

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) seek solvers to enter in the *PMA Learning Agenda: Public Participation and Community Engagement Evidence Challenge*. Details below.

If interested, review the challenge information including rules and how to enter on [Challenge.gov](https://www.evaluation.gov/challenge) and complete your submission.

What Public Participation and Community Engagement (PPCE) activities are effective in increasing reach, improving inclusivity, and promoting public involvement and trust in Federal decision-making?



Department: Office of Management and Budget (OMB) - Office of Performance and Personnel Management (PPM) Evidence Team; and the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA)

Topics: Equity; Evaluation; Public Participation; Community Engagement

Summary:

The [President's Management Agenda](#) Priority 2 envisions the delivery of excellent, equitable, and secure services and customer experiences to the American people by and across Federal Government. Yet, Federal services have not always been designed with the public's needs and priorities in mind, nor have these services always kept up with these needs. Achieving PMA goals require a renewed emphasis on direct engagement with Americans of all walks of life to reimagine the delivery of Federal services. The American people deserve a government that understands who they are, what they need, and how best to deliver for them. [Federal agencies are embracing the importance of PPCE](#) and trying new and innovative ways to extend engagement opportunities to the public and especially members of communities who historically have been excluded or whose views may not be well represented through traditional public comment processes.

Given the limitations of public input garnered through traditional PPCE activities, including [Federal Register](#) notice and comment processes and Requests for Information, in representing the full breadth of American experiences, agencies are pursuing other approaches, including consultations, listening sessions, customer feedback surveys, user research, and crowdsourcing. More equitable and effective public engagement benefits Federal agencies by improving their awareness of and responsiveness to the perspectives and needs of the communities and individuals affected by their

policies and programs.¹ Individuals and communities can benefit by gaining more awareness and understanding of government policies and programs that impact them and sharing their experiences and expertise to influence changes that improve their interactions with and trust in government.

To help agencies develop effective approaches for meaningfully engaging with the public, OMB has recently published a [Request for Information in the Federal Register](#) seeking the public's input on:

- Experiences individuals and organizations have had in participating (or trying to participate) in Federal Government PPCE activities;
- Content to incorporate in a Federal framework for PPCE, including common guidelines and leading practices that can help Federal employees better use these methods; and
- Suggestions for how OMB might continue to pursue a collaborative process to co-develop such a framework with the public.

A critical complement to improving how Federal agencies conduct PPCE activities is the development of methods to evaluate the extent to which the efforts they adopt and implement are effective. Also, as agencies pilot, implement, or experiment with approaches to their PPCE activities, they need support in measuring and evaluating whether and how those changes are an improvement relative to the status quo. Currently, Federal agencies do not have a shared set of valid quantitative or qualitative metrics or well-developed evaluation plans that would enable them to rigorously measure the effectiveness of different approaches to PPCE.

This Challenge aims to develop a PPCE evaluation toolkit, informed by rigorous research and validated approaches for social science measurement, that Federal agencies can use to build evidence to improve their PPCE activities in furtherance of reaching a wide and diverse audience and augmenting public trust. OMB and GSA are interested in Solvers developing evaluation tools to help generate evidence regarding the effectiveness of various PPCE approaches, such as:

- 1) What approaches increase awareness of PPCE opportunities among members of affected communities?

¹ For example, see Holley, K. (2016). [The Principles for Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement: A Guide to Transformative Change](#). Columbus, OH: The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at the Ohio State University (highlighting six principles of equitable and inclusive civic engagement: 1) embracing the gifts of diversity; 2) realizing the role of race, power and injustice; 3) radical hospitality: invitation and listening; 4) trust-building and commitment; 5) honoring dissent and embracing protest; and 6) adaptability to community change). Examples across the Federal Government include White House, "[Fifth Open Government National Action Plan to Advance a More Inclusive, Responsive, and Accountable Government](#)," 28 Dec. 2022; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "[Public Participation Guide: Internet Resources on Public Participation](#)," 31 Jan. 2024; and U.S. Dep't of Transp., "[Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making](#)," Nov. 2023.

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- 2) How do motivators and barriers to PPCE vary across demographic factors and lived experiences? What features of PPCE activities serve to build on those motivators and/or mitigate barriers to participation?
- 3) How does participation in PPCE opportunities affect perceptions of related Federal program or policy decisions and the leaders or agencies who make and implement them? and
- 4) What measures, data sources, and analytic methods provide actionable information about the relative effectiveness of PPCE approaches in terms of their contributions to increasing reach, improving diversity and inclusivity, eliciting substantive involvement and nuanced input from participants, and promoting trust in Federal decision-making?

This Challenge includes a two-phase process to propose and develop an evaluation toolkit that provides Federal agencies with guidance, methods, and metrics to effectively plan, collect, and measure key aspects of their PPCE activities. Specifically, this Challenge is expected to address Federal agency needs for generating and applying credible evidence to their adoption of appropriate and effective PPCE activities. Solvers will be eligible for up to \$195,000 of prize funds from GSA. Additionally, the top-scoring Solver may have the opportunity to collaborate with a Federal agency in a pilot implementation of the Solver's evaluation toolkit as part of a PPCE activity, to the extent allowable (more information further below).

Anticipated deliverables:

The Challenge Solver will provide a scalable, cost-effective PPCE Evaluation Toolkit that can be used by Federal agencies to evaluate their PPCE activities. The toolkit should include (but need not be limited to) guidance for evaluation planning (e.g., actionable and practicable approaches for embedding evaluation in PPCE approaches and the roll-out of new methods, including related communications and outreach); identification of valid output and outcome measures (relevant indicators may include measures of participant diversity, breadth and saturation of reach, new or unique perspectives gained by Federal officials, engagement quality, engagement satisfaction, and measures of trust in government); and strategies to collect and analyze that data to contribute to a shared and growing evidence base that can inform continual improvement and refinement of approaches to effective and equitable PPCE across the government.

Phase I – Technical Concept Paper

In Phase I, all interested potential solvers will submit a technical concept paper that details their approach to developing the PPCE evaluation toolkit. The concept paper should outline potential output and outcome measures and how they will be validated, the types and sources of data agencies could use to evaluate their PPCE activities, other components that the toolkit will include, and how the toolkit will be designed and developed (including file formats, software, or platforms) to aid Federal agencies in the evaluation of their PPCE activities. Solvers may look to existing literature, scholarly articles, research, and other resources as they identify recommended evaluation methods.

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In Phase II, the winning solvers from Phase I will develop and submit their detailed PPCE evaluation toolkit for use by Federal agencies. The toolkit must be feasible and scalable for use across the breadth of PPCE approaches by agencies with varying evaluation capacity and must include (but need not be limited to):

- Guidance for evaluation planning (e.g., actionable and practicable approaches for embedding evaluation in the roll-out of new PPCE approaches, including related communications and outreach),
- Identification of valid output and outcome measures (relevant indicators may include measures of: participant diversity, breadth and saturation of reach, new or unique perspectives gained, engagement quality, engagement satisfaction, and measures of trust in government), and
- Strategies to collect and analyze data to contribute to a shared and growing evidence base that can inform continual improvement and refinement of approaches to effective and equitable PPCE across the government.

To demonstrate the applicability of their toolkit, solvers will also provide a use case of how their toolkit would apply to the example case study below. This case study is only applicable to Phase II of the challenge.

Case Study: *Agency X seeks to improve how it delivers its services, and expand participation and enhance public trust in its new environmental justice programs. To help achieve these goals, Agency X wants to implement PPCE approaches that ensure the Agency is able to broadly share information with and get feedback from those individuals impacted by these programs, including underserved communities (see E.O. 13985 for definition intended). The agency also wants to ensure its participation processes are inclusive and accessible, and that its efforts build trust with participants. The agency plans to use this diverse feedback to identify and address challenges that the public may face in accessing or participating in these programs. Agency X has historically only used Requests for Information (RFI) as a PPCE method with citizens. Generally, RFI responses are primarily received from industry associations. Agency X officials feel that this approach will be insufficient for garnering broad and diverse engagement in the development of its new environmental justice initiative it is planning. Agency X wants to implement PPCE approaches that will ensure it reaches broad audiences as intended, hears from many and diverse perspectives, and is accessible and inclusive in its efforts to engage with the public.*

Describe in a Use Case how Agency X can use the Evaluation Toolkit to aid it with the following questions:

- *What should Agency X consider when deciding what PPCE approaches, including methods of engagement, to implement?*

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- *What does Agency X need to do as part of the implementation planning and roll-out to support evaluation of their chosen PPCE activity?*
- *What should Agency X measure and how?*
- *Overall, how would your toolkit be responsive to Agency X's need as described in the case study?*

Planned use of results:

The Challenge will result in an evaluation toolkit that Federal agencies can use to evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of their PPCE approaches. The toolkit will provide ways to better evaluate PPCE activities and approaches, so that agencies will have better information to inform the selection and implementation of more effective PPCE approaches that will help agencies advance the PMA priorities.

Funding:

Challenge solvers are eligible for prize money up to **\$195,000** under this competition.

- Phase I – 3 winners selected to continue to Phase II will be awarded **\$15,000** by GSA
- Phase II – 1 winner will be awarded **\$150,000** by GSA

Other Benefits to Researchers:

The winner of the challenge may have the opportunity to collaborate with a Federal agency in a pilot implementation of the Solver's evaluation toolkit as part of a PPCE activity, to the extent allowable. If the Solver expresses interest, OMB may facilitate a collaboration between the Solver and a Federal agency High Impact Service Provider to implement the toolkit to evaluate a specific PPCE activity. The PPCE activity would not necessarily relate to the Phase II case study and use case description. (Note that there is no guarantee that the winning Solver will have the opportunity to conduct a pilot implementation.)

Learning Agenda Question:

[President's Management Agenda Learning Agenda](#): What are effective approaches that agencies can take in managing the business of Government to address barriers that have hindered equal opportunity?

Expertise needed:

- Knowledge of public participation and community engagement strategies
- Program evaluation, with experience in culturally responsive evaluation or similar methods
- Measurement design
- Technical communication skills

Key dates:

- Challenge Phase I opens 4/8/2024
- Phase I Submission deadline 5/21/2024
- Notify Phase I winners 6/3/2024
- Challenge Phase II opens 6/3/2024
- Phase II Submission deadline 8/2/2024
- Notify Phase II winner 8/19/2024

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