

Guide to Online Participation

The Guide to Online Participation will help State servants identify and develop exciting and innovative ways to engage with New Zealanders in policy and service design and delivery.

This work contributes to achieving a world-class professional State Services. The current Guide to Online Participation is the first step in an evolving area of theory and practice - it will be tested and refined, and we require your help to improve its contents.

To comment on the guide or share your ideas and experiences about online participation, please email participation@ssc.govt.nz to be set up with access to the ParticipationNZ wiki (at <http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz>).

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How to use the Guide

The principles, processes and tools set out in this Guide are a starting point for making online participation work in your own context. Critically, there are no checklists: this Guide offers a basic walkthrough of the issues and risks associated with online participation. Your own judgement, experience, knowledge and creativity are needed for your success.

For new practitioners, this Guide is a practical primer for engaging people online. For more experienced practitioners, it is a call to find creative and effective ways of engaging the public, using information and communication technology, especially Web 2.0 technologies and social media.

This Guide focuses on online participation only. It does not cover electronic voting (e-voting) in elections which falls under the responsibility of the Chief Electoral Office.

The Guide was drafted online which is reflected in its structure and format. The sections are interconnected and relevant resources are hyperlinked to allow you to follow alternative paths through the material, depending on your interests and focus. There are three main parts.

- **Overview** - provides a brief but holistic introduction to Online Participation for all readers.
- **Snapshot** - offers a strategic review of each section's essential elements for policy officials and business managers.
- **Full story** - provides in-depth assessment and more operational detail for those responsible for putting it all into practice.

1. Introducing the Guide to Online Participation

[A guide for navigating online participation.](#) This section provides a quick introductory tour of the main issues addressed in the Guide to Online Participation.

2. Purpose

[Why have a guide?](#) This section defines the scope and purpose of the Guide to Online Participation.

3. Principles

[Sound principles can stand the test of time.](#) This section sets out the core principles for online participation.

4. Implementation

[Good design puts principles into practice.](#) This section describes how to design successful online participation.

[Project management is where design hits reality.](#) This section describes how to successfully manage online participation.

[Evaluating to learn, learning to evaluate.](#) This section provides guidance for evaluating online participation.

5. Resources

[Want more? Need help? Look here.](#) This section provides tools, case studies, a glossary and links to useful resources for online participation projects

1. When government engages, Online Participation - an Introduction

Welcome and Kia Ora

E-government is about putting people first. It's not just about technology – it's about making government work for everyone.

People who are affected by public policy and services are in a good position to help improve them. Online participation is one way of seeking their views. It also responds to people's expectations that they will be more involved in the design and delivery of policy and services.

The Guide to Online Participation will help State servants navigate the complex and exciting terrain of technology-enabled public engagement. It embodies government commitment to achieving a world class professional State Services. This document introduces the Guide and highlights its key points.

The Guide is meant as a first step in an evolving area of theory and practice. It encourages us all to lead the way in applying and testing it. Given the pace of change, the Guide will go on being refined and improved based on new evidence and wider experience. Above all, the Guide is designed to reassure and encourage State servants as they explore innovative ways to engage with New Zealanders on the policies and services that matter most to them.

Download the Guide

Copies of the Guide to Online Participation can be found at: <http://participation.e.govt.nz>

This website provides a host of practical resources to build capacity and promote good practice across the State Services.

Get Started

- Apply the Guide.
- Improve the Guide.
- Share your experience.
- Visit the Participation wiki (<http://wiki.participation.e.govt.nz/wiki/>) for more resources.
- Ask us for advice: participation@ssc.govt.nz

Technology is changing

Personal computers and the Internet are increasingly facts of life in New Zealand.

Close to two-thirds of New Zealand's households are now online. Business, government and people use the Web to work, shop and play. Connecting is becoming easier than ever.

But the Digital Strategy goals of improved connection, confidence and content have yet to be achieved for all New Zealanders.

Today, 90 percent of young New Zealanders (15-24 years) have a mobile phone in their pocket. Today's digital generation are New Zealand's future. They will expect a 24/7 government that responds to their needs and is open to their ideas.

Just as New Zealanders are changing so too is the Internet. New applications allow users to create, share and link content as they develop communities on an unprecedented scale. These new interconnections are facilitated by the Internet - but extend beyond it.

This emerging online space is characterised by social networks, collaboration, expression and creativity. By linking ideas, stories and experience it provides a new public resource for collective action.

Online participation helps tap this new resource by making information available, enhancing consultation and providing new platforms for engagement.

So is technology the only thing that's changing?

People are changing

Trends

New Zealand will have greater ethnic diversity in the future. By 2039, one in four New Zealanders will be aged 65 or over. Two-thirds of New Zealand's population growth until 2026 will be in the Auckland region.

Voices

- *[Public servants] don't understand the real community environment. They just don't know, even though they think they know. -- Community leader*
- *Allow us to be valued participants in the formulation of policy, permit us to share our combined wisdom with you and most of all respect the voluntary commitment we continue to gift to our individual communities and allow us to sit at the table as equals. -- Community leader*
- *The technology is lovely but where is public participation valued? If we don't have buy-in from civil servants and MPs we won't get far. -- Workshop participant*
- *...just jump on the website, click a button and suddenly we're participating with the government. Because we like everything to be instant, that's why we carry our phones around with us all the time. -- Secondary school student*

Expectations

New Zealanders' trust in public services depends on:

- their confidence that public servants do a good job
- the public service providing services that meet their needs
- public servants treating people fairly
- the public service keeping its promises
- the public service admitting responsibility when it makes mistakes.

So how do these changes affect services and policy?

Online participation can help

Online participation can help ministers and State servants:

make existing policy and services fit better with people's experiences and needs

navigate future uncertainty by tapping people's knowledge and experience to design better policies and services

focus the public's good will and knowledge on significant, complex problems that need local solutions (e.g. climate change, obesity, road safety).

Online participation can help people:

- understand the purposes and processes involved in designing and delivering policies and programmes
- enhance accountability for the results of policies and programmes
- contribute to improving policies and services affecting them
- create communities around issues people see as important.

Online participation cannot:

- make decisions for Ministers and State servants
- be the only means of reaching out to people -- many may not have access to the Internet
- be just about government -- it's about creating a two-way conversation.

So is anyone doing it in New Zealand?

Public institutions have to change

The Couch

The Couch (<http://www.thecouch.org.nz>) is the Families Commission's online panel. Since April 2006, 3000 people have signed up to answer online questionnaires and short polls that help the commission better understand the experience of New Zealand families.

One year on, The Couch is integral to the commission's policy process. Its latest national consultation with parents, children and caregivers on out-of-school services mixed traditional social research, in-person consultation workshops and 600 responses to The Couch questionnaire to create a compelling, detailed picture of people's concerns.

Safe As Road Safety Forum

The National Road Safety Committee, led by the Ministry of Transport, held 'pre-policy' stakeholder engagement workshops around New Zealand in July 2006. A critical component was the Safe As Road Safety Forum (www.safeas.govt.nz). The forum is an online discussion board for stakeholders to engage the Ministry and each other in a discussion about road safety policy for New Zealand.

The discussions helped steer the National Road Safety Policy Statement, issued on 13 December 2006 by the Minister of Transport, Hon Annette King, and Transport Safety

Minister, Hon Harry Duynhoven. Long after the end of the official process, the road safety forum community lives on, adding value to ongoing policy development. Ministry staff continue to use the platform to work with stakeholders, share ideas and supply information to concerned individuals. Open attitudes and collegial relationships built online have meant fewer requests under the Official Information Act and letters to Ministers.

Toi te Taiao: the Bioethics Council

Toi te Taiao: the Bioethics Council (www.bioethics.org.nz) engages New Zealanders in discussing the cultural, spiritual and ethical aspects of biotechnology. To date, the council has facilitated dialogue on human embryo testing, human gene modification and animal-to-human gene transplantation.

By combining the expertise of scientists, ethicists and religious leaders, with the skill of facilitation and communication professionals, the council has engaged thousands of members of the general public in face-to-face, deliberative discussions about these highly complex and sensitive issues. Its online efforts support this engagement, supplying digestible and interesting content to inform and encourage discussion.

Can we mainstream online participation?

Prepare for the future today

Meeting the needs of New Zealanders and serving the government of the day calls for a world class State Services ...

... one that can harness the power of technology-enabled interactivity, collaboration and engagement to design better services and policies ...
... today and tomorrow.

Why has the State Services Commission produced this Guide?

To promote State Services that are networked, co-ordinated, accessible and trusted. To help agencies reap the benefits and mitigate the risks of online participation. To produce better designed and more responsive policies and services.

How has the State Services Commission produced this Guide?

With the input and advice of members of a wide-ranging Participation Community of Practice, drawn from central and local government, the private sector and civil society.

By 2020, people's engagement with the government will have been transformed, as increasing and innovative use is made of the opportunities offered by network technologies.

How do we promote good practice?

Apply principles

Clarity

Be clear. Be open and transparent about the objectives, limits, resources and potential impacts of online participation.

Respect

Demonstrate respect. Respect for the contributions, perspectives, values and prerogatives of people, stakeholders, elected representatives and public servants.

Confidence and commitment

Build confidence as a basis for commitment. Online participation is a new practice for decision makers, people and stakeholders. Give it time, prove its worth.

Creativity

Be creative. New tools mean new approaches. Success hinges on innovation.

Inclusion

Be inclusive. Go to where people are. Make every effort to ensure accessibility and connect with all relevant communities, online and off.

Accountability

Be accountable. Online participation is a multi-stakeholder process where everyone is accountable.

Achievement

Make a difference. Strive for, build on and celebrate achievements in using online participation as a means for people, government, communities and businesses to achieve their goals.

Tools for engaging online will change over time. Principles guiding their application must be future-proof.

What next?

Help chart the path to 2020

2007 Test and review the Guide Online resource pool Mentoring

2010 Capacity building Performance review Evaluation

2020 Intrinsic and embedded Multilingual & mobile platforms Longitudinal analysis

Finding the Guide

Copies of the Guide to Online Participation can be found at <http://participation.e.govt.nz>

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Endnotes

The Digital Strategy: Creating our Digital Future (2005).

See: <http://www.digitalstrategy.govt.nz>

Picture of the Internet by Hal Burch and Bill Cheswick, appeared in Wired Magazine (December 1998). See: <http://www.cheswick.com/ches/map/gallery/wired.gif>

Statistics New Zealand Population Projections.

See: <http://www.stats.govt.nz/datasets/population/population-projections.htm>

Satisfaction and Trust in the State Services (2007).

See: <http://www.ssc.govt.nz/display/document.asp?DocID=6049>