# Step 2: Engaging with the disability community

In this step, you will consider how to gather the different views of disabled people and relevant experts from across the disability sector.

Engagement is important across the entire policy process; from identifying and understanding the problem, all the way to developing the solution, the implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Engagement should happen early and often. Avoid making engagement with disabled people a check-box exercise.

As tāngata whenua, Māori have explicit rights and the Crown has explicit responsibilities under both the Treaty of Waitangi and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Engagement is how government agencies can give effect to Articles One and Two of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, namely with respect to kawanatanga and rangatiratanga. More information and guidance on how to give effect and consider Te Tiriti in your policy work can be found [on the DPMC website](https://dpmc.govt.nz/publications/co-19-5-te-tiriti-o-waitangi-treaty-waitangi-guidance-html), and [guidance on how to engage with Māori are available on the Te Arawhiti website](https://www.tearawhiti.govt.nz/te-kahui-hikina-maori-crown-relations/engagement/). Consider how you will be meeting the rights and needs of tāngata whaikaha (disabled Māori) and their whānau in your engagement.

## Why engage?

Disabled people can be forgotten, and their needs neglected. It is often assumed that the one-size-fits-all solution will benefit disabled people along with the whole population. This is not necessarily true. For example, beautifying a town centre with planters, bollards and connecting metal chain may be visually appealing for many people, but may cause problems for blind and vision-impaired people. Consultation with disabled people at the early planning stages should identify this risk and avoid unintended accident and injury.

Meaningful engagement is key to developing solutions and policies that are universally effective. The expectation that government agencies take the opportunity to gather insights and experiences from the disability community, is highlighted in the [New Zealand Disability Strategy](https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/). Meaningful engagement and consultation with relevant population groups contributes to the Government’s commitment to inclusivity and working towards a non-disabling society.

A non-disabling society is part of the vision of the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026. This Strategy was approved by Cabinet in 2016. Government agencies are obligated to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) when developing policy.

The two Articles within the UNCRPD that are particularly important to this step are [Article 4(3)](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-4-general-obligations.html)and [Article 33(3)](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-33-national-implementation-and-monitoring.html).

Article 4(3) states that:

“In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.”

### Representative organisations

In New Zealand, ‘representative organisations of disabled people’ are known as Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs). Several DPOs come together regularly as the [DPO Coalition](https://www.odi.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/disabled-peoples-organisations/) to provide advice and guidance to government agencies on disability issues.

Article 33(3) states that:

“Civil society, in particular persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, shall be involved and participate fully in the monitoring process.”

The articles describe the need for active involvement of disabled people in decision-making and the development of legislation and policies that relate to disabled people. As all policy has a direct or indirect effect on people, and disabled people make up 24% of the New Zealand population, all policy relates to disabled people.

In 2018, the United Nations issued guidance clarifying obligations around these two Articles. This guidance is called [General Comment Number 7](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crpd/pages/gc.aspx)and explains that when disabled people are consulted, this leads to laws, policies and programmes that contribute to more inclusive societies and environments.

General Comment 7 is a useful tool providing concrete recommendations on how to undertake consultation with disabled people, through their representative organisations. The recommendations include:

* developing accessible information about decision-making processes
* establishing inclusive methodologies
* ensuring organisations of disabled people have access to national and international funding for their functioning and advocacy.

## What level of engagement with disabled people does your policy process need?

Policy engagement can range from simply informing the public or those groups affected by a policy, through to targeting diverse experience and inviting co-design of policy options. The [IAP2 spectrum](https://www.iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum/)captures this range. You should work out what type of engagement you think fits your project at different points in the policy process and overlay your engagement with a disability lens. Check in with Disabled People’s Organisations before you start, to ensure you are on the right track.

## Who to engage with?

First, consider which groups might be affected by your policy. This will help you target those you want to hear from. Seek advice at this early stage, as your proposed policy may impact on disabled people in ways that are not obvious.

ODI recommends that you start by contacting relevant Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) and the DPO Coalition. DPOs are membership-based organisations, led by Boards made up of disabled people. Engagement with these organisations should provide a broad perspective of the membership they represent. [Details on how to engage with DPOs can be found on the ODI website](https://www.odi.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/disabled-peoples-organisations/).

There are many other organisations or groups that you can also contact that are not part of the DPO Coalition. If you require a regional perspective or have a service provider focus, consider contacting the local council/s or District Health Boards. Many have disability advisory groups that you can connect with.

Don’t forget about children and youth. [Guidance on listening to the voices of disabled children in New Zealand can be found on the ODI website](https://www.odi.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/listening-to-the-voices-of-children-with-disabilities-in-new-zealand/). Another option is [I.Lead](https://ileadchange.org/%22%20%5Co%20%22Open%20external%20link), a New Zealand disabled youth movement.

Engaging with people who work with disabled people, or are advocates, family members or carers of disabled people, may provide a valuable perspective. This is especially true for those that care for and communicate for non-verbal disabled people. However, disabled people are the experts in their own lives. You should never use family members, carers, or service providers of disabled people for advice on policy for disabled people instead of engaging with disabled people directly.

Regardless of the combination of groups, organisations and individuals that you engage with throughout your policy process, checking back in with the DPO Coalition during the final stages can improve transparency and accountability, making sure the policy is responsive to the requirements of disabled people.

### Valuing consultation and expertise

Beyond initial discussions, government agencies must factor in funding to engage disabled people and/or representatives from DPOs for advice and participation in reference groups, advisory groups or working parties. The advice from representatives of DPOs or the DPO Coalition is regarded as expert advice and vital to agencies ensuring their policies and services work for disabled people.

DPOs are not funded to provide the level of advice, expertise and time required for reference/advisory groups. Individual disabled people and those representing a DPO or the DPO Coalition are not funded elsewhere for their involvement in reference/advisory groups. They may have to take leave if they are in paid employment to represent the DPO. Government agencies need to negotiate the terms of payment with relevant individuals, the DPO, or the DPO Coalition, prior to commencement of the reference/advisory group.

The Office for Disability Issues provides funding for the DPO Coalition to meet regularly in Wellington. These meetings are held approximately every six weeks for two days. Government agencies can request to meet with the DPO Coalition during these meetings at no additional cost to agencies. This mechanism is ideal for seeking input from disabled people through their representative organisations near the beginning and in the final stages of your policy process. This should not replace the inclusion of paid positions for disabled people on reference/advisory groups. [Information on how to request a meeting with the DPO Coalition can be found on the ODI website](https://www.odi.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/disabled-peoples-organisations/).

#### Examples of costs

The funding agreement ODI has with the DPO Coalition for the regular meetings includes payment of daily meeting fees benchmarked against the Cabinet Fees Framework. This is currently $350 per day for DPO Coalition members and $360 per day for the meeting Chair. ODI also pays for preparation time if that is required before the meeting, travel, accommodation and expenses incurred by each DPO Coalition member. For some DPO Coalition members, other reasonable accommodations are required to enable their full and effective participation. These can include costs for meeting assistants, New Zealand Sign Language Interpreters, and translation of information into alternate formats.

Government agencies need to negotiate the terms of payment with relevant individuals, the DPO or the DPO Coalition prior to commencement of the reference/advisory group or provision of other advice and expertise.

## When you engage with disabled people directly, keep the following things in mind:

* Consult with disabled people as people. Be specific that you are consulting with them to understand their experiences.
* Provide safe ways for disabled people to have their say, e.g. disabled people should not have to share personal information in order to heard.
* Disabled people may require reasonable accommodations to have their say. Providing reasonable accommodations to enable disabled people to engage with your policy process on an equal basis with others is likely to increase participation. Examples of reasonable accommodations include NZSL interpreters, braille, audio, and easy-read versions of relevant information being distributed ahead of the meetings.
* Good engagement has accessibility and inclusion built into the consultation process.
* Involve disabled people at different ages, stages of life, cultures, backgrounds, and regions. These groups can have very different perspectives, experience and values, which are all are useful in getting a full picture to inform your policy.
* Cultural perspectives on disability may mean that disability may be under-reported by some grounds. Based on current data, 26% of Māori and 19% of Pacific people are identified as disabled people. Make sure your engagement acknowledges diversity within the disability population and consider if and how you might tailor your engagement to capture proportional representation.

For more guidance on how to run an accessible meeting, see guidance from:

* [Office for Disability Issues - Running accessible meetings](https://www.odi.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/running-accessible-meetings/?stage=Stage)
* [Ministry of Health - Guide to community engagement with people with disabilities](https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/guide-community-engagement-people-disabilities-2nd-edn-apr17.pdf)

### Tips for graphics depicting disabled people in media and communications content

Information about disabled people should show them as people in society and not create an impression of disabled people being separate or special. Images should be age appropriate and respectful.

Disabled people should be included in general illustrations including everyday social situations and work environments, to show they are part of the community like everyone else.

Show diversity amongst disabled people – disabled people can be any ethnicity, any relationship or family status etc. Some impairments are not visible or obvious. Don’t go out of your way to accentuate a person’s disability in photos/images.