

Guide for engaging with Muslim communities

Key engagement steps

What could this look like in practice?

1. Identify purpose

You recognise a need for Muslim communities' views to inform your work. You are clear on the purpose of the engagement.

2. Identify who to engage with

Defining the purpose and understanding the potential impact on Muslim communities will enable you to determine who has a potential interest in the issue.

You determine what relationships or processes exist within your own agency that you could start with. You talk with other Public sector agencies to avoid duplication that increases the burden on community members and organisations. You check whether communities have previously provided views on the issues you are seeking to engage on so you are not asking them to repeat themselves.

You are inclusive and reflect the diversity of Muslim communities by identifying and engaging with a wide range of participants that includes, but is not limited to, representative organisations that may speak for large communities of interest. It should include a balance of gender, youth/elder views, established communities and recent migrant communities and be representative of different religious perspectives and ethnicities. Consider whether the issue affects Muslim communities in a local area, at a regional level or has a national significance that affects all Muslim communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

3. Determine how to engage

The level of engagement should be determined by the potential impact of those policies on Muslim communities.



Before commencing any engagement, you should work with the community to agree on a set of principles for how you engage with them – see example below*.

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4. Plan & prepare

You have determined how you will engage. Now you need to plan the logistics and prepare. This includes choosing an appropriate venue where participants can feel safe and welcome, including providing opportunities for prayer space. You may need to consider culturally appropriate hospitality – make sure that meals are halal. Your agenda allows sufficient time to allow everyone to be involved. You consider how you might deal with gender, youth/elder issues and different languages to ensure inclusive engagement. In the main, ensure you have material available in English, Arabic, Bangla, Dari, Hindi, Pashto, Persian, Somali, Turkish, Bosnian, Albanian and Urdu. You prepare for different levels of English proficiency among your participants including having interpreters as needed.

You inform participants about the work you are doing, the purpose of the engagement and how it might benefit Muslim communities. If required, you send material to participants well in advance so they are able to consider information ahead of the engagement.

If you are holding a face-to-face hui, you have considered the needs of the Muslim communities involved. You cover significant transportation costs where appropriate.

You plan and prepare for differing levels of understanding and knowledge of New Zealand government processes and how you might support your participants to develop the knowledge necessary to genuinely engage.

You engage a facilitator as needed to support the conversation between participants.

5. Engage & listen

You are empathetic and respectful to all participants and seek to create a space that is inclusive for everyone to share their views. You take time to answer questions and explain relevant systems and processes.

You supplement any face-to-face engagement with other channels, for example using email to provide further information and answer participants' questions.

You note down feedback and share the draft notes with participants to ensure you have accurately reflected their views. You take on board comments received and share the final notes.

6. Provide feedback

You recognise the importance of following up and providing feedback to participants about how their feedback has been actioned and any outcomes that may have been achieved. This is crucial if you are building a long-term relationship.

7. Review and evaluate

You review the engagement process you have implemented to identify potential improvements for future engagements. You seek feedback from those you have engaged with to understand how the process worked or did not work for them and advise what improvements you intend to make for your next engagement process.

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Other considerations

The following provides a general guide to help understand the social customs which may impact your engagement with Muslim communities in New Zealand. It is important to remember that different groups have different characteristics and there may be variations.

Faith is a major part of daily life and will impact on how Muslim communities may engage.

- Prayers – there are five sets of daily prayers, with a different midday prayer on Fridays. The time for each prayer is set by the sun.
- Festivals – the Islamic calendar is lunar-based. This means that the dates of festivals change each year. Be aware that some groups do not celebrate these events on the same day.
- Fasting – during Ramadan, most Muslim individuals fast between sunrise and sunset. It is important to note that some Muslim individuals or communities will not be able to take part in meal and drink times.
- Dress – there are variations but in general conservative dress (for women, covering shoulders and legs). If attending a masjid, women will need to cover their head also.
- Hospitality – this is extremely important to Muslim communities and the host has responsibilities, including providing food and beverages (alcohol is prohibited). Pork and pork products are strictly forbidden, and Islam requires any meat products to be halal.

Multiple methods of communication may be required to acknowledge the different levels of literacy of English.

- Face-to-face is often the best tool when forming relationships and identifying communication needs.
- Arabic is widely used but Muslim communities have many languages.
- Some people may avoid eye and physical contact with members of the opposite gender.

Engaging with women may need sensitive handling and a tailored approach.

- Some women may not feel comfortable being alone or speaking with a male who is not a family member.
- Some women may be more confident speaking with women only or speaking to strangers through a male family member.

*Example of principles for engagement

The Muslim Community Reference Group worked together with the Royal Commission to develop principles to guide our engagement with each other as set out in the Group's Terms of Reference:

The Muslim Community Reference Group is a group of people who have 'Iman' (faith). Members of the Reference Group come with good intentions 'Niyah' (intention) to contribute to the work of the Royal Commission and with hope that the report can be part of creating a better future for New Zealand. Based on this Niyah, Reference Group members see being part of the group as a form of 'Ibadah' (worship). The contribution of time, energy, experience and 'Hikmah' (wisdom) is seen by the group as 'Sadaqah' (charity).