

## 4. Implementation

Having developed an approach for the eEngagement, the implementation phase represents the realisation of this vision. Often, this will require stakeholder input – across government and outside of it – and necessary adjustments to the initial plan in the light of unforeseen eventualities. In this way, implementation is just like any other process for project delivery.

Rather than provide a summary of issues associated with standard project implementation and management issues, this section (and the later discussion of post-implementation issues) focuses on aspects of specific, or particular, relevance to the manager engaged in eEngagement activities.

### 4.1. Stakeholder Buy-in

The first step in successful realisation of the eEngagement approach is ensuring appropriate commitment from key stakeholders. This may entail a new process of negotiation, ‘selling’ and discussion, or may reflect the formalisation of processes already undertaken as part of the visioning process.

Four important considerations are:

- *managing upwards* by ensuring appropriate commitment from senior policy makers (managerial or Executive). This will be of particular importance where the process has a deliberative element, where for all intents and purposes, the project team is asking for the engagement process to be *delegative* in character;
- *managing sideways* by intra- and inter- governmental stakeholders may need considerable persuasion, either to establish their commitment to the process, or to provide resources and participation within it, or because of the need for their (possibly long) approval and authorisation processes to be undertaken;
- *managing outwards* by identifying and ensuring commitment from members of the community to the process and approach to be taken;
- *managing inwards* by ensuring that staff are committed to the process and the approach. Internal resistance can be one of the least-well-managed factors in the successful realisation of the plan.

### 4.2. Developing an Engagement Plan

Once stakeholder commitment is established, a formal engagement plan will be developed. This takes the form of a formal work plan and might simply be an elaboration of the proposals and associated documentation developed to date. The work plan needs to address:

- formal timeframe commitments;

- budgetary allocation;
- participant role descriptions;
- output indicators;
- evaluation approaches and success measures; and
- contingency strategies.

In addition, the engagement plan can serve as a formal, or informal ‘contract’ with the public. In areas where participation has been poor because of low levels of trust, making this document participative, or public, can be useful to demonstrate commitment to the engagement approach by the agency and provide a benchmark against which agency performance can be observed by stakeholders and potential participants.

As the implementation process moves forward, the formal engagement plan can serve as the basis for supporting documentation such as:

- the marketing and promotion strategy;
- the technical specifications and, if necessary, contracting documents for systems development;
- evaluation frameworks;
- the final report; and
- the evaluation report.

Good documentation, from the outset of the project, will greatly assist in the process of post-project review and project termination.

### **4.3. Managing Technical Implementation**

Managing the technical aspects of the project implementation process can be the more complex area of the implementation plan, particularly for managers who are not highly familiar with the technologies supporting the engagement strategy.

There is a risk that lack of technical familiarity or knowledge might, perversely, lead managers to ‘outsource’ the technical side of the process to a private company or IT unit in government. It must, therefore, be emphasised, that maintaining strong control and oversight of this part of the process will be critical in ensuring that the objectives of the eEngagement process are realised.

Although some IT professionals have a very good grasp of the social issues arising at the interface of computer technology and public policy, many have not and the collaboration between policy specialists and technologists can be the most productive and educative part of the implementation process. In many cases, existing relationships and associated business processes governing the provision of IT services to the organisation may require some (re)negotiation (either to determine the ability of the existing provider to undertake this work, or to allow new systems to interact with existing ones).

Technical implementation will require:

- consideration of the relationship of this project with existing agency or departmental IT strategic plans;
- acquisition of appropriate expertise or advice (either through the appointment of a technical staff member, or through an out-sourcing arrangement);
- assessment of technology options and vetting against eEngagement objectives;
- determining an appropriate 'solution' (choosing the product or bundle of services and products);
- managing costs and implementation timeframes;
- the 'purchase' or commitment decision; and
- management of implementation, user testing, review and 'going live'.

#### **Exhibit 22: City of Wellington IT Strategy**

In their 2006 IT Strategic Policy Document, the City of Wellington in New Zealand has incorporated electronic democracy as one of the three elements of their IT approach.

The eDemocracy element of the strategy includes four objectives:

- accessible information;
- accessible elected members and Council officers;
- encouraging broader consultation; and
- efficient services.

The document includes a discussion of the implementation approach and an explicit identification of the need for post implementation assessment of the approach.

The policy can be located at: <http://www.wellington.govt.nz/plans/policies/ict/pdfs/ictpolicy.pdf>

### **4.3.1. Determining the Software Feature Set**

The *software feature set* is the bundle of attributes possessed by the application that achieves the objectives of the engagement process. This is normally constructed as a list of 'can dos' – the software can do x, y and z to meet the objectives. Depending on the budget of the organisation and the complexity of the eEngagement process, this may need to be clustered into 'must have', 'should have' and 'would like to have' characteristics, thus supporting an analytical approach to making trade-off decisions (where necessary).

This approach may simply require the development of a list, or may be expressed as an analogy, such as 'the system should emulate a library, with a check out area, reference table, volumes of texts, etc.' Do not underestimate the value of drawing analogies: they can generate powerful metaphors that assist in visioning

and ease communication between purchasers and providers (and later may be valuable in assisting users to understand the parameters of the interactive environment).

It will be useful to engage the participation of a technical advisor early-on in the process, as some activities that appear difficult or complex to those unfamiliar with the technology may in fact be commonplace and straightforward, or vice-versa. Having early advice can also serve to generate new ideas prior to systems development which the project team may find valuable. This could take the form of new features, or potential features, that will be noted for future iterations of the approach or as contingencies.

### 4.3.2. Who Governs? Technical, Administrative, or Political

Regardless of the approach undertaken, a critical decision point is the determination of who is ultimately responsible for developing the technical package. For various reasons, the implementation process may require, inter alia: a strict level of control by the auspicing agency; IT or communications technology experts having autonomy with respect to decisions about technical issues; or direct hands-on management by a Minister or select committee (e.g. in a Parliamentary process).

Decisions about software acquisition, management and/or modification may entail an explicit choice between close management of the process by the host agency, or devolution of the process to a technical unit, or private firm. It is important to be cognisant of the advantages and limitations of each approach:

**Figure 9: Who Governs?**

	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
Technical Experts	Strong technical understanding, solid project management skills, awareness of advantages and limitations of subtle differences in technical design, understanding interoperability issues (particularly for data interchange).	Can over-focus on technology, can emphasise effective technical management at expense of engagement objectives. Lack of policy and engagement expertise.
Administrative / Policy Staff	Strong understanding of policy-making processes, the issue(s) under consideration and the wider environment (stakeholders).	Sometimes very weak in technical understanding and insensitive to technical concerns and timeframes.
Political Layer	Ability to commit resources and devolve decision-making, clear articulation of importance of project through 'demonstrated project leadership'.	Often unable to commit time to project, can over-focus on political benefits and short term electoral cycle issues.

One potentially valuable approach to is to place project management *outside* of government. This may take the form of outsourcing a specific aspect of the project (such as the development and maintenance of the technical infrastructure), or shifting the entire project to an organisation within (or with explicit expertise in) the community of interest, such as an academic body, or a non-government organisation (NGO).

The advantages of this approach include:

- external organisations may have expertise not possessed by the host agency;
- third parties can serve as a ‘buffer’ or neutral arbiter;
- low cost facilitation of technology exchange between principle and agent;
- eEngagement process can be ‘insulated’ in the event of failure;
- use of non-profit or academic agencies can be cost effective;
- fosters community of expertise, or marketplace;
- access to new networks (social, professional); and/or
- the capacity to capture additional, or ‘multiplying’, sources of funding (such as integration of research funding).

The limitations of this approach include:

- loss of control over process (to a greater or lesser degree);
- additional layers of negotiation and project management;
- transfer of skills may ‘de-skill’ organisation; and/or
- it is sometimes difficult to identify third party organisations having the necessary skill sets and capacity.

### **Exhibit 23: Placing Management of the Participatory Process Outside of Government**

In the case of the Hansard Society’s collaboration with the Social Security Select Committee in the United Kingdom’s *Uspeak* online consultation project, the online consultation process was undertaken by a collaborative *umbrella management* structure including voluntary organisations with expertise in the specific policy area and target audience, local government organisations capable of providing place-based assistance with recruitment and promotion and private sector providers with capabilities in developing access technologies.

The Department of Human Services (Victoria) uses an external, non-profit organisation to provide moderation skills for their online discussion forums. In this case, the Department benefits from acquiring the necessary skills without long lead-times associated with recruitment and training.

### 4.3.3. Make or Buy?

The most fundamental decision in the development of an eEngagement technology platform is choosing the right type of software to meet the project requirements (as discussed in Section 3, Designing the Right Approach). Depending on the specific engagement strategy being undertaken there may be a range of software packages available to host and administer the online engagement activity.

For eEngagement projects that are based on electronic discussion list models, there is a range of existing software packages that allow for these types of discussions to be hosted, either as simple email handling systems, real-time chat facilities, or Web-based bulletin board systems. For more complex or innovative projects, the lack of a large commercial marketplace for electronic democracy software means that there may be few, if any, off-the-shelf software packages available.

A critical early decision will address whether existing software packages can deliver the functionality required for the proposed engagement activity. This will also require consideration of:

- the degree to which the software packages interface with other systems to be employed by the project management team, such as database systems for handling contacts (e.g. the corporate Customer Relationship Management system) or managing project timelines and data analysis tools to assist in effective evaluation of materials collected;
- the capacity of existing information technology infrastructure to run or host the software under consideration (e.g. a bulletin board system built using a computer language like PHP may require a posting server to have specific capabilities, such as a particular database product); and
- the capacity to customise the software being considered, if required, to meet the needs of the consultation process. In addition, a highly flexible (e.g. feature rich) or customisable software package may be required if the engagement process is intended to accommodate significant input by the participants in shaping the process and/or provide an interactive environment or decision-making process.

These considerations may in turn require further decisions about whether to select an existing software package (which may necessitate a trade-off between availability versus functionality), the re-engineering of existing applications, or the development of wholly new applications to undertake the task.

Even when undertaking a relatively conventional approach – e.g. in which an existing software package is available to the project team – the likelihood exists that some form of customisation or modification will be required to accommodate the agency’s requirements, such as:

- integrating the system with appropriate document management protocols and storage systems (such as systems to retain documents for FOI or archival purposes);
- integration of the system with existing IT security systems, such as user login profiles or workflow management software (e.g. groupware or Lotus Notes); and/or
- data interchange systems to allow the importation or exportation of data from one database to another (e.g. moving textual information from a discussion list into an analysis package, such as NVIVO).

#### 4.3.3.1. Do we Need New Tools at All?

Public sector managers are often surprised to learn that their agency (and partner organisations) either possess, or can access under licence, a wide array of applications software capable of supporting eEngagement activities. As part of any assessment of available technologies, it is important to consult an inventory of available software (or undertake an inventory, if none exists) and assess the utility of these packages in meeting the objectives of the eEngagement plan.

This is a useful strategy where resources are limited, or the eEngagement process is not technically complex – it does *not* imply a process in which the objectives are retrofitted to the tools on hand. Public agencies commonly possess, or have access to technologies like:

- email management systems;
- servers, with scripting capabilities and database integration (often with good security);
- content management systems (website management engines), which may include:
  - simple polling and survey design and management systems;
  - online discussion facilities (bulletin board systems);
  - email collection systems;
  - password access (password-restricted access); and/or
  - groupware systems (such as intranet systems). For example, the ‘Central Station’ intranet system of the Victorian Public Service includes the capacity to develop ‘communities’. These communities allow for online discussion, online publication and the lodgement of shared documents.

In addition, the desktop environment of many public agencies also have an array of potentially useful software, such as:

- statistical analysis packages (such as SPSS or R);
- qualitative analysis packages (e.g. NUD\*IST/N6);
- database and spreadsheet packages (e.g. Access, FileMaker Pro, Excel); or
- desktop publishing applications.

Alternatively, non-government 'communities' tools abound, some of which may be of value, such as:

- Yahoo!, MSN, or VicNET communities;
- blogging and publication tools;
- online meetings sites; and
- commercial, low-cost, online surveying packages.

#### 4.3.3.2. Purchase Point Considerations

The decision about whether to 'buy or build' software is a complex undertaking and will need to be considered with due reference to the existing agency or whole-of-government policy on software acquisition.<sup>1</sup>

The decision about whether to purchase an existing software package, or to develop a custom-made piece of software will be based on:

- a balanced assessment of the trade-off between cost and functionality. A decision to 'buy' can be supported on 'value for money' grounds, where there is a high degree of *fit* between the functionality offered by existing software packages and the requirements of the eEngagement plan. Purchasing an existing software product can represent significant time savings over the lifecycle of the project. Depending on the vendor, a collaborative approach to acquisition might be considered in order to improve the alignment between the existing functionality and project needs. This also offers significant advantages to the agency and the vendor by allowing the agency to develop a better software system for its specific needs, with costs shifted to the vendor, while allowing the vendor to develop their product in the expectation of improving its marketability in the future; and
- the practical capacity of the agency, in collaboration with supporting information technology units, to undertake an in-house software development process. While there is considerable expertise in developing software within the public sector, this expertise is often rationed towards core corporate information technology systems over 'line' applications. If the agency feels that it lacks the expertise to manage a software development process, this will be a mitigating factor against significant internal development.

Regardless of the approach taken, a clear business case process will be undertaken in line with existing policy in the agency's jurisdiction.

<sup>1</sup> For example, *A Guide to ICT Sourcing for Australian Government Agencies* (Australian Commonwealth Government) or *New Zealand Government Information Systems Policies and Standards*. Similar documents and policy statements are maintained by each State and Territory in Australia.

#### 4.3.3.3. Proprietary versus Open Source

When considering whether to ‘make or buy’, public sector agencies also consider non-commercial software alternatives. During the last 10 years there has been an increasing interest from the public sector in ‘open source software’.

Open source software is provided under a *licence* that commonly allows for its original source code to be freely distributed and modified by end users. While open source software is often considered to be ‘public domain’ intellectual property,<sup>2</sup> this is not the case. Open source software is often released under a licence that imposes specific restrictions on the end user or modifier. These may include:

- requirements to preserve the identity of contributing programmers and developers;
- restrictions on the use of the code for commercial purposes (e.g. reselling);
- requirements for development of the initial code to be released under a similar licensing arrangement; and/or
- exclusions and indemnities.

The growth of the ‘open source movement’ has stimulated the proliferation of software packages that are available free, or at low cost to the public, as well as encouraging the release of software which may have been developed for specific purposes but does not have a commercial value. As this movement has developed into a strong, collaborative community, the availability of elements of code and whole applications allows new software applications to be developed from existing code, without undertaking complete software development – in other words, elements from one project can be incorporated into another to add functionality.

The advantages of utilising open source software are:

- low-cost for the initial acquisition of the software package. Open source software can often be downloaded for free, or simply for the cost of the media and supporting documentation. Some open source packages (such as the popular replacement for Microsoft Office – OpenOffice.org) have been developed with the explicit objective of high usability, making installation and operation no more difficult than commercial offerings;
- access to a large community of developers who can assist and advise in the development of the software package;
- the software can be modified simply because the source code is open for modification (whereas proprietary software often prevents modification

<sup>2</sup> Intellectual property that has no proprietary claims made against it (e.g. no ownership). A good source for information on open source licensing is the Free Software Foundation (<http://www.fsf.org>) or the Open Source Initiative (<http://www.opensource.org/>).

outside of the vendor's company or requires the purchase of developer's kits);

- the contribution by government of new applications can grow the user and developer base, increasing the number of people working on the software;
- proprietary software can become orphaned (abandoned completely or no longer offering upgrades or support) which necessitates shifting to a new product; and
- modified versions of the software can be developed and distributed freely without reference to any vendor.

The disadvantages of utilising open source software are:

- lacking vendor support, open source projects require either the participation of a motivated volunteer programmer community, or the investment of time and money in developing and modifying the software in-house;
- some open source projects are poorly documented, making modification difficult;
- open source software can lack the 'polish' of commercial software, particularly in terms of user documentation;
- open source projects can become inactive leading to limited further development;
- the software may be at an early stage of development, leading to a quick succession of releases which necessitates regular updating; and
- many government information technology agencies (central policy and standards bodies) are cautious about the use of open source, because of concerns about malicious code, or the poor quality of software employed.

Open source software can deliver some cost savings to government agencies interested in developing unique packages. However, it is a misconception to consider open source as 'free' software. Depending on the type of functionality required, considerable investment may be necessary to develop or modify an existing open source application. In addition, care must be taking when adopting an open source solution, given the variety of licences that may be attached to the original code and the constraints these might place on further development or release of modified versions of the initial software.

The real advantage of open source lies in the ability to redistribute modified versions of the software to organisations with whom your agency may be partnered. For example, you may develop an online consultation system in open source that is of interest to a number of peak industry bodies engaged in the initial consultation, who wish to use the software to consult with their members. Having developed the package in open source may allow your agency to freely

release its software to partners/stakeholders and any enhancements that they make to the software can be acquired by your agency for future use.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.3.4. Low Tech versus High Tech

A common but largely avoidable problem associated with the design of electronic democracy systems arises from the mistaken belief that, because these concepts are new, they will be supported by the latest technology. For example, the capacity of computers and mobile telephones to support interactive multimedia often leads to their being selected to deliver eEngagement solutions. This assumption is often ill-founded and can limit the degree of participation by members of the public.

Over the last decade, the public sector in Australasia has become much more effective at managing issues of technological obsolescence, through systematic hardware and software replacement processes and the use of managed service agreements (equipment licensing). While this has positive benefits in terms of the productivity of public servants, public sector managers need to be cautious when assuming that members of the public have similar technical capacity.

This has a number of dimensions:

- on average, the public sector has newer hardware and software than the general community. The connection speed at which the public access the internet and the capacity of their installed software is much more variable than that found in the public sector;
- public employees on average have higher levels of information literacy than the public. As 'white collar' workers, public employees have greater levels of experience using IT systems than the general community; and
- public sector employees are disproportionately *urban*. Urban areas commonly enjoy higher connection speeds and greater reliability of telecommunications services, which in turn leads to higher internet usage and like services (bandwidth).

Technological solutions need to be matched to the target audience taking into account its general characteristics, like technical skills, technological capabilities and information literacy. Target audiences can be grouped according to a number of archetypical user types (as illustrated in Figure 10).

<sup>3</sup> The Australian Federal government has developed a guide for public sector agencies interested in acquiring open-source software. This guide can be found at: [http://www.agimo.gov.au/\\_sourceit/sourceit](http://www.agimo.gov.au/_sourceit/sourceit). The New Zealand National Government has also given consideration to some of the issues associated with open source software, a discussion of which is located at: <http://www.e.govt.nz/>

**Figure 10: Archetypical Internet User Types**

'Experimenter'	'Sporadic User'	'General User'	'Power User'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low levels of use</li> <li>• Simple applications (web)</li> <li>• Exploring and learning</li> <li>• 'Lingers' on websites</li> <li>• May only use technology at a location remote from the home (work, internet café, public access terminal)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrequent, irregular use (borrowed or public access terminal)</li> <li>• Sees value only in occasional use (specific purpose)/or</li> <li>• Access may be limited by situation (access, affordability)</li> <li>• May have a internet connection in the home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular use for short periods of time</li> <li>• Sticks to tried and true software ('standard desktop software')</li> <li>• Emails existing social / professional network</li> <li>• Consumes content</li> <li>• 'Trusted' transactions (banking, taxation)</li> <li>• Likely to retain a slow internet connection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High levels of frequent use, invests in technology</li> <li>• Experiments with new technology / software</li> <li>• Creates content</li> <li>• Develops new online networks</li> <li>• Many transactions online</li> <li>• Likely to invest in high-speed internet access</li> </ul>

A common trap for public sector managers is to assume parity between the capacities of government officials and those of the public with whom they engage. Examples include:

- distributing unnecessarily large documents online, or designing websites that include extraneous formatting or images that are slow to access for users with older hardware or slower connection speeds;
- using file formats or website elements that require the most recent software to access, thus requiring the end-user to install software that is not commonly used by most web users;
- requiring a platform- or technology-dependent capability (such as a specific type of internet browser or screen resolution); and/or
- providing few choices to the user as to how they interact with the system (such as web-based electronic discussion lists that do not permit users to access the discussion through a generic mail client, such as Outlook or Eudora).

When selecting the most appropriate approach to technology, consider the following four questions:

- do we need this feature to achieve our objective (is it simply aesthetic, 'cool', or redundant)?
- does the system offer the end-user a choice in the range of technologies used to access the system (is it technologically *agnostic*)?
- does the system work with older technology and slower access speeds?
- is the means of accessing the system part of the standard operating environment of most computers/ICTs?

If the answers indicate that the user base is most likely to be served by older or more common technology then work within those limitations. While this may restrict some activities, it does not necessarily prevent the eEngagement process being interactive and compelling. Having users with slower and older software can allow interactivity and complexity of systems design, but may require:

- multiple approaches to displaying the content, such as inclusion of a ‘text only’ version (see section 4.4.1, Compelling Content versus Eyecandy); and/or
- placing the bulk of information processing at the server (agency hardware) end of the communications channel (e.g. putting the ‘smart’ end of the system within the computing environment of the agency).

#### 4.4. Generating Compelling Content

At the end of the day, *content is king*. The information you provide, the quality of debate you generate and interactivity can be essential in shifting participation and interest from passive to active. Content is not, however, about graphic design. Although style is important for some target audiences, the quality of the information presented, including its clarity and accessibility, can encourage or discourage participation.

Public sector managers need to understand that we are all living in an increasingly media-rich environment. Although the consultative processes of public sector organisations are by their very nature important, they do have to compete with a wide range of demands on the time and attention of potential participants. In some cases people consume multiple media simultaneously and each source of information must compete for attention immediately. It is essential to recognise that many target audiences are continually confronted with the need to ration or make ‘tradeoffs’ in their use of communications technologies. Therefore, when attempting to encourage participation in eEngagement initiatives, the core challenge of content development is to reward those tradeoffs with compelling content.

Some suggestions for encouraging participation in eEngagement initiatives include:

- use plain language;
- use short summaries that allow participation based on ‘skimming’ (provide extensive content as options for further reading);
- provide alternative interpretations of information (such as ‘case studies’, points of view, or first-person accounts);
- allow issues to be personalised (e.g. if the issue is one involving cost tradeoffs, provide an online calculator to determine benefits at different levels of costs for the individual);
- where appropriate provide a mix of media forms (text, audio, animation, diagrams, games) which allow users to consume the content in their preferred format;
- workshop, or user-test, content with a focus group (formal or informal) prior to release;
- be prepared to adjust content ‘on the fly’;
- provide capacity for participants to generate their own content;

- ensure an appropriate 'refresh' period for content – eEngagement processes that attract commitment provide new information and experience on each visit by the participant (where the process is multi-stage); and
- remember what the user has seen and make navigation menus dynamic to present new or unread information on the next visit (requires cookies).

#### **Exhibit 24: Public Participation Geographic Information Systems**

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is a type of mapping software that allows the storage, analysis and presentation of spatial data. GIS systems are used largely in land / urban planning processes, but allow data to be overlaid for analytical purposes. Data may include land use, pollution flows, car movements or any other form of information pertaining to location and position.

These systems can be very useful for relevant eEngagement purposes (Public Participation GIS (PPGIS)), allowing participants to visualise and analyse spatial issues, or provide data to overlay existing map data. With global positioning (GPS) being incorporated within some low-cost consumer electronics, the capacity for members of the community to contribute to GIS datasets (rather than simply consume data) will expand. Examples of PPGIS include:

- as part of a major review of their Local Environment Plan the Kiama Municipal Council partnered with the University of Wollongong to develop a web-based GIS site to allow members of the community to visualise land use issues in the municipality. The system allows members of the community to look at current land use issues across the whole municipality before completing a survey;
- the Community Block Grant Administration of Milwaukee has employed GIS in local neighbourhood strategic planning, where members of local communities undertake assessments of local strengths and needs based on data provided on economic and social indicators and presented using special mapping techniques;
- GIS has been combined with 3D imaging technology to allow for the 'visualisation' of different policy decisions for land use and area planning, allowing communities to see the projected impacts of different land planning regimes on local growth and the aesthetics of the community. See: <http://www.communityviz.com/>

### 4.4.1. Compelling Content versus Eyecandy<sup>4</sup>

The multimedia elements of ICTs are often touted as one of their compelling features. The convergence of text, audio and video can allow the development of attractive and entertaining online content that presents – often dry – content in a dynamic manner. When developing online content, it is important to gauge the value of dynamic media against technical issues (discussed in Section 4.3.4, Low Tech versus High Tech), as well as the relevance of stylistic design to the objectives of the engagement process.

#### **Exhibit 25: Web Design for Accessibility**

When utilising a website as a primary or secondary element for eEngagement, it is important to apply the relevant World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) guidelines to ensure that the content is presented in a manner accessible (readable or interpretable) to the widest possible audience.

These standards have been put into place to assist website designers to ensure that content is accessible to users who may:

- have limited vision or dexterity;
- have learning impairments or poor language skills;
- use assistive technologies to encounter information online (such as text-to-speech converters or Braille computers); and
- have low information literacy skills.

The guidelines provide technical *and* stylistic suggestions to increase the readability of online content and are mandated by many levels of government in Australasia. While generally considered a requirement for disabled members of the community, these standards have wider value to people whose primary language is not English, older members of the community and people who have poor literacy. Because the Australian and New Zealand societies are progressively aging, consistent application of these design guides will be increasingly important for social inclusion.

Further information on the guidelines can be found at: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/>

<sup>4</sup> Eyecandy (n) is defined by the Labor Law dictionary as ‘visual images that are pleasing to see but are intellectually undemanding’.

The tendency to over-emphasise design can significantly limit participation by:

- misrepresenting the content as not serious;
- preventing access by people with limited access speeds or who are unfamiliar with complex graphical user environments; and
- slow interaction with the system.

The accessibility of ICT interfaces is an ongoing concern for all governments for a number of reasons:

- governments are keen to promote their online information as accessible to all;
- there have been cases of litigation where inappropriate site design has prevented participation (for example: *Maguire v SOCOG*);
- the convergence of the internet protocol with a range of electronic devices makes 'standardised' designs (such as websites that enforce a specific screen resolution) unwise; and
- there is a growing movement towards standardisation of presentation to aid consistent branding and make user navigation simpler.

A good web designer is invaluable in ensuring that these issues are well-managed. They will have:

- a good technical understanding;
- a good understanding of useability issues;
- an awareness of relevant standards bodies and guides; and
- an awareness of relevant legal requirements and risks.

## **4.5. Promotion and Recruitment**

Promotion and recruitment is one of the key requirements for the development of a successful eEngagement (or any other consultative) project. One of the primary tests of eEngagement and online consultation activities is the extent to which the process has attracted participation. As the decline of civic participation (see Exhibit 1) is commonly the core motivation for government interest in eDemocracy activities, the success or otherwise of promotion and recruitment (and later retention, see Section 5.2, Closeout Processes) will often come to define the success of the activity in the mind of senior managers and Ministers.

The appropriate approach to promote the eEngagement process and recruit participants will depend on the nature of the process being undertaken, its objectives (particularly expectations of large or small numbers of participants) and the characteristics of the target audience.

Most government agencies use a combination of:

- website placement (on the agency site and increasingly on central ‘consultation gateways’, for example the *ConsultWA* Catalogue: <http://www.citizenscape.wa.gov.au/index.cfm?fuseaction=catalogue.about>);
- conventional advertising through mass media; and
- selective recruitment of key stakeholders.

The tools enabled by ICTs can be useful in developing innovative and effective means of recruitment, particularly in difficult-to-access segments of the community.

#### 4.5.1. Conventional Advertising and Promotional Approaches

Any eEngagement process, correctly configured to take account of issues associated with the digital divide, will incorporate a conventional promotional strategy (such as advertising, direct mail / marketing, etc.). Public sector managers will need to confirm their agency’s policy (or wider government policy) governing the use of advertising (e.g. preferred vendor lists, timing issues, branding strategies, etc.).

In addition, the management team will also consider:

- the appropriate integration of ICT-based information with advertising (such as referral from advertisements to informative websites);
- the lead-in times for purchasing advertising (which can take months to schedule);
- careful project planning to ensure online materials are ready to go ‘live’ at the scheduled start time for the promotional campaign; and
- leveraging the ‘novelty’ of the process to ensure media coverage of the event (a valuable public relations approach that can deliver cost-effective coverage of the issue).

#### 4.5.2. The Power of Social Networking (and its Limitations)

‘Social networking’ or ‘referral’ (or even ‘multilevel’) marketing is the use of existing social networks (such as friendship groups) to spread promotional and recruitment messages. These approaches are already used in consultative approaches in government, either formally (‘bring a friend’) or organically, as information relevant to one person is spread by them to their friends and personal acquaintances.

### **Exhibit 26: Wellington Shire (Victoria, Australia) Council Webcasting**

The Shire of Wellington introduced web-based video cameras into Council meetings to extend the reach of Council meetings to its large shire. As part of the implementation the Council included the capacity for viewers to post questions to the Mayor (following formal meeting practices for gallery observers), which made the process more engaging and interactive, as the Mayor responded live on camera to public concerns and questions. The webcasts have had strong viewer numbers, partially because of good promotion and marketing via existing media channels including television coverage on the regional news and positive endorsement by the local newspaper. In addition, some journalists who live at a distance to the Council chamber use the system to cover council debate, increasing the 'knock on' effect of information distribution and oversight of Council activities.

Social networking is particularly powerful in the ICT world, where messages can be spread quickly and easily in digital form (as when colleagues forward messages about issues they think may be of relevance to persons in their social or professional networks). In addition, many websites include 'mail this page to a friend' options to allow people to easily distribute information they think of interest to people they know.

The advantages of including a social networking recruitment element can include:

- low/no cost;
- ease of implementation;
- the 'networking effect' can massively multiply the number of people who receive the message; and
- the message is targeted to people who are likely to be responsive.

The limitations of social networking include:

- uncertainty about the number of people who are likely to be recruited;
- 'sameness' of friendship groups (may need to seed many different groups to get a diversity of participants);
- risk of recruiting 'wrong' or ineligible participants (remember the global nature of the medium);
- loss of control over the communication as it passes along personal networks;
- loss of control over the timing of messages (particularly where social networks are infrequent communicators) – may lead to request for participation long after the eEngagement process has concluded; the difficulty in developing

effective messages (e.g. that have intrinsic appeal and are, therefore, likely to be passed along); and

- the need to ensure that recruitment is not undertaken in a way that would be seen as deceptive or in violation of relevant Privacy laws.

## 4.6. Managing Risk

Most, if not all, public sector managers are now familiar with the main tenets of risk management as a key process in project management. Many of the risk assessment and mitigation processes in current use are well-documented 'checklist' approaches. This means, however, that they sometimes suffer from 'over-formalisation'. The introduction of eEngagement processes will be undertaken with reference to potential risk.

James L Creighton<sup>5</sup> provides a useful checklist to assess the level of controversy associated with a topic, an important precursor to the development of appropriate risk management and mitigation strategies. According to Creighton, public managers need to ask:

- are the impacts of the change/issue significant?
- has there been prior controversy?
- does the issue tie into others that have a history of controversy?
- does the issue touch on politically charged issues?
- is this issue the *raison d'etre* for stakeholder groups?

By using this form of assessment tool, the level of potential controversy can be determined and particularly sensitive issues or groups identified. While Creighton observes that there is no 'mathematical formula' for the identification of levels of sensitivity, this type of risk assessment approach is something that (a) can assist in planning for the avoidance or minimisation of risks and (b) offer an important accountability mechanism if risks become manifest in the process.

This assessment may be developed simply as a mitigation process, however, where risks cannot be mitigated fully, the process will also be necessary as a means of providing information about risks to potential participants. This is particularly true with regard to privacy issues (as discussed in Section 3.3, Managing Identity Issues), where the capacity to provide a completely private environment for participation is limited, due to the agency's lack of control over the user's ICT platform (e.g. they may have an insecure personal computing environment). Beyond privacy, the most common issues of concern are security and defamation.

<sup>5</sup> Creighton, James L, 2005, *The Public Participation Handbook: Making Better Decisions Through Citizen Empowerment*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

### 4.6.1. Security

Security is a technical *and* social concern and relates to:

- the safety of participants – particularly if their privacy cannot be guaranteed. While this may be irrelevant in many cases, experiences with consultation on issues of family violence in the UK necessitated careful planning and support to foster the participation of victims, particularly where they were alienated from their partners or remained in an at-risk environment;<sup>6</sup>
- the integrity of the system – even if the consultative process is not contentious, any networked system is open to attack and vandalism. Standard security procedures will be taken to prevent intrusion (which could lead to the loss of personal data of participants) or prevention of access attacks.<sup>7</sup> Where the issue is contentious, extra levels of security (higher security investment, distribution of hosting machines, multiple redundancy) should be applied to prevent disruption to the engagement process. This must be done in consultation with technical managers and security experts (often IT support staff may not have expertise in this area and external advice needs to be considered);
- social issues – it is important to recognise that most breaches of online security result either from ‘insider’ attacks (internal staff misuse of the system) or where users are ‘tricked’ into giving away identifying information (‘social engineering’). Careful design of the consultation approach, appropriate management of staff with access to the system, (e.g. preventing access by staff to areas of the software or database not relevant to their work) and training for users (to resist social engineering attacks) can reduce these risks significantly.<sup>8</sup>

#### Exhibit 27: Open Source for Security

In the development of the eVACS electronic voting system, the ACT Electoral Commission released the source code of the software as open source. This release allowed third party organisations and individuals to identify and report problems with the code. See: <http://www.elections.act.gov.au/EVACS.html>

### 4.6.2. Moderation

Moderation (monitoring and exercising editorial control over message content) is necessary in some areas of eEngagement and has generated a number of

<sup>6</sup> Coleman and Götze’s *Bowling Together*. The full reference is included in *Further Reading*.

<sup>7</sup> An attempt to prevent access to the system by ‘flooding’ it with fake users.

<sup>8</sup> An additional benefit here is increasing the public’s awareness of online security issues more generally – a growing area of public policy concern.

practical reference guides and formal training (the Hansard Society in the United Kingdom runs an online course for moderators). Moderation can be necessary where:

- the issue is contentious and emotions can run high;
- the target audience is new to online communications (and may be naive about the implications of contributing to online conversations and their ability to be widely read);
- the contents of discussion is intended to be published (in whole or part);
- there are political or cultural sensitivities associated with online discussion or debate; and
- participants are young.

While these issues are not relevant to simple interactive approaches (such as one-off data collection, or the use of polling and surveys), the most commonly cited risks or concerns of public sector managers are:

- the presentation of material from participants (online or off) opens the agency to the risk of defamation (e.g. they are acting in the role of a *publisher*); and
- aggressive, lurid or rude postings to a discussion list can lower the tone of conversation – either reducing the tenor of conversation (generating little of value) or intimidating potential participants (silencing).

Both are real risks, with the latter more serious than the former.<sup>9</sup> The role of public officials (or third party moderators) in maintaining a correct tone of discussion is important – even if this is simply to keep debate and discussion ‘on topic’ and focused towards the consultative objectives.

The difficulty in determining an appropriate approach is often:

- failure to consider this issue before the project is initiated (thereby lacking rules and technical processes for moderation if problems emerge);
- lack of experience in many public sector organisations in moderation – the nature of online communications – its lack of paralinguistic cues and other ‘social’ indicators makes online moderation a specific skill set that needs to be developed and cultivated over time; and
- inappropriate setting of the level or extent, of moderation. Overly *light* moderation is as bad as having no moderation at all, while excessively draconian control of discussion (allowing no off-topic conversation at all, which undermines the ‘forming and norming’ social bonding process, for

<sup>9</sup> While defamation laws have been applied to the online environment, it has been recognised that publishers (sponsoring agencies or companies) only have limited control over the content posted, provided they act in good faith (a post hoc or complaints-based takedown approach). Additionally, the Australian online censorship laws (the *Broadcasting Services Amendment Act 1999*) provide exemptions for dynamic content that is not stored as a static resource (e.g. the correspondence of emails over an unachieved list are exempt from censorship under the Act).

example) can prevent the appropriate ‘flow’ of conversation that can make these processes largely self-directing (thereby reducing staff time in ‘prompting’ and ‘guiding’).

Comprehensive moderation can be expensive, requiring considerable allocation of staff to the task (depending on the number of participants). This is particularly true where moderation requires all communications to be read in real time (such as may be required in a chat room for young people, for example). However, a number of options exist to maintain a robust approach to moderation at lower cost. Which options the organisation employs will depend on the nature of the issue and participants, but can include:

- using a mix of paid staff and volunteer moderators;
- using keyword searching to identify suspect posts for human review;
- ensuring participants are not anonymous; and
- using a ranking system to allow readers to ‘vote down’ offensive or irrelevant posts.

The advantages and limitations of different approaches are outlined in Figure 11.

**Figure 11: Advantages and Limitations of Moderation Approaches**

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
<b>Gate Keeping</b> (pre-posting review and approval)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong control over content, limits risk of hijacking or defamation</li> <li>• Focused discussion reduces ‘off topic’ conversation</li> <li>• Clear rules of engagement and participation, useful for inexperienced participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overly controlling, can limit valuable tangential discussion</li> <li>• Can alienate participants</li> <li>• Limits ‘discovery’ function – data collection can be railroaded toward expected conclusions</li> <li>• Significantly slows conversation</li> </ul>
<b>Post-hoc Moderation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manages risks without excessive control</li> <li>• Guiding role of moderation can stimulate participation from shy participants</li> <li>• ‘Referee’ function can build community and reduce tension in complex and contested issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time consuming, especially where high degrees of negotiation are required</li> <li>• Can still attract criticisms of control or censorship</li> <li>• Slows free-flow of discussion</li> </ul>
<b>Unmoderated</b> (open forum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No risk of accusation of censorship</li> <li>• Low cost</li> <li>• Free flowing discussion</li> <li>• Can allow discussion to flow to unexpected areas (discovery)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risks of hijacking or defamation (modest)</li> <li>• Can lead to domination by small number of vocal contributors</li> <li>• Discussion can drift towards irrelevancy</li> </ul>

### **Exhibit 28: Handling Defamation in a Discussion Forum**

The City of Brisbane (Queensland) maintains a clear policy for managing issues of defamation on its citizen discussion lists (<http://ycys.brisbane.qld.gov.au/>). This policy consists of:

- a formal policy statement that is provided to participants when they subscribe to the service;
- a moderation process that sees a member of the city council staff review all messages before they are posted to the list; and
- a complaints handling process with avenues for appeal and review.

The aim of this process is to protect the City from publishing material which may result in an action for defamation, or lead to general incivility on the discussion list. Items that are deemed to violate the policy are:

- in the first instance referred back to the original author pointing out the areas of difficulty and with suggestions as to how the message may be modified to comply with the policy; and
- subject to review (upon request) by a more senior manager for final determination.

e-democracy.org, on the other hand, maintains a 'take down' approach, where messages that violate the rules of the discussion (<http://www.e-democracy.org/rules/>) are removed if they are deemed to violate the rules.