

## Tool – Lessons learned

One of the Charter's principles is about ensuring engagement processes are reviewed and improved. *The Guide to the Community Engagement Charter* speaks to this in its final step, which is to reflect as a project team on the success of the engagement.

Conducting “lessons learned” exercises are an important way of recognising and celebrating success as well as acknowledging where and how improvements can be made.

You don't need to wait until the end of a project to start learning from past lessons. You can reflect on lessons learned after each individual engagement activity, such as an open house event or workshop. This approach allows you to adjust and improve your process as you go.

### Lessons learned exercise

Invite all members of the project team who contributed to the overall engagement process to participate.

The point of the exercise is to identify what went well and what didn't go well to improve process and outcomes for future efforts.

Lay some ground rules for the exercise, such as:

1. do not assign blame – this exercise is about focusing on behaviours or approaches that were successful or challenging, not people
2. there are no right or wrong reflections - one person's perspective may be different to your own
3. remain focused on positive, productive discussions that will yield lessons learned within the defined amount of time scheduled.

Key questions to ask include:

- What worked well?
- What was challenging?

You may want to consider the above questions in relation to the themes of:

- engagement activities and materials
- communication
- process
- people
- resourcing.

You could ask people to answer these questions as a group, or you could enable each group member to write their own thoughts on post-it notes.

You could then ask group members to prioritise their top six successes and their top six challenges.

As a group you may then like to discuss how to integrate successful approaches into future engagement processes and avoid or mitigate against things that did not work well.

All positive and negative outcomes of an engagement activity should be documented so that they can be shared and re-used among current and future project teams. If subsequent engagements are planned, improvements should be implemented before these commence. This helps 'close the loop' on lessons learned and ensures that mistakes and/or negative outcomes are not repeated.