

ENGAGING PEOPLE DURING DIFFICULT TIMES



TOP 10 TIPS

Facing community crises at any time is difficult. When there are 'concurrent crises' it makes it even more challenging and complex to respond and engage. Community members can feel disturbed, frightened or anxious. At the same time, organisations are also grappling with how to adjust, change and continue to move forward.



There is value in continuous connections.

Finding pathways to continue to talk, solve problems and build understanding is important and valuable. But only if done well. Engage poorly or insensitively, and you will face the consequences.

TIP	DESCRIPTION
1 Plan, plan and plan 	Invest now and set yourself up for an effective engagement process going forward Poor planning at the best of times makes for bad, even damaging, engagement. Not only will your processes not work, you may even set the project and organisation back several months or years in terms of reputation and relationships. <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Take the time to understand what is happening to your community - research, enquire and reach out.2. Invest time in a reset. Plan forward strategically - you may need to adapt your approach and align your team.
2 Slow down 	Rethink, readjust and avoid rushing ahead <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Readjust timeframes if needed - what needs to happen now and what could pause?2. Be cautious about moving to implementation, it may take time to return to a 'new normal' post event, and delivery may not be appropriate amidst confusion and disruption.3. Consider different cohorts and their circumstances - some will be ready to engage and take action, others won't.4. Slow down your engagement - flex around people's needs and give them time to adjust.
3 Get comfortable with emotions 	Embrace and work with emotions (even if it's not your normal mode of operating) <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand fear is normal, but it isn't 'just' fear - it is a family of emotions ranging from apathy and concern through to denial.2. Don't try to 'save' people from their emotions - emotions are part of being human and help us build resilience.3. Get ready for the long haul - emotions will pop up continually and impacts can be felt for decades.
4 Acknowledge it 	Recognise what is happening and what people are feeling Over the next year or two, you are going to need to notice, listen and acknowledge. <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Acknowledge emotions - it helps people carry them.2. Remember to be an engagement practitioner, not a counsellor. Just don't ignore or dismiss what people are feeling.3. Recognise emotions before you 'park' them - once acknowledged, people can concentrate on something else meaningful.

TIP		DESCRIPTION
5	Language and tone matter 	Words and how you use them are key <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Don't say 'I know how you feel', instead reflect on what you've heard people tell you. 2. Change and adapt your message - the situation (and peoples' emotions) will shift.
6	Some things will need to stop 	Not everything is appropriate right now <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It's ok to delay or stop sometimes - some projects shouldn't continue. 2. Warning - meaningless engagement is even more dangerous right now. People will get annoyed if you don't offer influence, and the promise you make is important.
7	Help people do something proactive 	People want to make a difference <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People want their time well spent - even more so during a crisis - and many will be looking to influence something or take action. 2. Move people to action at the right time - provide activities that create meaning and movement when the 'danger' passes.
8	Provide internal advice fearlessly 	Draw on your strategic skills and relationship building expertise <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic people need to step up, and that means engagement practitioners. Provide frank and fearless advice to leaders. 2. Work with your 'buddies' in communications and combine forces - but don't think communications is all that's needed, relying on 'inform' only is a risk.
9	Break your engagement down 	'Chunk' your process into manageable pieces <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Don't exhaust participants - keep online sessions short, interactive and purposeful, (because screens can be tiring) and don't talk 'at' people for too long. 2. Manageable chunks are key - break activities into discrete components and provide options that can be done synchronously (together) and asynchronously (separately).
10	You are experiencing this too 	Recognise that everyone is feeling the pain <p>Everyone will be hurting - your colleagues, your boss, even you. 'Anticipatory grief' linked to uncertainty affects behaviours and capacities. Recognise and sensitively manage your own emotions, and you'll be more empathetic and better able to engage effectively.</p>