



Australian Government
**Department of Industry,
Innovation and Science**

A Guide To The Right Engagement



ABOUT THE GUIDE

The Guide is designed to assist the Australian Public Service (APS) in choosing the right engagement for the problem at hand. It is made up of two components: the Diagnostic and Catalogue.

The **Diagnostic** is designed to work hand in glove with the Catalogue. The Diagnostic helps you choose the right engagement type for your problem. Through a series of questions, it prompts you to think about the complexity of the problem, and the time and resources available before recommending the most suitable engagement approach.

The **Catalogue** then directs you to a number of potential engagement processes that complement the recommended engagement approach. For example, if the Diagnostic recommends undertaking deliberation, the Catalogue will help you consider whether you should do this through a workshop or citizens' panel. Please see the [Problem Scenario Walkthrough](#) for practical examples.

The Guide also includes a list of digital platforms and resources that could help you achieve a successful outcome from your engagement. This list is not exhaustive. The purpose is to give you an idea of what kind of approaches are out there.

It is important that you are clear on what you are trying to achieve as this will assist you in selecting the right engagement process. Some considerations that should be taken into account when choosing an approach include:

- Is the problem you are trying to solve simple, complicated or complex? Or, are you simply wanting to share information?
- How much influence do you want participants to have at each stage of your process?
- Do you want to involve the participants in the decision making process? Do you want to weigh up evidence and balance competing interests with participants, or on your own after receiving their input?
- Do you want to involve the participants as partners in implementing an agreed solution together?

WHAT KIND OF PROBLEM IS IT?

In selecting the right way to engage, the Guide divides the problem or challenge into three categories: simple, complicated and complex.

A policy problem is simple if:

- The problem is predominantly or entirely objective and based on facts.
- The problem is known and well understood, and a solution has already been decided.

A policy problem is complicated if:

- Multiple stakeholders are involved, and there is a high potential for finding a win/win solution.
- People's lived experiences are involved, and must be supported by quantitative data.
- The problem is somewhat understood, however more information is needed to fully grasp it.

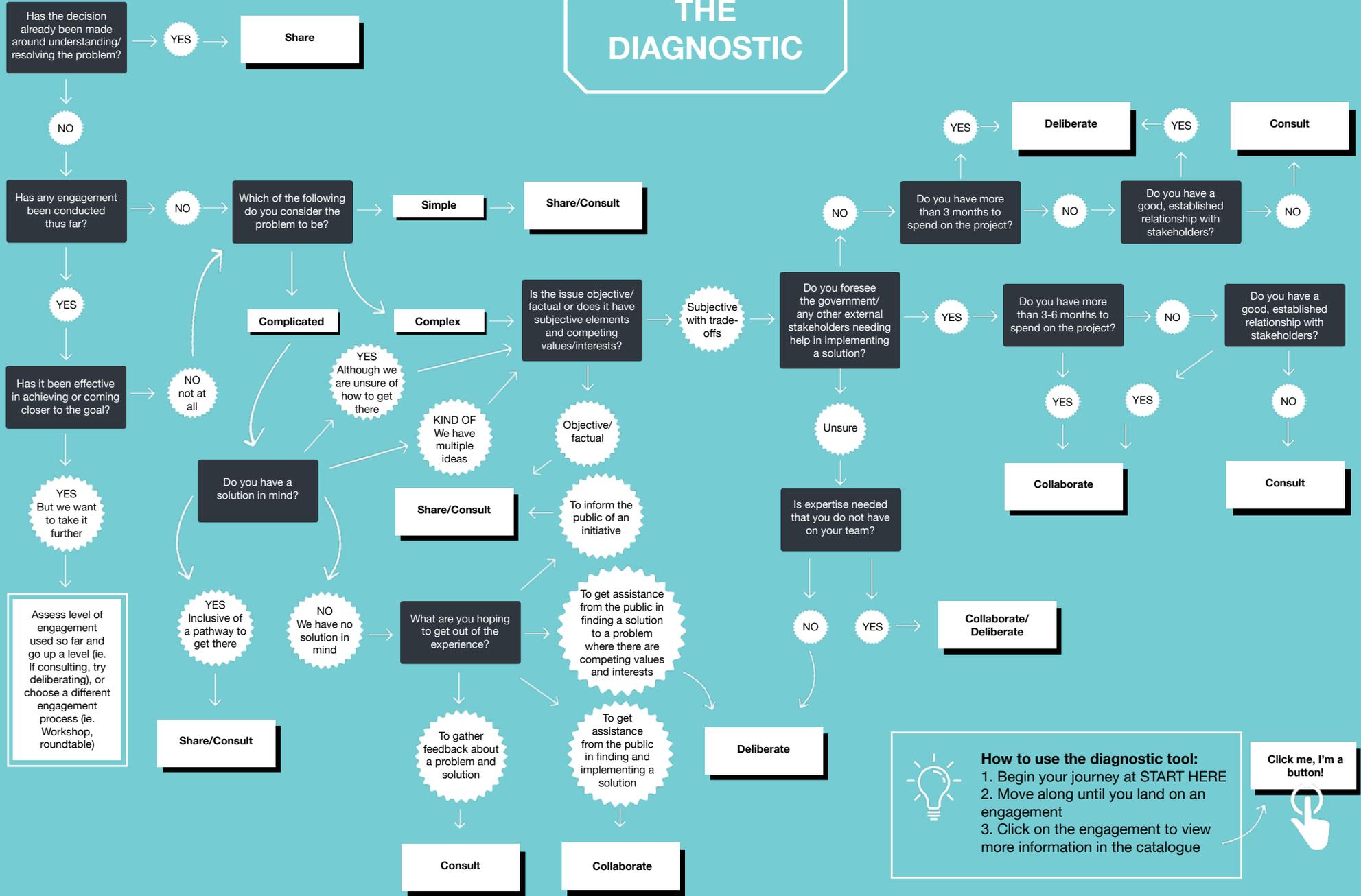
A policy problem is complex if:

- No one person or organisation has the resources to solve the problem alone, including the government.
- The problem may not be understood, and still needs to be defined or framed.
- Multiple stakeholders are involved, and any potential solutions will likely create some winners and losers.

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START HERE

THE DIAGNOSTIC



How to use the diagnostic tool:

1. Begin your journey at START HERE
2. Move along until you land on an engagement
3. Click on the engagement to view more information in the catalogue

Click me, I'm a button!

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF A CONSULTATIVE, DELIBERATIVE OR COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The Australian Public Service (APS) Framework for Engagement and Participation outlines four ways in which the APS engage with communities, businesses and citizens.

They are:

Share

When government tells the public about a government initiative

Consult

When government gathers feedback from the public about a problem or a solution

Deliberate

When government seeks help from the public to frame and/or solve a problem

Collaborate

When government seeks help from the public to find and implement a solution

Matching The Right Engagement Approach To The Process

When **sharing**, communication is one-way, from the government to the public. Typically, people receive factual information to describe an event, new initiative or changes to an existing process.

When **consulting**, the engagement process chosen needs to ensure that the public's views are ascertained, and taken into account when making decisions. Once public views are understood on an issue, officials can then take this into account before making a final decision. Please note that the stakeholders and/citizens are not part of the deliberation process. Consultation is typically used for problem that are not overly complex, but neither is it simple.

Issues today are increasingly complex and often require a difficult balancing of interests. Deliberation helps ensure these choices are seen as legitimate and acceptable by stakeholders and/or citizens by giving them a meaningful role in the process. When **deliberating**, the engagement process chosen needs to provide an opportunity for participants to listen to one another, learn about each other's concerns, discuss their similarities and differences, weigh evidence, and work together to strike a better balance between competing values and interests, and so on. It is typically used when the problem is complicated or complex.

When **collaborating** the engagement process chosen needs to facilitate a commitment between people, organisations, and governments to coordinate their efforts and the use of their resources in order to achieve a shared goal. Deliberation is an essential part of building and sustaining such projects. Deliberation helps decision-makers solve complex issues by engaging stakeholders and/or citizens in making trade-offs, setting objectives, and so on. However, this will not be enough to fully resolve some issues. That is why collaboration requires all the components of a deliberative engagement plus more. This is typically used for a complex problem.

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ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES

There are many engagement processes that could be used to achieve your engagement outcome. Below are some examples of different types of processes that might be suited to the challenge before you. This is just a guideline, and is not intended to be exhaustive.



SHARING/CONSULTING

Forums

What is it?

- A meeting or medium where ideas and views on a particular issue can be exchanged on a regular basis.
- Often the people gathered share similar interest, and are there to express their views on a specific topic.
- An example would be the Open Government Forum, a group comprised of members from government and civil society that monitors and drives implementation of the Open Government National Action Plan at a monthly meeting of its members.

When should it be used?

Forums are typically used for sharing information or for a consultative type of engagement on a particular stream of work or project, in order to obtain buy-in or approval, and/or to provide advice and guidance. They are not generally used to undertake deliberative engagement due to the larger number of participants that usually attend. However, they can be designed to be more deliberative by including structured activities in smaller groups that would allow participants to discuss and weigh up competing interests in order to propose a solution.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Regular events help to maintain momentum, commitment and enthusiasm and encourages wider participation as the activities of the forum develop.	Not a representative sample because it often comprise representatives from existing groups rather than individuals from the community.
Can be an effective way of involving excluded or hard to reach groups by creating an arena directed towards the concerns of specific groups.	May become 'talking shops' rather than action-oriented.
Can address specific concerns.	Potential for them to become rule-bound and bureaucratic.

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SHARING/CONSULTING

Street Stalls

What is it?

- Street Stalls consist of outdoor displays such as idea or graffiti walls which can be used to capture the views and comments of large numbers of people.
- Maps and plans for an area or project can be displayed and people passing by are asked to comment or vote on particular issues and themes, activities or facilities, generate ideas.
- Choosing a busy public location can help to achieve high levels of participation and generate interest in the project from those who may not otherwise get involved. The approach can be organised to coincide with other events e.g. community festival.

When should it be used?

Street stalls are a great medium to raise awareness on a subject matter, or to generate interest in a project. It could also be used gather quick feedback on a proposed policy or program change from a large number of people. It is best suited for information sharing or consultation.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Can collect the views of large numbers of people.	Can generate a large amount of disparate data.
Can be interactive.	Requires advance planning and preparation and is resource intensive.
Engages and generates interest.	Requires several facilitators to engage with people.
Can reach people who may not normally participate.	Event may be affected by weather conditions.

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SHARING/CONSULTING

Public or Town Hall Meetings

What is it?

- A meeting convened with members of the public or a community for a specific purpose or goal.
- There is no single format. Some may be informational, while others may encourage a greater degree of participation from the group.
- They provide an opportunity to consult large numbers of people, but can also be organised to allow for small group discussions with oral feedback.
- Typically public meetings are advertised, have some sort of chairperson or facilitator and involve obtaining feedback from the community on issue at hand.

When should it be used?

It is a great way to share information and/or to consult in order to seek diverse feedback from the public or a community.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Enables large numbers of people to have their say.	Unlikely to be representative - not everyone has the time or inclination to attend.
Provides an opportunity to explain processes, give information and gather feedback.	Attendance is often low unless people feel personally or deeply concerned (i.e., people with vested interests).
Demonstrates openness and transparency.	Some people are likely to be inhibited from speaking in a large group.
Can attract publicity or be used as a launch event.	Traditional formats can limit audience contribution and lead to conflict.
Enables participants to develop networks.	If confrontational it may lead to poor media/ publicity.

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CONSULTING

Roundtables

What is it?

- Roundtable discussions can be used as a tool for consensus building. They have multi-stakeholder involvement, operate by consensus and can generate co-operation.
- All participants involved are equal — there is no leader but there may be a chair or facilitator.
- The key factors to consider are representativeness of members; selection and duties of members; size (usually up to 24 members); facilitators; budget and the decision-making processes.

When should it be used?

Roundtables are best suited to gathering views and generating discussions, and less useful for deliberation.

It can be an effective approach for a consultation.

Strengths	Weaknesses
People are brought together as equals.	Their composition can preclude wider participation e.g. academics and professionals.
Encourages open discussion and helps break down barriers.	Requires considerable preparation.
Confronts issues rather than people.	Relies heavily on the skills of the facilitator.
May produce innovative solutions Aims to create 'win-win' situations, rather than 'win-lose' scenarios.	Open to dominance by more outspoken participants.

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CONSULTING

Reference Groups

What is it?

- In contrast to advisory groups, reference groups are typically designed to create an opportunity to test ideas already developed and obtain feedback on potential proposals.
- Similar to advisory groups, they involve a diverse mix of stakeholders selected for their technical expertise in a particular field or subject matter.

When should it be used?

A reference group could be used for a simple or complex problem, but the purpose is typically to test ideas with a group of people in a short amount of time. It is most often used for consultation, or to garner feedback and guidance.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Quick way to gather ongoing feedback or test ideas with a range of participants.	Can be mislabelled as collaboration, and create mismatched expectations and frustrations from participants.
Creates formal or informal champions for the process and the project.	Need to be clear at the outset on purpose and intended outcomes, otherwise could just end up as a discussion fest.

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CONSULTING

Focus Groups

What is it?

- A focus group is usually a small, but demographically diverse group of people whose reactions are studied in guided or open discussions about a new proposal or service. This determines the reactions that can be expected from a larger population.
- It is a form of qualitative research consisting of interviews in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept, advertisement, or idea. The purpose is to specifically concentrate on a single issue or a program of topics to gather specific targeted feedback.

When should it be used?

Focus Groups allow participants or certain interest groups to be targeted and therefore those often excluded from a wider engagement exercise can be identified and invited to attend this type of event. This is typically used to obtain direct feedback on a particular issue and is most appropriate for consultation, or in conjunction with other deliberative exercises.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Encourages active discussion for the purpose of obtaining direct feedback.	Requires experienced facilitators to be successful.
Time and resource efficient way of identifying and clarifying key issues.	Focus groups can be dominated by articulate and confident individuals if not carefully facilitated.
Can be directly targeted at excluded or 'hard to reach groups' for example young people or ethnic minorities.	Important stakeholders can be excluded.

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CONSULTING

Open Space Technology (OST)

What is it?

- OST is a method for running meetings, events and organisations, where participants create and manage parallel working sessions around a central theme of importance.
- They can range from groups of 5 to 2000+ people — working in one-day workshops, to three-day conferences.
- An “open space” meeting usually will start with short introductions by the sponsor and a single facilitator. The sponsor introduces the purpose; the facilitator explains the “self-organising” process that is called “open space.”

When should it be used?

This is a useful method where large groups of participants are involved and the agenda needs to be flexible or where you want to get an idea of what is important to stakeholders. This allows you to obtain feedback from a diverse group of people who can choose to participate in their area of interest through this process. This is more appropriate for a consultation type of engagement.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Good for addressing difficult issues, involving large numbers, particularly where there are conflicting views.	Only likely to get small percentage of the ‘whole system’ to attend.
Breaks down traditional ‘us and them’ barriers.	Unlikely to attract people who traditionally avoid open meetings.
No experts or fixed agenda - ‘moulded’ by participants - ownership of process.	Because they are usually ‘one-off’ events, potential participants may miss out.
Motivation and commitment can emerge in a way not usually achievable in traditional meetings.	Meeting could be viewed as an end in itself.
Leadership can emerge from people not necessarily seen to be leaders in the community.	This requires significant organisation and facilitation.

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CONSULTING

Surveys

What is it?

- Generally, a set of simple questions that enables the creation of statistics. These statistics are used to generalise about how a larger group might feel, act and think regarding a topic or issue.
- They can be administered in various ways, such as through website, email, SMS (text), telephone and face to face interview.

When should it be used?

Surveys are best used as part of a program of other methods. They can be used to validate other engagements or qualitative methods such as information acquired from user interviews. By themselves they can be limited in scope and provide little meaningful community engagement. This is more appropriate for a consultation type of engagement to gather feedback.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Can gain the views of a large number of people.	Need to be well designed and coded to get 'usable' answers, otherwise information can be misrepresented.
Useful for obtaining quantitative data.	Large questionnaire surveys are time-consuming and labour intensive.
In principle data can be compared over time or with results from elsewhere.	Information may be limited.
Useful for identifying and evidencing need.	Do not offer any real sense of community engagement or provide an opportunity for people to exchange views.
	Typical response rates are between 10- 20%, which can make results biased.

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CONSULTING/ DELIBERATING

Advisory Groups/ Committees/ Expert Panels

What is it?

- A group of appointed persons, established to provide short or long term advice on a specific issue or project.
- The people are typically a diverse mix of stakeholder representatives and are selected for their technical expertise or extensive knowledge in a particular field or subject matter.
- They usually bring their own networks of stakeholders to the table, which can benefit a project by providing avenues for engagement or access to hard to reach stakeholders.

When should it be used?

This type of group or panel could be used to undertake a consultative or deliberative form of engagement, depending on how they are constituted. When used for the purpose of consultation, the advisory group would be asked for their opinions or comments on issues. In contrast, when used for deliberation, the members will be required to consider issues, weighing up competing interests and trade-offs before providing advice or recommendations.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Can bring together a group of stakeholders with diverse expertise and a high level of interest into a process.	Needs to be well chaired as members can have strongly opposing views which must be carefully managed.
Can build understanding, relationships and consensus over time.	Can perpetuate existing dialogues and narrow discussion and viewpoints to a select few members.
Creates formal or informal champions for the process and the project.	Not statistically representative, although if members are carefully selected can represent a variety of views.

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CONSULTING/ DELIBERATING

Workshops

What is it?

- A face to face meeting at which a group of people engage in intensive discussion and activity on a particular subject or project. Active participation from attendees is encouraged, and small activities are often conducted to keep the participants engaged.
- They can be designed to achieve a variety of outcomes from brainstorming ideas for a new project to prioritising and developing an action plan.

When should it be used?

Workshops by nature are quite flexible, and can be used to consult or deliberate on an issue with a larger or a smaller group of people.

When deliberating on an issue, the workshop is typically on a specific subject. It allows small groups of targeted participants to unpack issues, weigh evidence, discuss competing priorities and come to a considered and informed view on a problem. It could also be used to consult by gathering feedback on specific issues or to generate ideas on a policy problem, or solution.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Encourages active discussion in a welcoming environment.	With small groups, it is difficult to be sure all stakeholders or interests are represented.
Time and resource efficient way of identifying and clarifying key issues.	Workshops can be dominated by articulate and confident individuals if not carefully facilitated.
Conflict can be more easily handled in a small group.	Requires experienced facilitators to maximise the benefit.
Can be designed to be versatile in purpose and size.	

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CONSULTING/ DELIBERATING

Citizens' Panel

What is it?

- Citizens' panel is a type of citizens' jury and involve ongoing panels of a small or large number of people who are representative of the target audience. The panel provides valuable input into the whole process by making sense of any background data and articulating what it means in practice for the target audience.
- There are multiple ways that a citizens' panel could be called on. The panel could be surveyed several times a year by post, telephone or online, but can also be consulted face to face.
- In contrast to focus groups, they are typically involved in longer term interactions during the course of a policy proposal and program design.

When should it be used?

This is most appropriate in the planning stages of a project, if it's likely that regular ongoing consultation will be required.

The panel can also be used to track changes in participants' attitudes towards certain issues over time. As a result, it may also be useful in the delivery stage as a means of getting targeted feedback to measure the success of implementation. It can be designed to undertake a consultative or deliberative engagement type.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Using the same panel a number of times reduces recruitment costs.	People on the panel become more knowledgeable (and therefore less representative) than the general public over time.
People agree to be on the panel thereby increasing response rates.	Can be hard to recruit people for an ongoing panel.
May allow for some measurement of changes over time.	Can introduce bias if only a certain type of people choose to volunteer.

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DELIBERATING

Deliberative Polling

What is it?

- Deliberative polling takes a random, representative sample of citizens and engages them in deliberation on current issues or proposed policy changes through small-group discussions and conversations with competing experts to create more informed and reflective public opinion.
- The sample is first polled on the targeted issues. After this baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather and discuss the issues. Balanced briefing materials are sent to the participants and publicly available. The participants engage in dialogue with competing experts based on questions they develop in small group discussions. After the deliberations, the sample is again asked the original questions. The resulting changes in opinion represent the conclusions the public would reach if people had opportunity to become more informed and engaged by the issues.
- In contrast to a citizens' panel, deliberative polling is conducted with members of the public, ideally with a representative sample in order to use the results as a guide to what the originating population would think if they had a similar opportunity to deliberate.

When should it be used?

As a deliberative method, it is particularly informative when you want to engage on complex issues that the public knows little about. It is also a great way to test how briefing information, discussion and expert perspectives can lead to opinion changes.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Enables broad and representative feedback.	May not be suitable for every public concern. For instance, crisis measures that demand instant decisions would not be appropriate.
Improved knowledge of stakeholder needs.	Can be expensive to get sufficient numbers of participants to create a good representative sample and improving the odds that members of more marginalized groups will attend.
May reach those who wouldn't otherwise engage.	Even though scientific random sampling are used and each person has an equal chance of being selected, not every selected individual will have the time and interest to join those events, which can introduce bias.
Can uncover key communications messaging that may be required to educate the public and/or get their buy-in.	Can be time consuming and typically take one to three days while online deliberations can take up to four to five weeks.
Participants can come to learn and appreciate the circumstances and interests of competing arguments through extended discussions and deliberations	

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DELIBERATING

Citizens' Jury

What is it?

- A group of citizens who are representative of the general public, meet to consider a complex issue by gathering evidence, deliberating and then reaching a decision.
- Jurors can 'cross examine' expert 'witnesses' who may offer differing perspectives on the issue or topic at hand before reaching agreement or producing a short report of recommended actions.
- Normally an advisory panel with expertise in the area, or the Government consider the jury's findings or report and determine what, if any, actions should be taken.

When should it be used?

A citizen jury is typically used as a deliberative engagement. The process allows participants to work together to find shared solutions. The process creates transparency so participants can see how important decisions, such as trade-offs, are being made. They are involved in making the trade-offs and balancing competing interests when coming up with recommendations.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Organisers and jurors usually find the experience empowering and satisfying.	The sponsoring body has to be prepared to accept the results or else the process rapidly loses credibility.
Large numbers of people can participate.	Jury could be manipulated by the moderator or witnesses.
Power issues are reduced, as the people impacted deliberate, rather than government coming up with a solution on their own.	Initial briefing, information and selection of witnesses could be open to bias.
Process produces an informed and collective view, resulting from deliberation.	Time and cost intensive.

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DELIBERATING

Open Dialogue

What is it?

- Open dialogue asks participants to draw on their experience around an issue and to use their natural conversational skills to exchange views and propose options to solve it.
- Typically, these processes have multiple stages which work like a funnel: the process starts with a relatively open exchange of ideas, the ideas are gathered together, then focused and refined. The discussions usually converge on important goals, values, or priorities.
- Comments and proposals from different sessions are usually recorded in reports. Sometimes the results are made available to participants in other sessions or online which allows them to be responded to and built upon.

When should it be used?

Open dialogue is most suitable when time is of the essence, and you want to deliberate with a large number of people. It works well when combined with other deliberative process because it can be done at scale.

Strengths	Weaknesses
The approach is flexible, scalable and relatively easy to carry out	Discussions may fail to reach clear conclusions, especially in the early stages.
By giving participants a meaningful role in decision-making, it creates a sense of responsibility for the process and ownership of the results.	Ownership and responsibility can be diluted as the process scales.

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DELIBERATING

Deliberative Analysis

What is it?

- Deliberative analysis involves a more rigorous, rules-based exchange that guide participants toward decision-making on tasks such as setting priorities and making trade-offs between competing interests.
- The process is designed to establish the legitimacy of its conclusions through a high level of representativeness, objectivity, fairness, and evidence-informed decision-making. It focuses participants' attention on facts and arguments, and the information and data that support them.
- The process normally follows a carefully constructed agenda and is led by a facilitator, who acts as a "referee" to ensure the rules are followed. Finally, processes like these are usually restricted to a smaller number of people. The larger the process becomes, the more difficult it is to maintain high levels of rigour.

When should it be used?

Deliberative analysis should be used when ownership and responsibility from participants are important, and deliberating with a small number of people will be sufficient. The process is rigorous and participants personally tackling with the issues and the trade-offs builds empathy.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Creates a high level of ownership among participants.	It is difficult to scale due to the rigorous nature of the process.
People outside the process, perceive it as having a high degree of legitimacy	Need to ensure that participants chosen are representative of the target population. Otherwise, those outside the process may not feel a similar sense of ownership for decisions made.

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DELIBERATING

Narrative Building

What is it?

- Narrative building draws on the participants' lived-experience to develop a story about an important change or challenge. Stories not only contain facts and information, but integrate these with personal beliefs and emotions in ways that reflect a person's or community's experience.
- Creating a narrative from these elements not only helps ensure the results of a dialogue will reach the broader public in a form they understand, but that it will resonate with them.

When should it be used?

Ideally, it should be used in conjunction with open dialogue and deliberative analysis. However, by itself it is useful when conveying aspects of people's lived experiences such as values and emotions because eventually evidence-based findings need to connect with the broader public to arrive at a final decision or solution to an issue.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Helps people understand what is at stake in an issue.	Stories reflect what people think and feel – their lived experience – but are not guaranteed to be factually accurate, respectful, or fair.
Is absorbed by the community members quickly and easily, and can create shared purpose.	Any misinformation within the narrative will also travel through the community very quickly.

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DELIBERATING

Informed Participation

What is it?

- Informed participation is a specific type of engagement within the deliberation class.
- It integrates the three deliberative types: open dialogue, deliberative analysis, and narrative building into one blended approach where each type informs the other.
- **Open Dialogue** asks people to draw on their experience around an issue in order to exchange views and propose options to solve it.
- **Deliberative Analysis** focuses participants' attention on facts and arguments, and the information and data that support them.
- **Narrative-Building** draws on the participants' lived experience to develop a story about an important change or challenge.

When should it be used?

It can help unpack complex and evolving topics, balance values and competing priorities, and make trade-offs. It's also good for building a sense of ownership from participants that makes its outcomes more resilient and enduring.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Engages lots of people, gives participants a meaningful role and ensures decision-making is rigorous and fair.	Time and resource intensive.
Imparts a sense of personal responsibility for the success of the process. This sense of ownership creates a kind of resilience that can protect a project from outside interference. The stronger the sense of ownership from the public, the more firmly the public will resist interference in the project.	If all of the tools are not used, a similar sense of ownership and resilience for the project may not be created. For example, narrative building is strong on scalability and able to reach large numbers of people but can be weak on generating evidence-based findings. In contrast, deliberative analysis is good for arriving at evidence-based conclusions but is difficult to take to scale.
Maximises the strengths of the different styles by getting all three of them working together.	Can be quite complex to execute.

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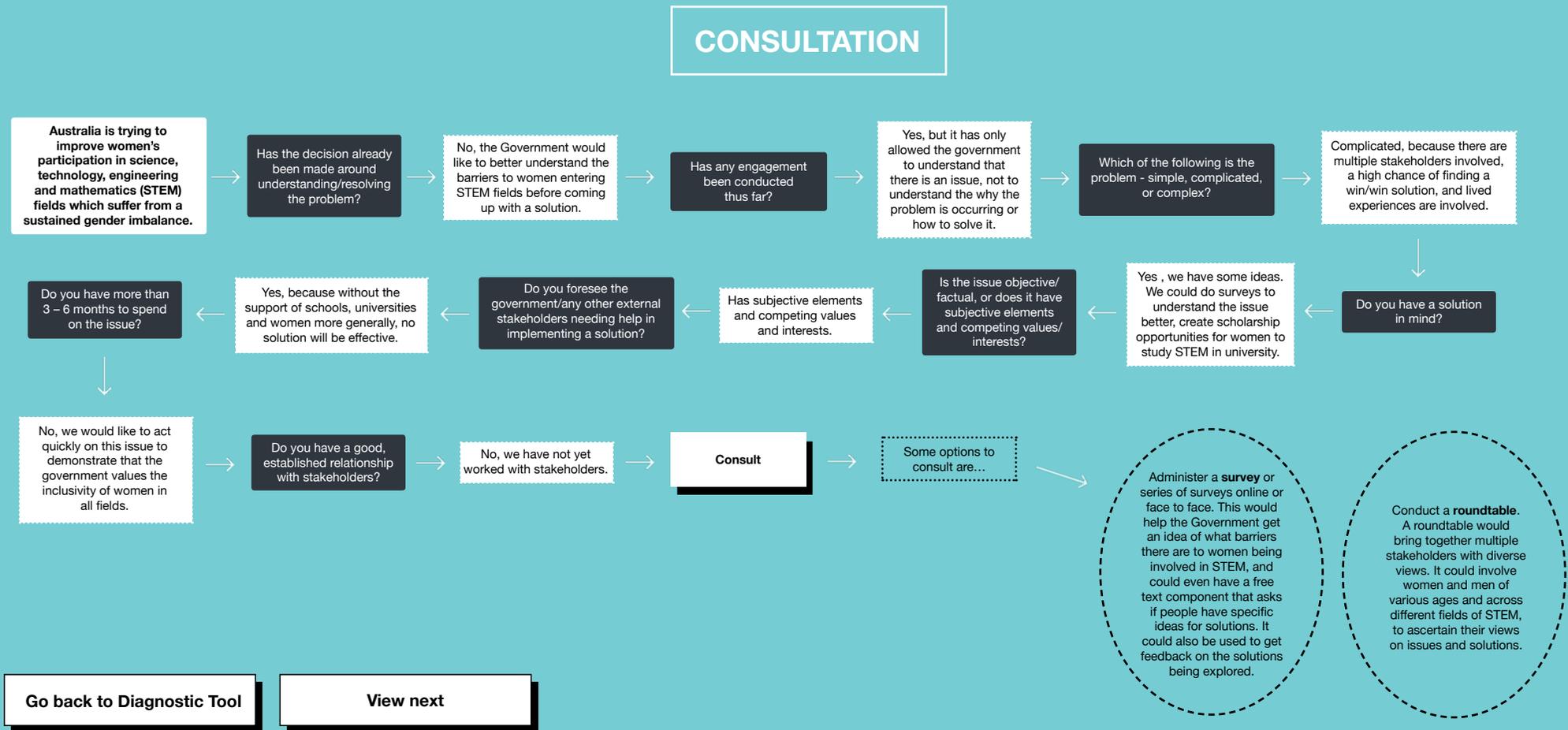
COLLABORATING

Collaborating will involve all the components of deliberation plus additional considerations such as how the public and/or stakeholders will share decision making rights with the Government and be involved in implementation of solutions.

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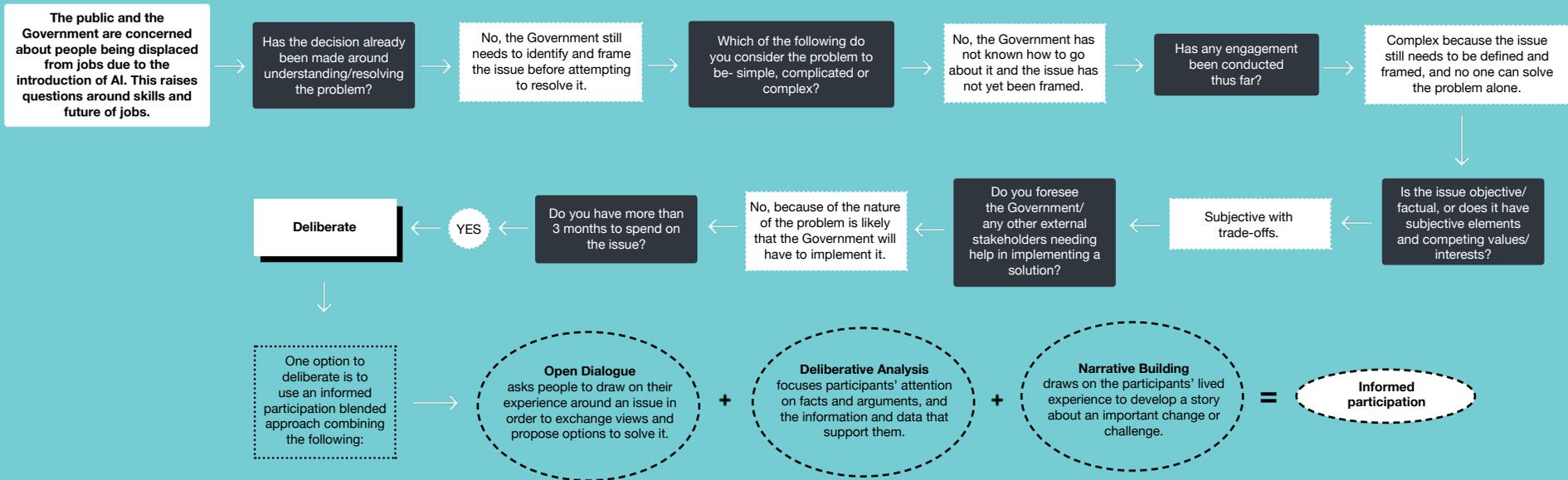
PROBLEM SCENARIO WALKTHROUGH

The following problems imitate real life policy issues that the APS might face. Whilst the issues are real, the government proposals are fictional, and are there to demonstrate the engagement type and process that might be most appropriate in solving the problems described.



PROBLEM SCENARIO WALKTHROUGH

DELIBERATION



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ENGAGING DIGITALLY

Engaging with communities, businesses and stakeholders has become easier, more convenient and increasingly accessible through the help of digital platforms and tools. It is important to harness the capabilities of new technology to deliver improved access to government information and decision making. The online environment can provide an effective platform for government to reach a broad audience.

Online engagement can provide a secure space for rigorous testing of ideas, assumptions, positions, and options. The relative freedom of an anonymous environment removes barriers to enter the conversation that are often present in community meetings, where different types of personality and assumed restrictions on the right to speak can stifle debate. They can also help draw many more people into the conversation than traditional face-to-face methods.

However, it is important to note that time and resources do need to be set aside for successful digital engagements. Recruiting relevant participants to engage on digital platforms can be challenging. You need to ensure relevant people understand what is being asked of them and why they should participate. Simply sending a bulk email requesting people to participate is usually unsuccessful. A personal touch and tailoring of messages is required on an individual level. A tried and tested method in these cases is to use multiple avenues of promotions. These could include: internet, Facebook, emails, face to face information sessions and individual phone calls.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Online engagement tools are usually less expensive than intensive face-to-face processes and also much less expensive than traditional telephone or print surveys.	Recruiting relevant participants to engage can be challenging.
Broader reach and ease of access for people who may otherwise not participate in government decision making (e.g., working parents, carers, young people, people who are mobility impaired, shift workers)	Degrees of inclusion, unequal power among participants and between participants and conveners.
Reduced barriers to entry for the use of online consultation by government agencies.	Lack of online civic engagement skills and opportunities from older or remote participants.
Increased levels of participation by the community in government consultation.	Lack of civility that can sometime arise in online discussions due to greater anonymity.
Increased transparency of the public policy consultation processes.	Can prevent individuals to provide a depth of qualitative feedback.

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Making engagement easier: Digital platforms

Just like face to face engagement, there are varied reasons for using digital forms of engagement. Digital platforms allow you to share information, respond to queries, ask the public questions or seek feedback on issues, brainstorm ideas, or seek solutions to posed challenges. As mentioned above, they also provide an alternative to traditional face to face methods, and can remove barriers to enter conversations such as shyness, loudness etc. Below are some examples of digital platforms, tools and resources that are currently used by different government organisations.

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South Australian Government, YourSAy

YourSAy is an online consultation hub where you can have your say and influence government decisions in South Australia. Some of the ways you can participate include taking part in online discussions, voting in polls, deciding where government funds are spent.

[Visit website](#)

Engage.dss.gov.au

Engage is an online platform used by the Department of Social Services to undertake consultation. Engage.dss.gov.au makes it easier for you to share your views and help shape policies. You can view all current and previous consultations on the site.

[Visit website](#)

Let's Talk

Let's Talk is an online platform used by the Australian Tax Office. It provides a space for citizens to have their say and contribute ideas about the tax system as well as facilitating conversations in communities of interest such as superannuation or not for profit.

It includes information sharing and consultation tools including:

- News (information sharing)
- Discussion forums; and
- Surveys and Forms
- Ideation

[Visit website](#)

Have your say

'Have your say' is an online platform used by the City of Gold Coast City Panel. It provides a way for the City of Gold Coast to gather information about what the community wants and to help us make the right investment decisions. Join the City Panel now and help drive change in the city by providing feedback on new ideas, projects and priorities.

[Visit website](#)

Dialogue

Dialogue is an online platform used by the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science to discuss an issue by setting a challenge/s. Dialogue is ideal for generating open discussion and ideas amongst a set of stakeholders. You may be starting from a relatively blank sheet of paper and offer an initial prompt (challenge) to see what people do with it. Dialogue is interacting with people and getting them talking to each other, perhaps building towards a consensus on a particular topic or issue.

[Visit website](#)

Challenge.gov (US)

Challenge.gov is a listing of challenge and prize competitions, all of which are run by more than 100 agencies across federal government. These problem-solving events include idea, creative, technical and scientific competitions in which U.S. federal agencies invite the public's help to solve perplexing mission-centric problems.

[Visit website](#)

Making engagement easier: Digital resources

Digital resources, on the other hand, provide valuable information on engagement practices, case studies, international best practice examples and much more at the click of a button. Below are a couple of examples of digital resources that are free and provide a range of information from case studies, engagement processes and best practice methods.

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Making engagement easier: Engagement management and planning

Digital management and planning platforms can provide support to undertake engagement at scale by saving time and cost. Converlens and Scaffle were developed as part of the National Innovation and Science Agenda's Business Research and Innovation Initiative (BRII) Challenge to produce a digital platform for better community engagement.

Participedia

Participedia proves a low-cost, easy way for hundreds of researchers and practitioners from across the globe to catalogue and compare the performance of participatory political processes. Participedia has a searchable database of cases, methods, and organizations, including knowledge about how well processes have worked for similar problems, under similar conditions. Anyone can join the Participedia community and help crowdsource, catalogue and compare participatory political processes around the world.

[Visit website](#)

Converlens

Converlens is an engagement management platform. It augments public servant capability to analyse engagement material and feedback using features like AI and Natural Language Processing to make it easier and quicker to engage.

One of the many things that the tool can do is within hours of submissions closing, it analyses, summarises and depicts key messages for briefing to senior decision makers. It can also mitigate consultation fatigue for stakeholders by tracking the contributing stakeholders through a smart participant database (a CRM) enabling a search through communications both current and historic.

Democracy R&D

Democracy R&D, is a site that includes some useful and interesting examples of deliberative exercises globally. It was developed by an international network of organizations and associations to promote ways to improve democracy, from the local to the global level.

[Visit website](#)

Scaffle

Scaffle is an engagement planning application. Scaffle's core innovation is a guided process that combines flexible templates with smart recommendations to help users create better consultation plans that are aligned with the cycles of policy making and service design.

Public servants will tell Scaffle about the key details of an upcoming engagement they're planning, and the platform will supply recommendations for appropriate activities, tools and providers. It will also connect public servants to learning modules and training opportunities, and will provide a range of other project management tools with which to run engagements. Scaffle is also designed to integrate with existing engagement methods and the digital platforms already in use by government.