

Inclusive Engagement with Communities:

Non statutory guide for Responsible Authorities

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1. Introduction – purpose of this guide

Welcome to this Natural England non-statutory guide on inclusive engagement for Responsible Authorities delivering Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The guide's purpose is to address questions that you have asked about engaging, inclusively with and beyond the land management sector. The guide offers steer around the optional aspects of community involvement as well as possible ways to approach the mandatory public consultation. Helpful advice about engaging those groups is already available in the documents **Engaging the Land Management Sector in Local Nature Recovery Strategies – Advice for Responsible Authorities** and **Local Nature Recovery Strategies: Advice on governance and working with partners**.

Two comprehensive documents externally commissioned by Natural England in partnership with Responsible Authorities in North, East, West and South Yorkshire - an **LNRS Participation Guide** and a **Participation Methodology** – cover in depth principles and information about participation more broadly. Here we hopefully offer some finer grained details, fill some gaps; and emphasise some of most important points.


Use this guide as a brief or set of 'top tips' for high quality engagement with groups you engage with, in your communities. Hopefully it will give a sense of who to prioritise, where, how and 'what good engagement looks like'. These tips are optional and go beyond the regulations.

You might want to share this guide with external engagement contractors or facilitators, or use this to build up a tender document.


We know that Responsible Authorities' budgets, resources and physical areas are all different, so no one size fits all.

2. Importance of communities for LNRS


You probably already know a number of reasons why engaging wider communities, health specialists, businesses, leisure and cultural groups is valuable for the LNRS, but here are some key reasons why it's important:



Without inclusive participation, we won't get a full sense of nature recovery's wider environmental, social, and economic benefits for our communities.



We will get to hear about priorities for nature from people who could benefit the most.



Different & diverse groups are likely to reveal new & compelling reasons why & where habitats or species should be prioritised.

Many groups have previously been excluded from decision making about nature recovery and consultations aren't always easy to get involved in.

We are likely to win supporters for further action or long-term care takers for nature.

The **Advice on Governance and Working with Partners document** states on page 4:

Engagement of the local community is a key way to ensure the LNRS reflects local priorities in terms of nature recovery and wider environmental issues. This engagement should be designed to build upon the environmental issues that affect residents. It should reach out to a wide range of local interest and community groups including those who are underrepresented. These local groups may also be interested in contributing to LNRS delivery in the future.

3. Early planning

3.1 Contracting engagement specialists

You may have plans to contract engagement work to one or a number of engagement specialists who lead with different communities. Use this guide to help with that process. They will need to be told:

- Clarity about scope of work, budget, timeline and mutual expectations
- Clarity about overall goals and priorities for project
- Your key audiences and messages

They should test messages, methods and materials if possible.

Arts and cultural organisations, universities and your own authorities' health, parks, communities teams will have skills in this area as will some Environmental NGOs. It's worth considering the value of subcontracting to community groups, youth groups, student bodies or others who are enthusiastic and already have a strong connection or tie with particular communities. Your engagement specialist(s) would ideally be a person/people with good local knowledge of your county and with expertise in working with a range of diverse groups. Talk to your Natural England Senior Adviser for Inclusion, in your region, for ideas.

3.2 Communications and engagement plans

We recommend creating both communications and engagements plans (they could be combined).

You could find a supporting authority ally - perhaps someone you are not typically engaging with - who would check that first communication. Whoever you communicate with, think... 'what will be their motivation for being part of this process?' Plan any first contact messages briefly explaining the LNRS in a compelling way; FAQs are helpful. Do ask external partners what they want to know.

We highly recommend having a communications specialist as a member of your 'Communities' working/advisory group.

Suggestions for subheadings within an Engagement plan include:

- Aims
- Benefits of engagement are to the LNRS process.
- Jargon free explanation of LNRS that communities would be able to understand
- Structure of overall LNRS Management
- Roles of working group(s) associated with engagement and hoped for membership, e.g. you could have one for Communities and Health and another for Businesses and Leisure
- A full detailed list of stakeholders relevant to the LNRS, their interests and how key you think they are to success of the LNRS
- Plans for targeted samples from key stakeholder and underrepresented groups you have chosen
- Methods for engagement with each
- Stages/timing of engagement right through to consultation on the draft LNRS

3.3 Budget

Talk to your Natural England Inclusion Senior Advisers and other Responsible Authorities for feedback on budget. You may get better value for money and local insight by spending smaller amounts on small local providers with specialisms, rather than a large 'out of town' contractor responsible for all engagement.

3.4 LNRS governance – including community and health expertise

As stated in **Local nature recovery strategies: Advice on governance and working with partners**, we recommend that your governance structure has a dedicated advisory/expert/working group to support you on engaging beyond land managing stakeholders. You may already have this set up. We advise payment to participate and allowances, especially for people who will not be able to participate in paid work time.

Within this group, having a combination of both hyper-local and county-wide expertise will help. Seek to understand any local tensions among individuals or groups before confirming group membership. Find out what barriers to participation might exist for that group (times of day; accessibility of written and verbal information; payment to participate; childcare etc.). You might want to have two groups e.g. 'Communities and Health' plus 'Business and Leisure' or combine stakeholder expertise. We suggest a maximum of 15 individuals in one group. Below are just some ideas for members. Note that many of these listed don't have environmental remits, and that is beneficial for governance diversity. There may also be a mix of seniority levels which could be useful:

- Someone with an estates, people or culture role at an NHS Trust, an NHS sustainability champion
- a representative from Public Health, whose teams sit within local authorities and have a broad remit looking at the health and wellbeing of the population.
- the Integrated Care Board Net Zero lead who is responsible for developing the localised 'Green Plan'
- a member of the Integrated Care System's biodiversity/greenspace working group
- representation from the voluntary sector where there is a focus on health and the environment
- Health and wellbeing programme manager at your Community and Voluntary Service (CVS)
- Member of a charity with key connections into seldom heard communities who could benefit from nature
- A lead on social prescribing in your county
- A lead for a green space friends of group

- A university researcher or project lead who works on environment and communities
- A communications specialist from within/outside your authority
- Head of engagement or inclusion from an environmental NGO
- Head of engagement within Museums/Libraries/Leisure organisations in the county
- Green schools or colleges champion
- Council or community officer with a Rights of Way remit
- Sports/Libraries lead
- A communities representative from a major town or city
- A co-production specialist.

The working group will first need to learn about the LNRS and nature recovery. They could then: co-develop communications and engagement plans; help decide who to engage and how; recommend key contacts for your priority groups. They might consider together the ‘findings’ from communities’ participation, making sure they are incorporated into draft priorities and outcomes for the LNRS.

Members will be well placed to be consulted on the LNRS draft and suggest who else to involve. This group will be able check that communities’ voices are included in the final priorities and outcomes. They will be able to advise on how priorities and outcomes should be fed back to communities. A steering group should also be able to advise on what secondary conversations and local issues you might use as a hook to engage people.

4. Who will we engage, where and when?

4.1 Who to engage - prioritising and locating

We strongly suggest prioritising hearing from geographical communities experiencing both high deprivation and low access to nature. This is because nature recovery gains for these communities can make the greatest difference in terms of economic, social and health impacts. These communities are identifiable via the Natural England Green Infrastructure Mapping tool and Natural England Inclusion Senior Advisers will be able to help. Your own demographic databases plus the [ONS census data for 2021](#) will be helpful, especially in identifying spatial distribution of ethnic minority communities. **We also recommend focussing people with roles in the health sector.** This will provide valuable buy-in for nature recovery from an influential sector at this first LNRS process and beyond.

It will be impossible to include all voices from all stakeholders and sectors. Rather, think of priorities that would well represent ‘samples’ from your communities. It’s important to make sure your ‘sample’ of engagement goes beyond affluent communities and those who traditionally participate in and enjoy nature-based activities e.g. visitors to environment centres and nature reserves

You might also plan to include communities you know to be impacted by concerned about environmental issues across your county.

We know *it’s not possible to engage all groups in all places across your regions*. It’s acceptable and good practice to note and transparently report where there were gaps in your engagement. Where exclusions were made and where alternative or surprising perspectives emerged, these are worth recording.

Engagement targets

We recommend setting some engagement targets for your priority groups. Below are examples of who might be engaged. Numbers will vary, but there will be benefit for the LNRS process *even if only small numbers* are engaged from some sectors, for example through a series of focus groups or tailored activities to engage say 25 people in total.

- Farmers and landowners, e.g. through Farm Clusters, NFU, CLA and Natural England contacts
- Individuals and groups within geographical communities experiencing both high deprivation and low access to nature
- Community wide survey (at end of survey, do ask for the first half of the postcode with the number e.g. PE21 plus ethnicity data, age and gender data that match Census formats so you can record who you are reaching)
- Plus deep dives into groups below. Try to include a mix of Group A **and** Group B or similar.

Group A - with responsibilities for physical spaces

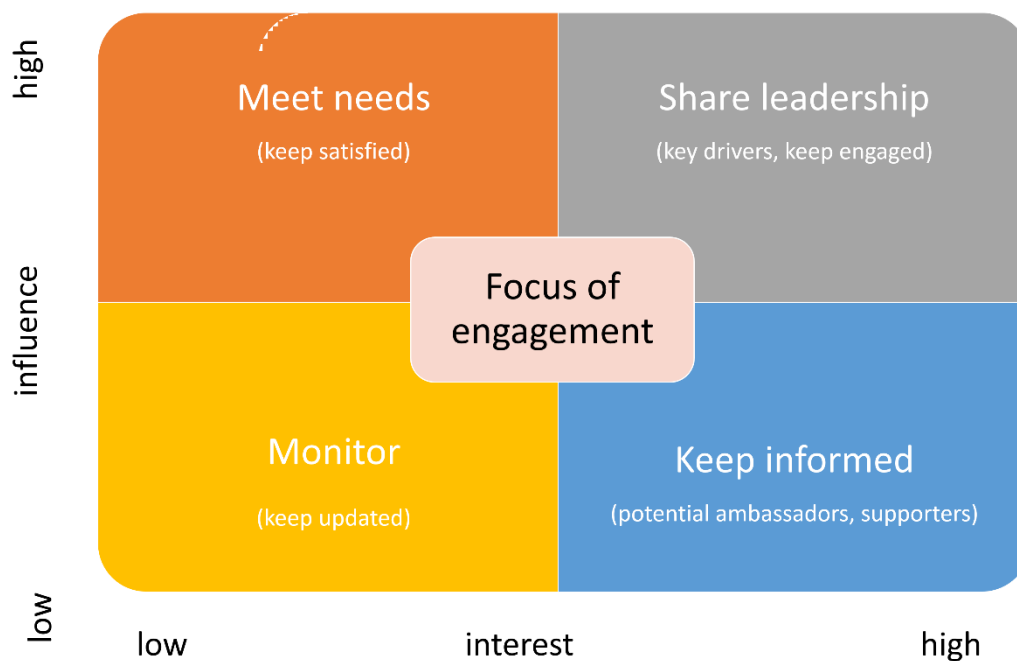
- Hospital estates and environmental officers
- Businesses and small to medium enterprises
- Public sector estate land staff e.g. responsible and supporting authorities, defense, courts, prisons
- Leisure and Culture providers
- Parish Councils

Group B – community members or those responsible for communities

- NHS hospitals staff, GPs, health workers, Allied Health Professionals
- Schools and colleges - staff, parents and children under 18
- Ethnic minorities (via interest groups, support groups, faith groups)
- People with health conditions or disabilities

4.2 Stakeholder mapping

With your engagement contractor and/or your advisory group, list potential stakeholders in your area – everyone who might be affected by the LNRS in some way and who would be unhappy to be missed out. You can use a tool like the one below to aid the process and consider their long term involvement in carrying out the LNRS later on.



Not everyone in this long list or map will be someone you engage. Having this list will offer a sense of the variety of reasons people might have in prioritising nature, gaining health, social and economic benefits in particular.

4.3 When to engage

Engagement can happen across the life of the LNRS process. There are likely to be engagement bursts or phases for participation. You may have a plan for a 6 month focus, but factor in time for relationship-building and there may be a need to 'go in' in several times. Plan in plenty of time for analysis and write up. Consider when people are most likely to engage. Spring and summer may gain wider participation at outdoor events; mid-winter may be best for farmers. Surveys for some groups may land better when they avoid holidays, term breaks or times of heavy workload. Internal surveys can get better response rates than external ones, so consider befriending allies that can co-design or release surveys in their organisations.

5. How to engage

5.1 An engagement campaign

In deciding what engagement activities would work with which groups, it might be helpful to think in terms of a campaign. A campaign involves more than one activity or event. Different communication styles and engagements will work for different groups, so you will need to assess pros and cons of different activities for you and the target group. Below is a list of key things to consider when planning engagement activities:

- **Your communications and engagement plan** should include a clear timeline of multiple activities you will be doing including checkpoints and milestones. It is rare that just one outreach works so plan for multiple engagements tailored to your different communities. You might have discrete campaigns for your different groups such as farmers and landowners; minority communities; underserved communities with low nature access;

communities where health and wellbeing inequalities can be addressed through nature recovery.

- **Have a presence** such as a website with engaging branding. You could use a partner's website where there might be more traffic. Post when and where your engagement activities will be taking place, and a clear outline of your project with a live FAQs document and any surveys you might have. You can use QR codes on your engagement materials such as flyers, posters and boards to direct people to your webpage and increase your engagement.

Collaborate with existing groups and join their activities. Getting involved with organisations and events going on in your area is key to a successful engagement and **will save time and resource**. Your longer list of stakeholders should be able to guide you as to when and where these are happening. Example: a stall with activities at a local festival in your region. Listen to people's experiences of nature and talk about the LNRS using your chosen methods and activities.

- **Start where people are at:** communicate what the LNRS is in simple and easy terms, as well as why it is happening and what input you are looking for. This will vary depending on who you are talking to. Whilst a farmer may want to tell you something about their land, a person living in a more urban area might want to tell you about their local green space and how it could be improved. (see section 6 for more ideas on key messages and hooks in).
- **Use a combination of online and offline mediums** to ensure no one is excluded. Some people may want to feed in digitally and there are many tools you can use for your engagement (for example Commonplace and Citizen Space) whilst others prefer face to face engagement, or might need more support entering information digitally.
- **Make sure your online activities are inclusive.** For example, make presentations easy to read and use captions. Choose text size to suit all ages. Check the inclusive language notes in 6.3.

5.2 Methods and activities

Local community members know their area the best. It is essential that at least some of your engagement amplifies seldom heard voices: in particular, those on lower incomes, ethnic minorities, children and young people, older people and those with disabilities.

Community engagement activities can include:

Drop-in workshops which can be pre-planned with local people invited to discuss issues, potential solutions and proposals. Mapping out, identifying and publicising the green and blue spaces is good for conversations and empowering involvement in decision making about what happens in these spaces.

Pop-ups in areas of high footfall to reach a wide range of people you might not hear from otherwise (outside stations, schools, supermarkets, libraries and other key hotspots identified in the area). This removes barriers to involvement and ensures natural and engaged conversation.

Going to existing community events in your area. Go to where trusted and well-loved groups are running existing activities in your region.

Access audits. Working with local disability groups to understand barriers to accessing nature first hand, using on the ground audits, is an insightful way to gather information to feed into the LNRS and understand priority areas that benefit people.

Posters / Feedback boards around neighbourhoods can support in having a presence and spreading the word about the work you are doing.

Online tools such as Commonplace <https://www.commonplace.is/> and Citizen Space https://www.delib.net/citizen_space can be useful tools to support your digital engagement strategy.

Community walkabouts enable you to listen as well as educate and empower people around biodiversity in their neighbourhoods. They can be a great way of reaching new audiences.

Focus groups especially where people get something new or valuable as a result of attending.

Your working/advisory group or your commissioned engagement specialists will advise what will work best where. Considerations such as accessibility, translation, timings are important.

On-street engagement is invaluable at capturing a wider diversity of views, and can go much further in **understanding ‘why’** than online surveys.

Successful engagement often happens when participants **feel valued or receive something in return for their time**. People can be attracted to a new activity or series of engagements because of what it offers them. Consider options such as: photography classes, certificates for involvement; displaying people’s artwork or contribution; celebration; video or printed resource; a wellbeing session; a master class; badges, postcards, free cake and a cuppa.

6. What will the LNRS mean to communities?

6.1 Communicating using Plain English

For those who have already heard about the Local Nature Recovery Strategy from you, the term will be familiar already. For non-specialist audiences, we recommend that the first of your communications uses plain English phrases so that the LNRS can be immediately understood by anyone in your communities. It’s helpful sometimes to check whether your first communication could be understood by an 8 year old and an 80 year old. Unsuccessful environmental engagement can often be attributed to initial communications being overly complex or not seeming relevant.

6.2 Key messages:

The LNRS could be introduced for example within these kinds of messages:

- Making space for nature in our county
- Priorities for looking after nature where we live
- We are deciding where to create and bring back places for wildlife across the whole county – help us choose!
- We need to think about where (*your place name*) nature needs our help the most and how people can benefit from giving nature a hand. Help us decide.

The catchy phrase ‘a blueprint for nature’ might encapsulate the LNRS for many. Remember that people with different cultural backgrounds and younger people might find the concept of ‘blueprint’ unfamiliar.

When you or your contracted engagement partners approach people, face to face, in print or online, there are a variety of messages that will make sense to people *and* importantly bring them in.

Example engagement messages:

- In making decisions about looking after nature, it's often environmental specialists who help us understand what to do.
- We would like to hear from people in your area especially.
- You are experts about this place.
- As we make our plan for places and wildlife that need attention, we want to hear from a wide variety of people with different backgrounds, opinions and experiences. We can't promise you that things will change instantly, but we want to include your ideas to plan what to do next.
- All counties in England are by law required to set out plans and priorities for looking after nature, where people can benefit too. We are doing this by deciding which kinds of natural environments and which wildlife should be prioritised and why.

6.3 Inclusive language

At every stage, consider 'what will they think of what we are saying here?' Remember that even phrases like 'habitats' and 'biodiversity' can be off-putting at first. They can be used later on in communication or explained.

Embrace up to date inclusive language that won't alienate the people you want to engage. For example:

- Consider using the phrase participation or involvement instead of consultation.
- Avoid the acronym BAME (unless specific local ethnic minority groups favour that term).
- If you and your engagement partner are not sure what phrases that your local groups use, take time to check beforehand.
- The phrase 'the public' can be unhelpful when it's so diverse. Sometimes, it can create an 'us' and 'them' divide between specialists and wider communities.
- Avoid using the phrase 'hard to reach', even in internal meetings. Moving away from this phrase will help you, your stakeholders and partners think and be heard more positively. 'Hard to reach' frames 'other people' as problematic. Instead, use phrases like 'new audiences', 'communities', 'diverse groups' 'seldom heard' or 'previously unheard' voices.

6.4 Whose LNRS?

All your engagement should help people know that this strategy for caring for nature does not belong to just the 'Responsible Authority', it is for your county or area. Help supporting authorities and communities themselves to feel a sense of belonging - using words like 'our' and 'your'.

7. How will you know if it was inclusive engagement?

1. You will have engaged a range of different groups who feel valued and able to have voice in the LNRS priorities – especially not just the 'usual suspects' – (people with environment jobs/interests).
2. Your Communities, Health, Business and Leisure group(s) will be steering you on 'good practice'. Members of these groups will: between them have strong community knowledge relating to their sector; help you target engagement; suggest ongoing improvements to your engagement plan.
3. Your 'core' steering group attending to strategic oversight or overall LNRS management will include at the very 'top' a person with community engagement interest and expertise.
4. Some of your budget will be earmarked for engagement of wider audiences and some

will be earmarked for wider, non-specialist audiences to be consulted on the LNRS draft.

5. Your LNRS will include perspectives gathered from people in areas with high deprivation and low access to nature; urban residents; minority groups; ethnic minorities; people with or representing disabilities and health conditions; a range of ages.
6. There will be evidence that communities' views have influenced the priorities chosen in the final LNRS.
7. People participating will be able to find out happened to their input and understand what the LNRS means i.e. 'you said, we did'. The wider public, including people who did not participate will also be able to find out and understand the LNRS outcomes.
8. You transparently record and report where there were gaps in inclusive engagement, where and why hoped-for groups were missed. Alternative perspectives and surprising 'findings' are also noted.
9. Your facilitator and engagement partners will have collected records about who participated. Collect metrics as you go:
 - ✓ some participant data about age, sexual orientation and gender of participants (use questions 26 and 27 from Census, 27).
 - ✓ notes on ethnic minority groups engaged. For surveys, ask for ethnicity data at the **end** of the survey (use the same language as 2021 Census ethnicity categories).
 - ✓ evidence to show you have engaged across a range of health and disability experiences (use Census 2021 question 22 about disability and health and **end** of survey).
 - ✓ facilitators' notes and estimates about the demographic makeup of groups, where more informal drop ins and face to face meetings happen.

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