were engaging with their local communities, they created a community engagement team in 2020. Their plan first involved active listening, to look through the lens of the community around how they wanted to engage with the London Fire Brigade. The ultimate goal was co-design, but they understood that active listening needed to lead this.

Be clear around expectations and remit – what can be taken forward and actioned and what cannot. We had several reports that there was often a miscommunication between community organisations and policymakers/infrastructure organisations around what could be changed based on community engagement. This can lead to a growing sense of distrust. It is important when engaging with the community to scope out respective roles, and the extent or limits of power to make decisions and changes.

So there's a really fine line between going out and actually conducting too much engagement before saying sometimes they need to know what our capabilities are and what we can do. And I think that sometimes that can be a real big gap in engagement and community participation. (Electoral Politics Roundtable)

Talking about co-production, it's really about power sharing, isn't it? And that means you need to find ways to include people that don't normally get included in the processes that you are trying to engage people in. So how do we create safe spaces that are inclusive and people feel okay to be in? And then, the other side of that is trust...If you are inviting people to come and share power with you and come up with solutions with you or whatever it might be, then you need to start from a point that recognises transparency as well, isn't it? They need to know what's on the table essentially and what they can influence and what they can't. Otherwise, you know, you can end up damaging relationships with people and they lose their trust for the people with power who come back and ask them for stuff again. (Infrastructure Organisation and Funder Roundtable)

In one of the roundtable discussions we heard from an infrastructure organisation working with communities that they developed a charter which set out terms, conditions and expectations around engagement to ensure the Community Engagement process was as inclusive and receptive as possible.

We've developed a charter locally, which is a set of commitments around voice and influence and engagement. And that was kind of after three or four events with the voluntary sector commissioning in a conference with the statutory and voluntary sector where [it was] articulated in a set of commitments. So it was clear what people need to sign up to and what they need to commit to. (Policymaker and Infrastructure Roundtable)

While digital engagement can be impactful and increase accessibility for some groups, in-person engagement is crucial for others to rebuild trust and relationships. **Often a mixed method approach is most effective at targeting the highest number of individuals and range of voices.** However, this takes capacity and is why engagement needs to be adequately resourced and prioritised within strategies and budgets.

For us, I think it's reaching a balance ... and being inclusive. So there are those who are fully online or who'd like to [be], who can access online and who are digitally aware and have the capacity and capability of doing that. But there are other people who prefer to have a newsletter. There are those who like to have face-to-face conversations. We've got digital notice boards on estates, we've got newsletters, we've got, you know, now in the throes of having a new digital platform, an engagement and consultation platform, which I think most local authorities are moving towards – a wider reach. (How do communities want to engage Roundtable)

We spoke with the Newham Co-create team to understand how digital engagement can enhance resident participation and engagement. The platform's user-friendly interface enhances

transparency, fosters active citizenship, and has seen increased engagement in voting activities and continues to promote meaningful community participation in Newham. Some of the challenges faced included managing diverse ideas, addressing digital literacy and poverty issues.

CASE STUDY 8: Newham Co-create, Newham, using a digital platform to engage residents in local policy

Themes: Useful tools; genuine long term policy impact

Classification(s): Digital engagement, co-design and co-production

What is Newham Co-create?

Newham Co-create is an online engagement platform used by Newham Council for consultation and participatory processes, complementing face-to-face interactions with digital resident engagement. Various services in the council use the platform for activities such as surveys, consultations, and the participatory budgeting exercise. Initiated by the Mayor of Newham and



launched in 2018, the participatory budgeting platform allocated £250,000 to each local area in the borough, with subsequent increases in the budget allocation per neighbourhood per year. We were able to deep dive into the platform and its uses with Amelie Pollet and Kris Krishnarajah from the Newham Co-create team. The platform allows residents to set priorities, generate ideas, vote, and participate in project delivery through distinct phases, promoting transparency and engagement continuity over the platform's two-year cycle.

You can showcase the different phases of the participatory budgeting program to residents. Currently, we are running on a two-year cycle, so it's really important that residents understand how they're gonna get engaged with a longer process.

The user-friendly nature of the Newham Co-create interface has played a pivotal role in enhancing transparency and in encouraging active involvement. The team embraced a positive response by residents as a confirmation of their efforts to create a platform that resonated with the local population, fostering a sense of ownership and active citizenship.

Successes, challenges and lessons learned

The initial offline deliberation stage proved to be crucial, allowing residents to express their priorities and concerns in-depth. Through this phase, the team gained valuable insights into the specific needs and aspirations of the community, providing a solid foundation for subsequent online interactions.

Residents uploaded to the platform a diverse array of priority ideas. Due to the significant amount of funding distributed to various communities, the team then faced challenges in categorising and effectively addressing the multitude of ideas. The experience focused the team on the need for robust and streamlined processes for managing collaborative input. It also prompted them to re-evaluate their approach to idea categorisation and funding allocation, striving to strike a balance between embracing diversity and ensuring impactful outcomes.

The Newham Co-create platform demonstrated both successes and challenges. One of the primary challenges related to digital literacy and poverty, which hindered some residents' ability to engage effectively. To address this, the platform has offered in-person events.

Each community neighbourhood has a team as well who deliver the program locally and they give support to residents and organisations to upload what they need onto the platform.

Additionally, beginner computer classes at libraries aim to improve digital literacy among participants. However, residents with learning disabilities have found it difficult to navigate the platform due to information overload, prompting the organisation of co-design sessions to enhance accessibility.

On the positive side, the platform has achieved increased engagement, particularly in voting activities, resulting since its inception in over 50,000 unique visitors, who are able to receive valuable information on services. The platform is administered by a team of experienced individuals well-versed in participatory methods, fostering greater co-production. Moving forward, the platform seeks to attract new individuals and groups in Newham to participate actively. By addressing the challenges and building on their successes, the Newham Co-create platform continues to pave the way for meaningful community engagement and participation and to raise awareness about participatory budgeting platforms,

Community engagement in context

Challenges to community engagement in Newham continue to include digital exclusion, poverty, and a cost-of-living crisis, which collectively impact residents' capacity to engage in grant applications. Despite these obstacles, Newham Council exhibits a considerable number of participation and co-production initiatives, actively involving its residents in various processes. However, it is evident that not all services prioritise meaningful engagement and participation, necessitating a heightened awareness of the importance of inclusivity in community involvement. There is a recurrent pattern of certain groups being underrepresented in these processes, indicating a need for targeted outreach strategies to address this disparity. Enhancing community engagement in Newham requires a multifaceted approach that addresses these challenges and ensures that meaningful participation is fostered for all residents, as achieved through the Newham Co-create platform.

Embedding Co-design and Removing the Tick Box

The most impactful type of collaboration comes from co-design rather than consultation, which is often seen as a 'tick-box exercise' by community groups. In this section we highlight strategies to practise co-design and challenge structures that foster tick-boxing methods.

So the community should be involved in the decision making and in the design of the community engagement programme from the very beginning. (Community Organisations Roundtable)

There's a few funding programmes happening right now with Anchor, like I think it's City Bridge Trust where I think it's a good approach to open it up so that the communities, organisations themselves, can decide what they want to do with those 10 years and trust that this buy-and-for-let organisation will know what to do. And I think they also have a very flexible approach too. So you might have a plan at Year One and then you can actually change that halfway through as you see fit if it doesn't end up more aligned with the project. And I think there needs to be proper investment, long term, and flexibility. (Community Organisations Roundtable)

Where co-design is not possible, shared knowledge can be increased without great strain on capacity by including elements of co-production between organisations or between community groups. This can be useful in areas like data sharing which have previously been a barrier for some of the community groups we spoke to.

We have worked on a data-sharing project where we have shared stories and built out data points so that we can have a better understanding of both advocacy and experiences of trafficking, but also feeding back into service delivery. So that has been really interesting for understanding how people work together ... I specifically work in the anti-trafficking sector, but it is a very siloed environment and the way that Stop the Traffik was trying to move past that by doing, embracing this data sharing. (Community Organisations Roundtable)

Power dynamics will shape expectations around engagement and the way that people ‘present’ and ‘show up’ in that space. By first addressing power imbalances and purposefully creating spaces that aim to dismantle or strip away aspects of this imbalance throughout the chosen approach, more meaningful engagement and collaboration can be developed.

Example: Clever Cities in Thamesmead

Clever Cities have been working in Thamesmead alongside Peabody as part of the regeneration of the area. They have used co-design ethics and methods with residents, many of whom have felt left behind and let down by local services and authorities. They found a model for how they could recruit/train/pay local residents to be a part of the decision-making process. They work with 10 residents on a public-run project involving a variety of activities, which involve, for example, sitting in on decision-making meetings and looking at how to define success criteria. They have found this an “incredible two-way journey” and a way to build relationships.

Example: We Walworth

We Walworth is a new project to engage everyone in the neighbourhood about food and inequality in Walworth. The key to the success with this project has been the relationships at the heart of its approach. The work focuses on reflexive learning and “is an opportunity to explore whether collective understanding and collective action to create change will be what really makes a difference.”⁴

We have discussed the issues of a transactional approach and the benefits of a relational approach. In our roundtables, **we heard from policymakers that they want to be relational. However, the structures that are in place push a more transactional approach.**

Carving out the space to be relational was a real challenge for policymakers and infrastructure organisations. One recommendation from policymakers in our roundtable sessions was around prioritising community engagement in the roles of senior figures in an organisation. There was a clear recognition that senior members of staff in policy roles or funders needed to be in the room and have buy-in to the engagement process, as illustrated by a contribution in one of the roundtables:

I think as we said earlier, [it's about] the will from senior people to be engaged from the beginning. And if you engage senior people in the engagement process about how you engage, which is what we did, I'm not saying it's gonna work, but it's about acknowledging that it's these people who actually have historically created the issues. That's the point. (Infrastructure Organisation and Funder Roundtable)

The following examples illustrate how creativity has been a useful tool for collaboration, addressing power imbalances and valuing lived experience.

Example: Haringey Council: Legislative Theatre

⁴ <https://wewalworth.org.uk/>

Power imbalances can be directly addressed by focusing on an activity that strips back the professional roles of policymakers or funders in the room. For example, in 2019 Haringey Council used legislative theatre to co-create the rough sleeping strategy in Haringey. People with lived experience of homelessness and staff from the council created and performed a play about the challenges they faced in local homelessness services. From this session, staff at the council also committed to adopting the most popularly-voted policy suggestions into the strategy moving forward. This sort of commitment lets communities feel listened to and heard.

Example: Probationary: Board Game

A pilot project between The Centre for the Study of Crime, Criminalisation, and Social Exclusion at Liverpool John Moores University, the Foundation for Creative Technology, Liverpool (FACT), and the Howard League for Penal Reform. This project seeks to explore the ways in which knowledge exchange via the medium of art (animation/film/photography) can lead to a different perspective on individuals' lived experience of the criminal justice system. People on probation worked with artists to create a board game to showcase the frustration of their experience of being on probation, for example with players losing their house and going back to square one.

Our review evidenced key factors that can help build a relational approach in engagement between communities and policymakers:

- Being open and transparent around roles, responsibilities and expectations.
- Improving the feedback loops around action and accountability.
- Continuing conversations after activity has taken place.

Transparency and authentic listening. So actually reflecting the feedback of the community in what you then decide and then supporting ongoing engagement, not just [a] one-off project. (Community Organisations Roundtable)

We spoke with Poetic Unity to understand how transparency and a relational approach to programmatic work had shaped their relationship with funders.

CASE STUDY 9: Poetic Unity, Brixton, Using poetry as a means of engaging young Black people in climate justice activity

Themes: Collaboration; Lived Experience; Mental Health; Young People

Classification(s): Community-led research, community campaigning and advocacy



Poetic Unity is a charity committed to empowering young Black people in their most authentic expression of self, giving them a voice and ensuring their perspectives are valued. They foster personal growth, mental health awareness, and educational development through providing safe spaces, spoken word events and workshops. Poetic Unity was funded by Impact on Urban Health and the Purpose Foundation to develop a unique approach to engaging young Black people. The collaboration took the form of a pilot model, allowing participants to express their perspectives and share their concerns and ideas for a future with cleaner air. We spoke with Ryan Matthew-Robinson, Founder, about their experiences of engaging young Black people to think about air pollution in their local environment.

Young people used poetry as a medium to facilitate a knowledge exchange. They developed workshops facilitated by a diverse team of movement and art creatives. By creating a dedicated space to learn about air pollution and prioritise its importance, the project successfully encouraged participants to engage with the issue.

Successes, challenges and lessons learned

A key aspect of Poetic Unity's success stems from its foundation in lived experiences. The team is intentionally composed of Black and mixed-race individuals from working-class backgrounds with a profound connection with the community; this offers unique perspectives on the challenges faced by young Black people. During the project, young people recognised the gravity of air pollution, the need for climate justice and the significance of raising awareness about 'invisible illnesses.' Ryan noted that, although air pollution and climate change were such large issues, young Black people might not perceive them as actually affecting their lives due to the immediate harm caused by living through racism and poverty.

Ryan noted that funding long-standing engagement activities was key to ensuring that young people remained engaged, to provide opportunities for full-time work, and to ensure that young people could be paid for their participation. However, despite initial apprehensions about the project's longevity, based on previous experience, ongoing discussions with the Purpose and Impact on Urban Health Foundation offer promise for sustained impact and future success. For Poetic Unity, this was a key lesson in rebuilding, as the teams funding them managed their expectations of future delivery and only committed to projects that they were able to deliver and remained open and transparent throughout the process.

Whereas, when I've done stuff with Lambeth directly, we'll do one workshop or one event and then there's no conversation to even think about what are we gonna do next or how are we gonna continue this work....It's kind of like, as and when they contact us

Ryan highlighted the need for continuous communication, a clear contact person within Lambeth Council and dedicated dialogue between the council and the community. Lambeth should also gain a better understanding of community organisations and their tangible impact on the ground.

Community engagement in context

The cost-of-living crisis is hindering young people's ability to connect with others and leading to social isolation. To address this, Poetic Unity established a programme enabling Black young people to participate in cultural activities, for example, funding cinema trips. Poetic Unity characterised community engagement as obtaining an understanding of the communities they serve and collaborating with grassroots organisations, which they believe play a crucial role. Furthermore, maintaining trust and upholding values were vital to avoid exploitation during engagement activities – supporting and not hurting the very people they aimed to empower.

Strength in Numbers

Enabling capacity building and cohort creation

Traditional funding approaches, such as providing money to organisations without a deeper understanding of their challenges and successes can draw criticism as being paternalistic. Comic

Relief stopped using the term ‘grant’ in 2018,⁵ to reflect a change from a paternalistic approach, shifting the language used to terms such as ‘investment’, ‘initiative’ or ‘funding opportunities.’

In recent years, we have seen funders take an approach which provides not purely funding, but can also provide other forms of support useful to build environments rich for capacity building and collaboration. This broader funder approach enables collaboration between groups who have common goals and different strengths and skill sets. It also re-shapes the relationship between grantees and funders to move away from a paternalistic, purely financially-based transactional relationship, towards a more human-centred and capacity-building relational model.

Example: MOPAC Violence Against Women and Girls Grassroots Fund

A first round of funding was delivered between 2021-2023. This fund has now been relaunched for its 2023-2025 cycle.⁶ It will continue to focus on supporting the resilience of organisations working to end violence against women and girls in minoritised and marginalised communities. Two-year grants of up to £100,000 will be provided, together with capacity building, networking opportunities and monitoring support.

Example: Breathe London Community Programme

This network is an exciting three-year programme that aims to provide 60 fully-funded Breathe London Nodes to community groups and organisations across London. The programme is run by the Environmental Research Group at Imperial College London, with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies. As well as providing successful organisations with a physical air pollution node, they deliver a learning partner programme, including regular learning events, focus groups and an online social media platform to share ideas, build collective knowledge, and plan campaigns with other groups in the network around the air pollution agenda.

In our research, community organisations reported that they felt unable to be always candid in communicating feedback to funders, for risk of souring a relationship they are reliant on for financial survival. Through building a more relational approach, engagement may be opened up.

Policymakers spoke about how finding others with similar ideas around achieving effective community engagement could be a great tool for building this change in approach.

I think it's then finding other people in the organisation who want to make those changes. So there is a growing number of people in the GLA who want to make change, who want to engage with communities, who want to work from the bottom up. And I think it's finding those people and then looking at how you can amplify these collective values that you want to take forward in a bigger sphere, or how we can amplify them in each of our different day jobs so that we actually are more than the sum of the parts. (Trust and Relationships Roundtable)

How to engage marginalised and underrepresented communities

Some of the policymakers we spoke to in this mapping research felt that, despite efforts to engage certain communities, some communities were ‘hard to reach’ and simply did not want to be involved in engagement. As we explored above, there could be many reasons communities were unlikely to engage – from historical mistreatment leading to scepticism, to mistrust, and to capacity issues. However, it should be noted that engagement styles used may not be suitable for some communities.

⁵

<https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/comic-relief-commit-to-even-distribution-of-all-publicly-raised-funds-by-next-year.html>

⁶ <https://londoncf.org.uk/grants/vawg-grassroots-fund>

For example, spaces to engage families and hard-to-reach communities need to be culturally appropriate so they are safe spaces to talk, connect and engage.

[When] we work with young children and families, it kind of feels that often the opportunities to speak are not really best done through giving a form or even a kind of a very direct conversation. The opportunities are usually better developed through a shared creative experience and what you often find is [...] you hear the most interesting things from people as they're just chatting, and as they get up to go or leave a session or, you know, it's that kind of playful approach where it's the doing it through art or doing it through play...It doesn't sort of matter what your language is or your background is. (Community Organisations Roundtable)

Something that worked well on a multi-generational project around the regeneration of a social housing estate was that, when we went into a local school, we interviewed young people, but they were very nervous about an appearance as part of a documentary. So we made avatars, they made avatars, and learned some very basic animation skills. So they knew that on screen their thoughts and views would be represented by their avatars rather than them appearing as themselves on screen. (Community Organisations Roundtable)

Often, policymakers said that when they had tried to engage communities, certain issues were much easier to engage communities on than others. For example, if a community member is currently struggling with their housing situation, this was more likely to take priority for them than engaging on an unrelated separate issue.

Community connectors, such as faith leaders, can often usefully help to connect with communities. It is important to consider positionality – the differences in social position and power that shape identities and access – especially in historically marginalised communities who may lack trust in mainstream institutions.

It can just be so helpful to actually get a third party, like a facilitator or someone from the community, to help facilitate those conversations, rather than it being like as a funder or as a person with the power – kind of like inviting people in and making it so that they have to take a risk. So if you can do it in a third space or with a third person helping to make that happen, I think that can help kind of equalise just the environment of the room a little bit. (Infrastructure Organisation and Funder Roundtable)

Example: Southwark Council

Southwark Council wanted to strengthen their relationship with faith-based organisations. They developed a faith-based strategy plan alongside local faith leaders in the borough. This plan was co-designed by local faith leaders and a consultation with the community also took place. This approach also connected faith leaders with one another to share knowledge among different faith communities.

Most importantly, these approaches all underpin **asset-based community development (ABCD)**. This is an approach that recognises the strength within the diversity of skills and lived experiences of all individuals that make up a community. The approach uses skills and tools for these assets to be celebrated and contribute towards decision making.

We spoke with Climate Action Lewisham about their successful community street engagement where they sought to engage local residents in a conversation around climate change – a topic that can often be divisive and difficult to engage communities in. This example describes how using an artist who was in tune with the local community and environment, and employing creative methods, allowed for successful engagement.

CASE STUDY 10: Climate Action Lewisham, Lewisham, Exploring community connections on car-free streets

Themes: community action; traffic pollution; arts and the environment

Classification(s): Community outreach and information, community campaigning and advocacy

Climate Action Lewisham (CAL) is a resident-led action group who seek to generate new initiatives that reduce the carbon footprint and promote healthy living practices. Lewisham was selected as the London Borough of Culture in 2022. As part of this, CAL was funded to deliver a community streets programme to promote conversations about climate change through community connections once busy streets were made traffic free for three to four hours. We spoke with Titania Krimpas, a volunteer at Climate Action Lewisham, to deep dive into this engagement activity. Over three Sundays, CAL facilitated road closures of three roads in Lewisham that were known to have high car usage, working with councillors, transport and emergency services to ensure smooth delivery.

On event day, a community mural was set up where residents could artistically express their views on climate change. Residents were asked to imagine what their streets would look and feel like if it were traffic free. The CAL team understood the need to embed artistic and cultural nuance into the project and partnered with a local community artist, Salina Gani, to facilitate these sessions. Following these events, the residents' artwork was made available in local libraries and residents had conversations with one another that centred on the greater connectivity enabled by traffic-free streets. Titania noted that residents often did not have the time or energy to engage with climate activism, but most could feel the difference cleaner air brought to their daily lives. The conversation around climate change therefore needed to start differently, from a point that did not feel divisive or polemic, but engaging yet complex.

Successes, challenges and lessons learned

One of the project's successes was the use of a community-focused local artist, who was able to navigate difficult conversations on the day and ensure residents were engaged in the activity at hand. During the course of the project, over 450 residents engaged with the community streets programme, with many noting that similar events were not always accessible to them as they had to pay to attend. One of the main lessons learned was that events needed to be planned carefully, with flexibility and an achievable end goal. Furthermore, CAL felt policy-maker engagement was key to ensuring the project's success; they needed to be excited to engage, especially with initiatives that centred on new ways of working. Closing the feedback loop with policymakers following verbal conversations was another lesson learned through the project.



Community engagement in context

CAL reported that good community engagement was born out of humility, taking a back seat in conversations and being reachable to community members. Engaging residents in climate change

activity was particularly difficult in an economic downturn, with most residents using their energy to just survive. To mitigate this, policymakers should seek to trust the experience of community organisations currently engaging with communities, and actively seek out their voices in policy development.

Approaches, Tools and Resources

Are there any particular approaches, tools or resources that are needed to support and improve engagement with regional, decision-making organisations?

Investing in tools that enable tracking relationships and growing confidence and skills

Online tools that facilitate a sharing of relationships and learning are useful to develop cross-departmental knowledge-sharing in organisations. This knowledge-sharing is also crucial for sustaining knowledge and relationships when individuals leave an organisation.

Investing in training and resourcing that prioritise sustainability in community engagement

One theme that emerged repeatedly from our review was a lack of confidence among policymakers and funders to carry out community engagement, which acted as a major barrier. To resolve this, training for professionals on how to hold space for communities and engage communities is essential.

Training and understanding around engagement will also help provide ways for policymakers to communicate confidently about their remit and limitations, and to build relationships with stakeholders that support this.

Individuals working in community engagement told us that presenting examples of successful community engagement to senior management can strengthen the case for the importance of doing engagement well, and the need to allocate time and resources for this.

Utilising and raising awareness around good engagement practice and poor engagement practices

Our findings on good and poor practices can be shared among policymakers to raise awareness, and to highlight choices available and inform decisions about engagement activities. Our findings can be made accessible through:

- The summaries emerging from the research around key barriers and challenges that make communities less willing to engage
- Our classification of different types of activities and where they have been used (see page 18).

We have also drilled into tools and guidance on how to address power imbalances within the engagement and policy-making space. It is important for policymakers and funders to have internal discussions on how to work with communities to deliver the change together, making it more accessible and less hierarchical.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In summary, this project aimed to map community engagement across London to identify collaborative engagement methods that evidence current, innovative approaches to decision making. Through our research we found that communities and policymakers engaged with one another through various channels, using different methodologies at each time point. We have suggested and proposed a reclassification of community engagement through our community engagement typology, based on the engagement community organisations deliver independent of policymaker oversight.. This presents a non-hierarchical approach to classifying community engagement in the capital.

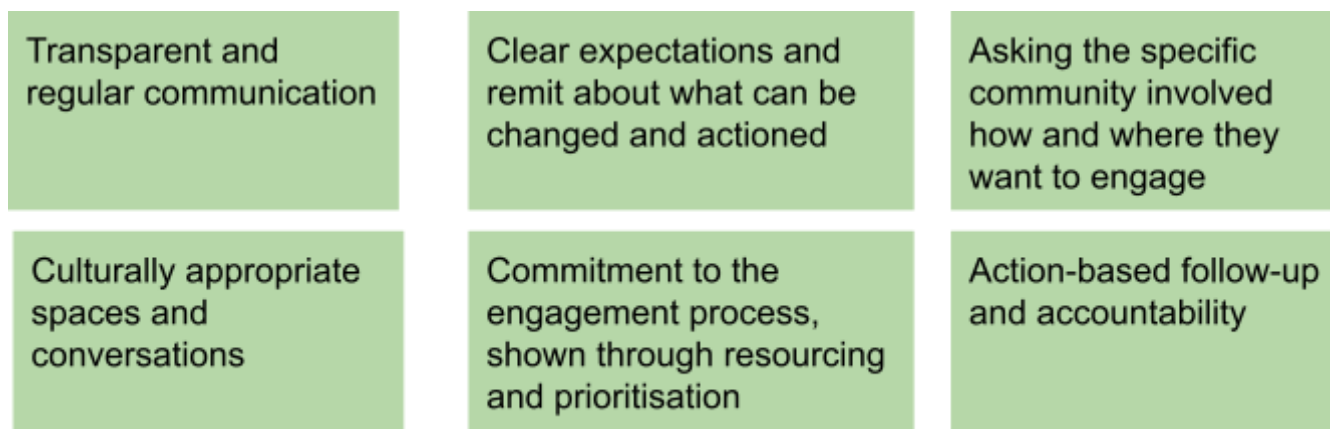
We sought to understand the barriers and facilitators to effective engagement. Our discussions with policymakers and communities demonstrated that cultivating and maintaining trust is the linchpin of engagement endeavours. This necessitates unambiguous expectations between both parties, gradually nurturing relationships, and cultivating an environment characterised by respect and transparency. Our findings have emphasised the pivotal role of communication and a relational approach to relationship-building at every stage of the engagement process. From project ideation to delivery, the importance of sustained, straightforward and human-centric communication remained key to ensuring successful engagement.

Additionally, appropriate feedback mechanisms were found to be integral to successful sharing of insights and updates between communities and policymakers, giving communities the opportunity to witness tangible outcomes from their involvement. Such feedback also fosters collaboration when strategies are being refined and is particularly helpful when engaging with communities defined as 'hard to reach'. A twofold approach is important to enabling collaboration:

- understanding the needs of people in the room
- understanding the objectives of the exercise and who is accountable for what.

From the mapping, we have summarised the conditions all stakeholders can contribute to in order to build effective community engagement in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Conditions for building effective community engagement



When transitioning to non-extractive approaches to engagement, stakeholders continued to maintain the importance of relational approaches to engagement. Communities emphasised that engagement initiatives must put community requests and lived experiences at the centre. Doing this

could consist of tangible measures, such as providing support services, like childcare, to facilitate broader participation, and giving communities agency to steer the course of the engagement agenda. Policymakers might note the importance of a relational approach, but a desire to adopt it was often constrained by structures that pushed them to transactional approaches to engagement. They are frequently working with limited resources, internal bureaucracy and time constraints that all act as barriers to sustained engagement with communities. This can be overcome by maintaining open and honest lines of communication and changing to organisational procedures which facilitate expansive relationships between stakeholders. These shifts need to be sustained organisation-wide to ensure long-term successful engagement with communities.

Our findings accentuate the importance of embracing discomfort and navigating difficult conversations within the engagement process. These conversations can be navigated through digital engagement tools and investing in training which bolsters policymakers' confidence to explore these avenues.

Recommendations

We have developed a set of recommendations for policymakers, funders and community organisations based on our research findings.

Recommendations for policymakers/funders

- Go back to basics. During our discussions about innovative ways of engagement in this mapping process, we often found the most effective methods to be the simplest. **Go to where communities are, and ask them what they need.** Communities are understanding if policymakers are unable to meet particular needs and require clear, honest communication throughout the engagement process. The sentiment from communities is that if policymakers do the 'little things' well, often relationships between themselves and community members naturally fall into place.
- Policymakers should **prioritise a relational approach to community engagement.** This approach will help rebuild trust within communities. When organisational infrastructure poses a barrier to relational engagement, cultural and infrastructural changes within organisations are required to ensure relationships with communities are centralised. These need to be mandated from the top down and require buy-in from senior management.
 - This can look like **protecting time and capacity for staff members to engage with communities and deepen relationships.**
- **Improvements are needed in the knowledge-sharing landscape** to ensure innovation and best practice is captured and shared.
 - **We need a London wide network of participatory grantmakers.** Many are interested in the process of participatory grantmaking but are unsure of best practice. A network will facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing and strengthen partnership working between different organisations.
 - **Feedback loops need to be in place to ensure the community knows how their participation has helped shape services/strategy.** This could take the form of a 'You Said, We Did' approach, and digital and physical updates in community forums to name a few. Feedback methods should take the community's needs into account and where possible, the approach should be co-created with communities directly.
- **Community engagement should be everyone's responsibility.** Community engagement often falls within the remit of a few departments within local authorities/funding organisations. If the role of the organisation, such as a local authority, is to serve the needs of the

community, there needs to be a greater commitment organisation-wide to ensure that all are actively engaging and visible to communities. For example, a community organisation that has a poor relationship with the housing department within a local authority might be unwilling to engage with the community engagement arm.

- In many instances, relationships with community members might solely be the role of a handful of officers or grantmakers within an organisation. It would be helpful for **organisations to map who holds different relationships and the nature of the connection**. This will highlight relationships that still need to be developed and require organisations to deepen their intra-departmental relationships. Ultimately, it will lead to greater visibility.
- **Communities need to be remunerated for their engagement.** While many organisations actively remunerate community engagement, there is varied practice in the sector.
- **Policymakers should use a mixed method approach to engagement** to ensure they target a wide range of voices within the community. The Community Engagement Typology can be used to guide policymakers to identify best engagement practice based on their programmatic objectives.

Recommendations for community members/organisations

- Both communities and policymakers would prefer a more relational approach to engaging with one another; this can take time and patience to develop. **It is important to express concerns and ideas clearly and directly, so that policymakers can consider and address these concerns properly.** If community members take a relational engagement approach when interacting with policymakers, this can foster better communication and understanding between teams.
- When engaging with policymakers, community members should ensure that they are **clear about their expectations and remit** to avoid miscommunication and unrealistic expectations.
 - We have heard of community organisations developing a local charter of commitments. This can be adapted to project needs.

Implementation of our research findings

To help this research to be implemented and the lessons to be shared, we will produce resources that can be used and distributed to and by a range of stakeholders. In our Future of Participation event: 'How to nurture meaningful engagement?' We asked all participants to share their confidence around engagement at the beginning of the session and the end. At the beginning of the session, 13% of the participants did not feel confident at all. However, at the end of the session the percentage of participants who did not feel confident dropped to zero.

TSIP in partnership with the GLA hope that the findings of this mapping serves to strengthen collaboration across London and provide fertile ground for effective community engagement.

APPENDICES

Glossary and Acronyms

Co-design: actively involving stakeholders in the design process, including the opinions of partners and end-users

Co-production: actively involving stakeholders to reach collective outputs and outcomes, ensuring that those who are most affected by a policy or service help to decide on its development

Extractive approach: engaging with communities by taking information and expertise *from* people, rather than engaging *with* them in a two-way process.

Feedback loop: a process in community engagement in which outcomes from engagement are fed back to those involved transparently, so that communities understand the result of their involvement and any next steps

GLA: Greater London Authority

Ideation: development of ideas or policy from their conception to their implementation,

Inclusion: being mindful of a broad range of users and their varied abilities and circumstances.

Intersectionality:

LGBT+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender +

LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual +

Minoritised: where an individual or group is made subordinate to a more dominant group, including being poorly represented and marginalised.

Relational approach: a way of interacting or communication with others that embodies values such as respect, inclusiveness, honesty and cooperation

SEND: Special Needs and Disabilities

Transactional approach: pragmatic, driven by existing ways of doing things, looking to get the job done, rather than driven by values and principles.

TSIP: The Social Innovation Partnership

VAWG Fund: Violence Against Women and Girls Grassroots Fund

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