

SEE-PD

Supporting Effective Community Engagement
through Participatory Design



**SCHOOL OF
INNOVATION
AND TECHNOLOGY
THE GLASGOW
SCHOOL OF ART**

Supporting Effective Community Engagement through Participatory Design (SEE-PD) is a research project led by The Glasgow School of Art's School of Innovation and Technology. Funded by The Creative Launch Fund, the project explores how participatory design principles and practices can support more inclusive, creative, and practical approaches to community engagement across Scotland's public sector. Working with three Scottish public sector organisations, the project aimed to co-develop practical tools to support the organisations on specific engagement challenges. The output of the project is a repository of these co-developed tools which can be used in local authority, community, and legislative contexts to support meaningful and rich community engagement. Although the tools have been developed with specific partners, the issues they cover have wide applicability in the Scottish public sector, and they demonstrate how participatory design can support stronger relationships, more thoughtful engagement, and ultimately, better outcomes for communities.

We thank our participants who generously shared their time, insights, and ideas throughout the co-design process, and The Creative Launch Fund for supporting the project.

Text: Cara Broadley and Harriet Simms

Design and Layout: Prisha Khare

Some images featured in this repository draw from previous research projects within the School of Innovation and Technology at The Glasgow School of Art, exploring participatory design in public sector contexts.

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<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/ris/ieed/innovation/trainingopportunitiesevents/creativelaunchfund/>

You can access the SEE-PD repository here.

<https://radar.gsa.ac.uk/10368/>



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Supporting Effective Community
Engagement through
Participatory Design

Project Report

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02. Background and Overview

SEE-PD is a design led, practice-based research project exploring how participatory design can strengthen approaches to community engagement in Scotland's public sector. Based at The School of Innovation and Technology at The Glasgow School of Art, this project grew from ongoing research into participatory design and its role in supporting public sector change. It responded to increasing interest from public bodies in developing more inclusive, creative, and practical ways of working with communities – particularly in relation to policy, service development, organisational change, participatory governance, and institutional engagement (Broadley and Dixon, 2025, 2022; Broadley, Prosser, and Stewart, 2025; Broadley, Burn-Murdoch, and Black, 2025; Broadley, 2024, 2022; Dixon, McHattie, and Broadley, 2022).

The project's starting point was to develop a repository of tools to share with public sector organisations and assess how participatory design principles and practices might align with strategic priorities. A parallel aim was to understand the capacity and readiness of different organisation to adopt these tools and associated ways of working within their community engagement work. The initial concept was a service or consultancy which would be developed in response to these conversations with the public sector, potentially providing bespoke support, tailored training programmes, and toolkits. While the original proposal had a market-facing ambition, the project evolved in response to the engagements to focus more on institutional readiness, reflective capacity, and design capability. This led to the design of a range of ready-to-use prototypes in response to identified engagement challenges, which were developed into a repository of tailored tools for the public sector in Scotland, as well as identifying a range of supports that might be needed to enable organisations to use the tools.

A Collaborative and Responsive Approach

SEE-PD takes a responsive and exploratory approach, shaped through active collaboration with public sector organisations. These included a national legislative body, a local authority, and a community development organisation – each bringing distinct priorities, challenges, and institutional contexts to the project. Through reflective workshops, iterative design development, and evaluation, we worked together to better understand what meaningful engagement looks like in practice, what gets in the way, and what kinds of support would be most valuable.

Project Objectives

The project had three core objectives:

- To explore how participatory design principles and practices can support reflective, equitable, and collaborative practices within the public sector;
- To co-create a repository of participatory design tools grounded in real-world engagement needs and contexts;
- To provide a practical and adaptable repository that public sector teams can use or build on to meet their own engagement aims.

Activities and Outputs

As outlined in Figure 1, three public sector organisations were engaged with over four months. The process started with five exploratory sessions with reflections on the benefits of participatory design and the organisations' engagement challenges and priorities. With these insights, the team designed three to four draft tools that responded to each organisation's specific challenges and priorities. Three tool development sessions were run to discuss the tools and their application in each organisation's work, as well as discussing what support they would need to use these kinds of tools. In total, ten participatory design tools were co-developed and collated into a structured repository. The draft repository was shared with the organisations for feedback and evaluation. This report was created to conclude the project and outlines the methodology, findings, evaluation and future opportunities.

Shared Priorities and Insights

While each strand of work focused on specific themes such as planning for engagement, embedding lived experience in decision-making, or building long-term organisational capacity, a shared emphasis emerged around the importance of preparation, alignment, and internal reflection. Many participants described the need for clearer starting points, time to think together, and practical ways to make community engagement more inclusive, effective, and embedded in everyday work.

The SEE-PD Repository

The resulting repository captures and extends this learning through ten creative, flexible tools, each linked to one of four thematic areas. These are not fixed templates, but prompts and frameworks for thinking, planning, and acting – shaped by real conditions and co-developed with engagement practitioners. Together, they demonstrate how participatory design principles and practices can support stronger relationships, more thoughtful engagement, and ultimately, better outcomes for communities.



Figure 1. SEE-PD research approach (diagram). 2025.

A Responsive, Situated, and Creative Practice

Participatory design resists the notion of a universal toolkit and invites a bespoke, iterative, and often improvised practice in response to the specificity of context, culture, and power (Björgvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren, 2012; Hillgren, Seravalli, and Emilson, 2011). It is frequently multimodal and experimental, using creative artefacts, maps, lenses, and prompts not only to visualise complexity, but also to provoke discussion, enable mutual learning, and materialise possibilities (Light and Akama, 2012; Brandt, Binder, and Sanders, 2012). These artefacts are understood not as neutral outputs but as objects that structure participation and mediate dialogue across difference (Andersen and Mosleh, 2021).

Emerging Roles in the Public Sector

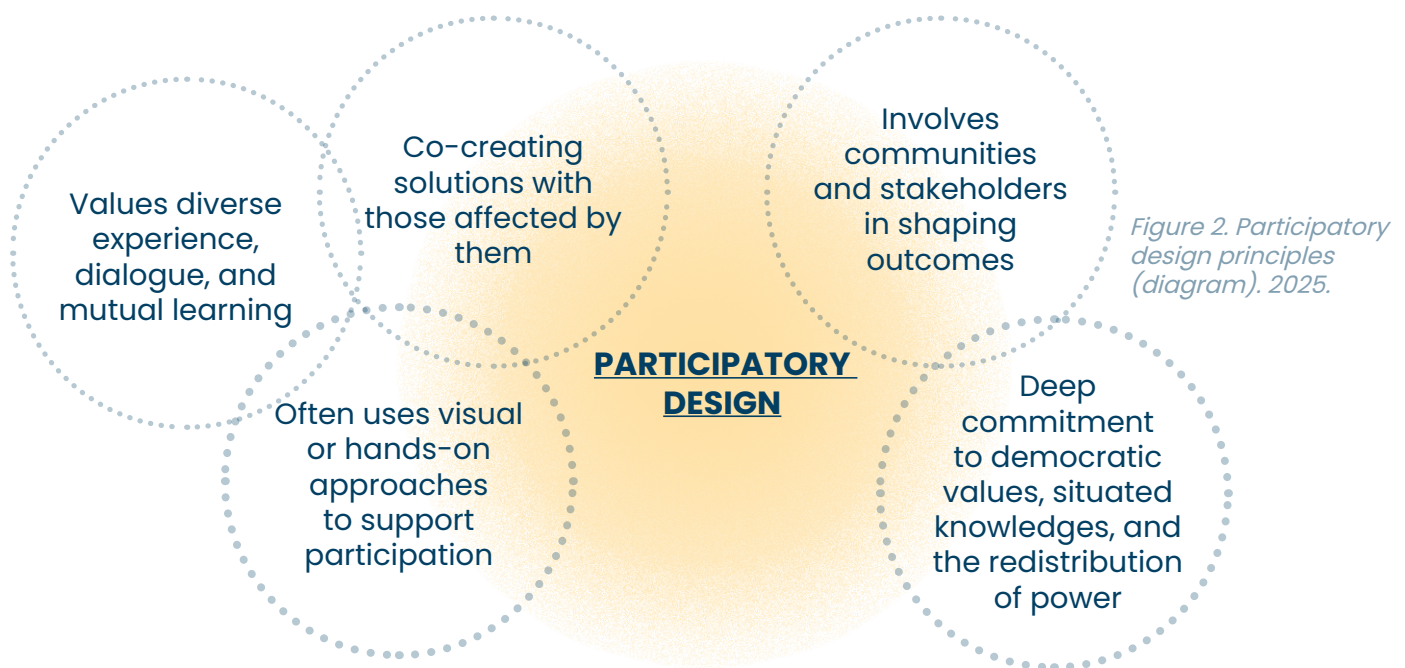
Recent work has sought to clarify the contemporary contributions of participatory design within public sector contexts. Rather than focusing solely on discrete methods, this literature emphasises participatory design's capacity to create spaces of negotiation and shared meaning-making within systems of governance (Hillgren, Lights, and Strange, 2020; Huybrechts, Benesch, and Geib, 2017.). It is increasingly framed not only as a practice of method deployment, but as a political and institutional orientation concerned with power, participation, and the situated conditions through which change is pursued (DiSalvo, 2022, 2009).

This evolution is echoed in recent literature (Smith et al., 2025), which collectively foregrounds the need to better understand participatory design's relational, emergent, and ethical dimensions. Mutual learning, institutional commitment, and reflective adaptation are positioned as central components of effective practice, particularly in complex and shifting policy environments.

Participatory Design as Policy Improvisation and Generation

Richardson et al. (2025) propose a typology of relationships between design and policy, distinguishing between instrumental, improvisational, and generative orientations. Participatory design resonates most with the latter two: it supports actors to work relationally and creatively within uncertainty, generating new meanings, framings, and potential futures. Rather than simply serving existing goals, participatory design may at times work 'with' or 'against' dominant institutional logics to surface alternative pathways.

Similarly, the Public Design Evidence Review (Cabinet Office and Policy Profession, 2025) offers an evolving definition of public design, described as an iterative process of generating, legitimising, and achieving policy intent while derisking operational delivery. It marks a clear shift from viewing design as a service delivery instrument to seeing it as a strategic and democratic capability, particularly in contexts that prioritise deliberation, trust-building, and integrating diverse forms of knowledge and experience. The review underscores that genuine impact depends on embedding design practice within governance systems, not simply using creative tools to deliver policy. As others have noted, this work remains vulnerable to de-politicisation or co-optation when values are not made explicit or sustained over time (Hill et al., 2020; McKercher, 2020). As participatory approaches become more visible across sectors, questions remain around how to embed participatory design in ways that maintain its critical approach while supporting practical, systemic transformation.



Participatory Design Research Reflections

My own research has explored many of these participatory design principles (Figure 2) in practice. For example, the PARliament Engagement project investigated how participatory and visual approaches could support more inclusive forms of scrutiny within the Scottish Parliament – co-developing tools that responded to the needs, logics, and everyday practices of parliamentary staff (Broadley, Burn-Murdoch, and Black, 2025). In parallel, I have examined how participatory design can strengthen democratic localism by embedding the principles of The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) into public service practice. This work focused on how communities engage with Participation Requests and what organisational capabilities are needed to support such engagement – highlighting the value of building long-term capacity for participatory and creative approaches to decision-making (Broadley and Dixon, 2025, 2022; Broadley, 2024, 2022; Dixon, McHattie, and Broadley, 2022). Complementing this, my work with Built Environment Smarter Transformation (BE-ST), Scotland’s built environment innovation centre, explored how participatory design could be used to facilitate strategic planning and cross-sectoral collaboration on net zero goals (Broadley, Prosser, and Stewart, 2025).

Taken together, these projects highlight the importance of strengthening both creative and institutional capacities, not only to undertake participatory engagement, but to prepare for it effectively, reflect on its outcomes, and translate learning into meaningful change. These insights shaped the values, objectives, and structure of the SEE-PD project, informing its focus on supporting public sector organisations to embed participatory design approaches in ways that are both contextually grounded and practically actionable.

Against this backdrop, the SEE-PD repository offers a set of practical, creative, and adaptable tools grounded in participatory design values and co-developed with public sector organisations. Rather than prescribing fixed solutions, the tools serve as flexible entry points to help teams build confidence, surface insights, and respond to context-specific engagement challenges. In doing so, they translate principles and practices of participatory design into accessible, visual formats that support both everyday actions and longer-term transformation. The following section introduces the repository in more detail, outlining its structure, how it can be used, and the themes that shaped its development.

03. THE SEE–PD REPOSITORY

The SEE–PD repository is a curated collection of creative, participatory tools developed in collaboration with Scottish public sector organisations. It offers practical scaffolds to support more inclusive, thoughtful, and effective community engagement. Designed as both a resource and a provocation, the repository responds directly to challenges raised by those working in public services and institutions – including time pressures, capacity constraints, consultation fatigue, and a desire for greater internal alignment.

The repository is informed and inspired by participatory design principles and practices, but the tools it contains are not intended for use by design specialists. Instead, they translate the values of participation – such as equity, shared ownership, and responsiveness – into accessible, visual formats that can be adapted to a range of organisational settings and roles.

Co-Development and Purpose

The tools within the repository were not developed in isolation. Each was co-designed in partnership with the SEE–PD project participants through a series of exploratory discussions, workshops, and feedback loops. These engagements enabled us to ground the tools in real contexts while also shaping them for flexibility and broader relevance.

The result is a set of tools that respond to common challenges, such as:

- Clarifying purpose and expectations before engagement takes place.
- Mapping relationships and roles across teams and services.

- Aligning intended outcomes with lived experience and community priorities.

- Building internal confidence and capability to engage more creatively.

- Supporting inclusive reflection and evaluation.

Each tool was tested and refined through dialogue and iteration with participating organisations, ensuring that they are not only conceptually grounded, but also practical and usable within everyday pressures of public sector work.

How the Repository Is Structured

Drawn from a synthesis of principles and practices applied across prior research, the repository is structured around four overarching themes:

- **Preparation and Groundwork** – clarifying purpose, roles, and expectations.

- **Meaningful and Rich Engagement** – supporting inclusive, participatory practice.

- **Supporting Decision-making, Outcomes, and Evaluation** – linking engagement to action and reflection.

- **Building Creative and Participatory Capacity** – nurturing confidence and capability to work differently.



Figure 3. A Snapshot of the SEE–PD Repository (photograph). 2025.

Each tool is linked to one of these themes but designed to be transferable across different stages of an engagement process. They can be used independently or in combination, depending on the team’s needs, stage of work, and available time or resource. As shown in Figure 3, within each tool entry, users will find:

- A short overview of the tool and its purpose.
- Suggestions for when and where it might be used.
- A breakdown of who might be involved.
- A facilitation guide, offering prompts and tips for delivery.
- Estimated time and resource requirements.
- A visual description of the artefact and links to the associated SEE–PD theme.

Throughout the repository, the term tool is used to describe a diverse set of artefacts including worksheets, cards, maps, and templates, which provide structure for collective discussion, reflection, and decision-making. These are not off-the-shelf solutions but frameworks that invite adaptation and interpretation.

Also included within the repository itself, Figure 4 provides an index of the tools and overview of their engagement themes and purposes.

Preparation and Groundwork

SHARED PURPOSE AGREEMENT

Supports collaborative and structured conversations to clarify engagement scope and process.

ENGAGEMENT READINESS CHECK

Maps out the existing context, potential tensions and shared vision of an upcoming engagement.

PEOPLE AND PATHWAYS MAP

Supports you to visually map your collaborators and networks and identify missing voices.

DESIGN BRIEF BUILDER

Collaboratively builds a summary of scope, purpose, and expectations for an engagement.

PARTICIPATION PRIORITIES PLANNER

Helps align engagement activities with goals, constraints, audiences and values.

Meaningful and rich engagement

ENGAGEMENT REFLECTION CARDS

Supports reflection and sharing of advice on how to facilitate and run meaningful engagements.

TRUST AND CONFIDENCE LENS

Helps build understanding of what trust and confidence might look like for people you engage with.

ENGAGEMENT THEMES

**Building creative and
participatory capacity**

**Supporting decision-
making, outcomes and
evaluation**

PARTICIPATORY CAPABILITY WHEEL

*visualises and maps out capacity
to understand collective strengths
and needs*

OUTCOMES REFLECTION CANVAS

*Helps capture and measure
outcomes, and any limitations that
may have affected success.*

SHARED INSIGHT SYNTHESISER

*Supports individual and group
reflection on engagement insights
and impact.*



04. TOOL INDEX

*Figure 4. SEE-PD Tool Index
(diagram). 2025.*

Using the Tools

The tools are designed to be accessible and flexible. They can be printed in black and white or colour, and scaled from A4 to A2 depending on the context, group size, or desired level of interactivity. Importantly, the visual structures are simple enough to be recreated by hand on paper, flipcharts, whiteboards, or digitally, allowing teams to use them in low-resource environments or informal settings.

Some tools are intended to be used directly with communities or people who access and use services, while others are designed for internal use to support public sector individuals and teams to reflect on their practice, build shared understanding across departments, or shape an approach before external engagement begins.

We have also found that many of the tools spark deeper conversations about organisational culture and values, particularly when used across teams or services. In this way, the repository is not only a practical resource, but also a catalyst for broader dialogue about what meaningful engagement can look like, and how systems can be re-shaped to support it.

An Adaptive and Evolving Resource

While this repository draws on over a decade of applied participatory design research and practice in the public sector, it is not intended as a comprehensive guide or one-size-fits-all solution. It does not prescribe a single way to approach community engagement, nor does it assume ideal conditions or unlimited resources.

Instead, it reflects our belief that even small creative shifts in how we plan, reflect, and collaborate can make a meaningful difference.

The tools are intended as prompts, not prescriptions: adaptable enough to meet diverse needs, yet structured enough to support critical conversations and purposeful action.

We also see this repository as a starting point, not a finished product. The SEE-PD project is one step in an ongoing journey to embed participatory design more deeply across Scotland's public sector. We anticipate future iterations, new collaborations, and evolving approaches in response to emerging priorities and feedback. We encourage users to adapt, build upon, and share what they find most useful and to help shape what comes next.



Scan QR code to access the full repository.

05. METHODOLOGY : A FLEXIBLE AND RESPONSIVE APPROACH

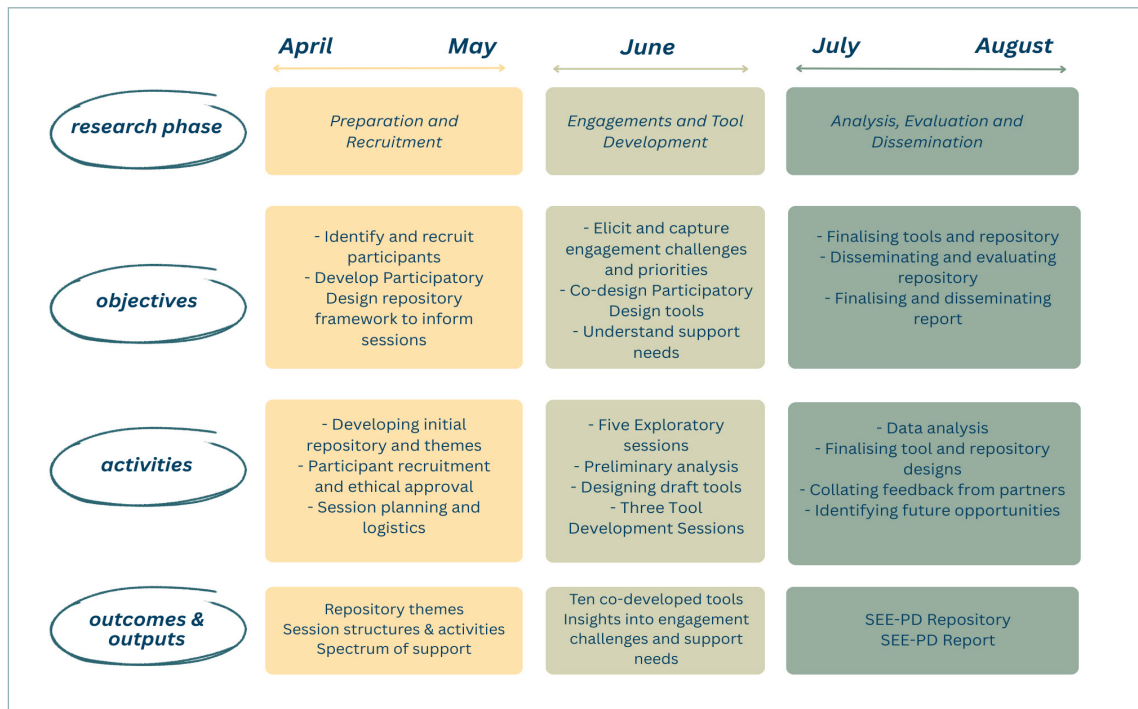


Figure 5. SEE-PD Project Timeline (diagram). 2025.

This project was grounded in participatory design principles and developed through an iterative, context-sensitive approach in collaboration with three distinct public sector organisations in Scotland. While the original project proposal outlined a larger programme of workshops across multiple sites, the delivery evolved to enable more sustained and in-depth engagement with a smaller number of organisations. This shift reflected the need to build trust, align with organisational rhythms, and adapt to shifting internal priorities and capacities. The timeline set out in Figure 5 details this phased delivery.

Across the project, a total of nine structured engagements were carried out, including exploratory meetings, co-design workshops, and reflection sessions. These were delivered both in person and online, using flexible facilitation formats and accessible visual materials. The process began with exploratory scoping sessions to surface key engagement challenges and informed the design of a participatory research and development process tailored to each partner's needs and interests. All of the exploratory sessions were held online with a presentation introducing the aims of the research, an overview of participatory design and the four SEE-PD themes – Preparation and Groundwork, Meaningful and Rich Engagement, Supporting Decision-making, Outcomes, and Evaluation, and Building Creative and Participatory Capacity. Discussions were captured digitally on Miro using a structured framework and sticky notes (Figure 6).

The data captured from the scoping sessions was analysed and organised under the four SEE-PD themes, with challenges, opportunities, aspirations and existing practices highlighted. For each sub-theme a list of relevant participatory design principles and practices was created with links to related projects from across the discipline. A draft tool was sketched and annotated with information and suggestions on how to use it. Three to four draft tools were developed as a result of each scoping session.

The second session with organisations was focused on tool co-development. The engagement challenges that were identified from the first session were shared and then the draft tools that responded to these challenges. For each draft tool, a worksheet was created that included a brief description of the tool and its aim, and four prompts (Figure 7). In groups the participants discussed each tool, sharing feedback on practical aspects like language, structure and usability, and reflections on when and how these tools could be used in their work.

The final part of these tool development sessions focused on how organisations could be supported to use the tools. Using the Spectrum of Support (Figure 8) as a prompt, partners were asked to discuss where they felt their organisation and team were on the spectrum and which kinds of support they would want to best help them to use both the SEE-PD repository and participatory design approaches more broadly.

Following the session, the team analysed the feedback from partners to inform the final design of each tool. Refined iterations of the tools were developed alongside supporting guidance and curated as the repository. This was shared with participating organisations for feedback and suggestions were incorporated into the published repository prototype.

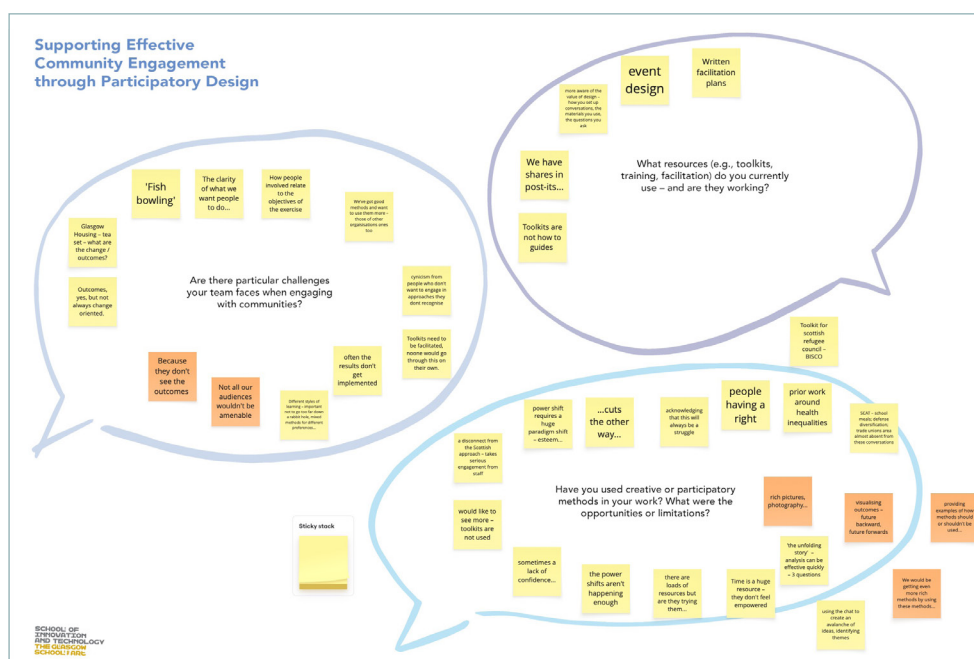


Figure 6 Detail of Miro board used with exploratory scoping session (photograph). 2025.

Participatory Design in Practice

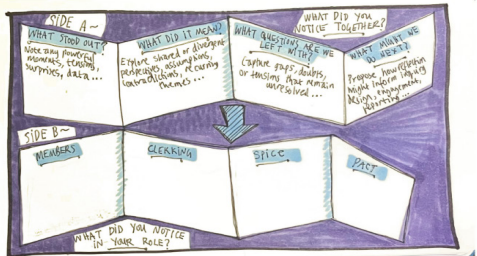
The sessions were guided by a participatory ethos that values creative inquiry, shared reflection, and practical experimentation. Our methods were informed by prior work exploring how participatory design can be used to engage meaningfully with institutional constraints, support internal alignment, and build creative confidence within teams. In each case, participatory design was used not simply as a way of developing outputs, but as a way of surfacing values, enabling mutual learning, and testing new forms of practice in context.

Tools were developed collaboratively in response to real-world challenges, through facilitated workshops that enabled participants to think through barriers, share experiences, and co-design practical responses. Responding to the four central engagement themes, a combination of mapping and storytelling techniques were used to support this work, with a strong emphasis on visual frameworks that are easy to customise, scale, and adapt.

While they were not directly involved in developing the tools, one additional participating organisation was engaged in the latter phase of the project and provided valuable insights into how the repository could align with existing frameworks.

Reflexive and Iterative Development

At each stage, the tools were refined based on feedback, with adjustments made to language, structure, and framing in order to better align with organisational practices and user needs. The visual nature of the tools allowed them to operate both as prompts for conversation, planning, and decision-making. Tools were tested and discussed in small-group settings and then refined between sessions, enabling both individual reflection and collective synthesis. The process was not about delivering pre-designed products, but about creating flexible, adaptable resources that could be taken up and owned by the people and teams they were intended to support. The tools' visual structures, prompts, and framing were shaped by the specific contexts in which they were developed but designed to remain transferable and scalable beyond them.



Shared Insight Synthesiser

Aim: To support equitable, multi-voiced reflection across inquiry support teams by combining shared prompts with role-based space to capture and compare diverse interpretations, ultimately deepening understanding and shaping inquiry direction.

How might this support cross-role reflection after an engagement session or inquiry?

Would people have time and space to use this?

How could this be adapted to different teams?

Could this help shape reporting or inquiry next steps?

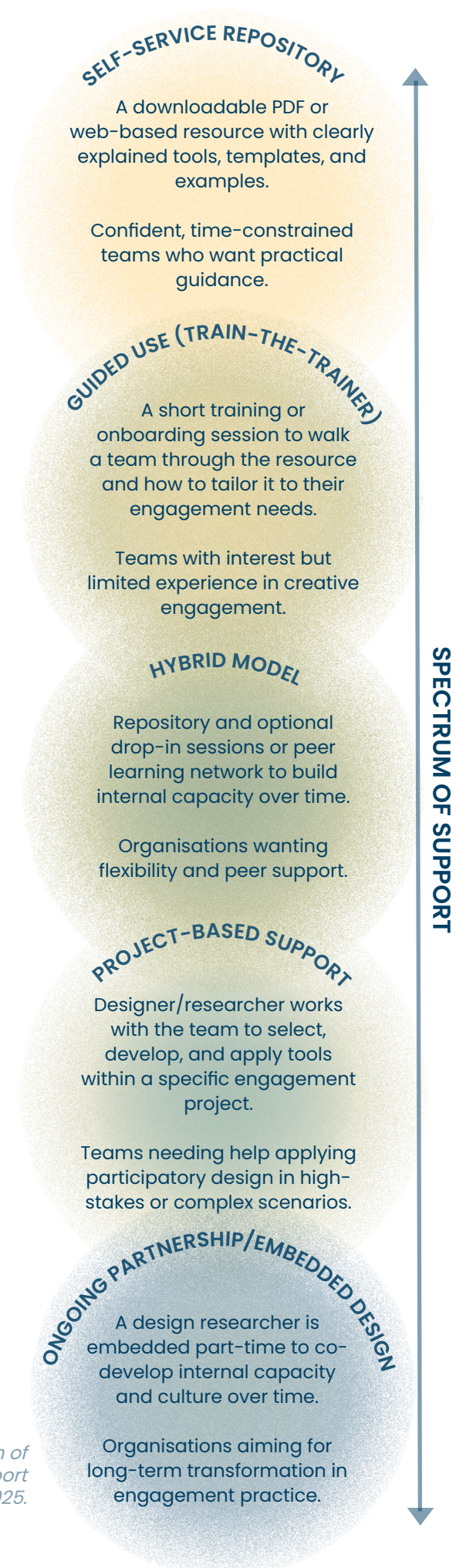
Figure 7. Example of worksheet created for and used within tool development session (photograph). 2025.

Supporting Design Capability through Collaboration

The project methodology aimed to support not only engagement outcomes but also organisational learning and capability-building. By embedding participatory design principles and practices in live settings, participants were supported to reflect on established approaches, explore alternatives, and envisage new ways of working. Rather than positioning design support as external expertise, the project encouraged participants to see these tools as extensions of their own practice, grounded in purpose and values. This embedded approach helped reveal both opportunities and limitations within the systems and cultures of engagement in public services. It demonstrated the value of participatory design in creating space for dialogue, supporting inclusive planning, and enabling more thoughtful, intentional forms of participation.

Informed by previous research, the team brought together different formats of participatory design support that could be offered to organisations and structured them into a spectrum of support to use as a prompt to discuss support needs and capability with partners. The spectrum ranges from the repository as a digital resource that could be used independently, to hybrid and project-based support, to embedded design partnerships or in-house support. Following discussion of the tools, the participating organisations were asked to reflect on the kinds of support they felt they would need to continue to engage with participatory design. The spectrum provided a framework for this discussion and revealed that each organisation had a different set of needs and capabilities.

Figure 8. A spectrum of participatory design support (diagram). 2025.



Ethics, Recruitment, and Participation

The SEE–PD project was guided by ethical principles of care, respect, and mutual benefit, in line with The Glasgow School of Art's Research & Knowledge Exchange Ethics Policy (2016a) and Research Ethics Code of Practice (2016b), and the participatory design ethos underpinning the project. Given the practice-led and collaborative nature of the work, ethical considerations were embedded throughout the process from the offset and continuously revisited as relationships, priorities, and contexts evolved.

Recruitment was carried out through targeted outreach to public sector bodies across Scotland with established or emerging commitments to community engagement. Initial contact was made via professional networks, project partners, and public-facing contacts, followed by informal exploratory conversations to discuss alignment, expectations, and capacity. Participation was entirely voluntary, with all organisations and individuals given the option to shape the form and depth of their involvement.

Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms were provided to all participants outlining the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement, and how any data or insights would be used. Informed consent was obtained for all formal engagements, with participants given the opportunity to ask questions and withdraw at any point. In keeping with the project's participatory approach, confidentiality and authorship were handled transparently and collaboratively. Organisations were offered the option to be anonymised or acknowledged, depending on their preferences. Feedback and reflection were integrated into each stage of the process to ensure that contributions were recognised, concerns addressed, and the outputs remained grounded in shared values and priorities.

The following section presents three case studies of engagement with each of the participating organisations, outlining discussions of engagement challenges, tool development, and feedback and evaluation surrounding the repository and participatory design capability.



06. CASE STUDY 1: EMBEDDING REFLECTION AND ALIGNMENT IN EVIDENCE AND SCRUTINY

This case study explores work with a national legislature seeking to strengthen the role of public engagement within its scrutiny processes. The participating teams lead a wide range of research, engagement, planning, and reporting activities designed to inform inquiries and ensure that diverse forms of evidence are recognised and used in decision-making. As part of a wider interest in creative and participatory approaches, the team was keen to explore practical tools that could support more inclusive, transparent, and effective scrutiny.

Overview of Engagement Challenges and Priorities

Participants from different internal roles came together for two exploratory sessions to understand their priorities and discuss potential tools and resources. In the first workshop, participants reflected on the need to create space for collaboration and alignment across teams in order to foster shared ownership of inquiries. They identified the importance of building facilitation skills and confidence to support rich and effective engagements, particularly when working with sensitive or emotionally charged topics.

A key challenge was how to make sense of the insights gathered from engagement during (Parliamentary) scrutiny and how to reflect on these collectively. While many teams gather and review evidence individually, there are few formal structures for multi-voiced reflection, especially at the end of an inquiry. This makes it challenging to align on what engagement inputs mean, how they inform findings alongside other forms of evidence, and how they can most effectively inform decision-making by elected Members.

Participatory Design Approaches

In response to these needs, we drew on a range of participatory design approaches that support shared reflection, collaborative scoping, and values-driven inquiry framing.

Inspired by practices of context mapping, facilitation games, and outcome-oriented reflection, we visualised a series of tool concepts that could support both the interpersonal and institutional dimensions of engagement.

Rather than offering step-by-step instructions, the aim was to create adaptable prompts and formats that teams could use flexibly, whether in meetings, planning sessions, or informal debriefs. Many of the practices we referenced are designed to surface assumptions, clarify intentions, and enable teams to align around shared goals before, during, and after an inquiry process.

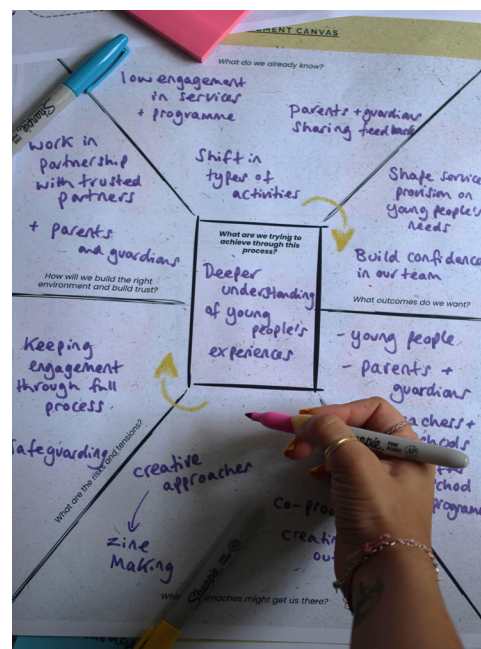
Tools Developed and Potential Impact

Following the workshops and our synthesis of the engagement themes, we developed three tools in response to the team's priorities, shown in Figures 9–11:

1) Shared Purpose Agreement

A scoping tool to support early conversations across roles, helping teams align around the purpose of an inquiry, how evidence will be gathered and used, and what success might look like. The canvas encourages shared reflection and records key decisions that can be revisited throughout the process.

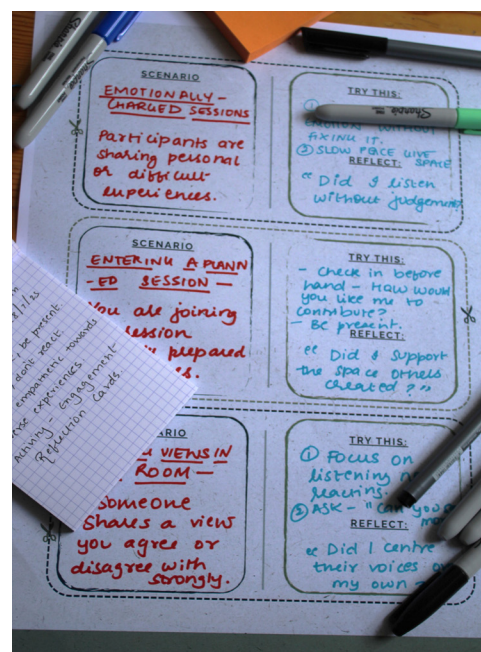
Figure 9. Shared Purpose Agreement (photograph). 2025.



2) Engagement Reflection Cards

Designed to support facilitation practice, the cards offer a simple way to prompt personal and peer-based reflection on running public engagements. They provide advice and space for collective insight-sharing—especially when preparing for, or debriefing from, challenging or unfamiliar sessions.

Figure 10. Engagement Reflection Cards (photograph). 2025.

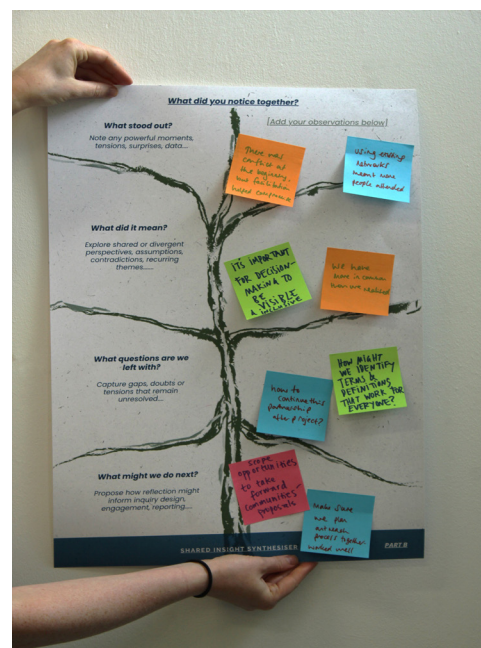


3) Shared Insight Synthesiser

A collaborative tool that helps teams reflect on the meaning and impact of engagement insights. It enables individuals to capture their interpretations before bringing them together in a structured group process. This helps to support more equitable, multi-voiced understanding and better align internal sense-making with public contributions.

We shared drafts of these tools with the team, who provided clear examples of where and how they could be used in practice. The tools were seen as useful for structuring conversations, capturing decisions visually, and making the use of evidence more transparent. Participants also suggested adapting the Reflection Cards further to allow for customisation and co-creation, highlighting the value of shared ownership in embedding new practices.

Figure 11. Shared Insight Synthesiser (photograph). 2025.



Reflections on Usefulness of the Repository

When discussing how these tools could be integrated into their work, the team noted the importance of a dual approach: combining in-house support, which ensures alignment with organisational culture and leadership, with external facilitation to expand practices and offer critical perspectives. Aligned to an upcoming new phase of work within the organisation, there was a strong sense that these approaches could inform future induction and training, embedding participatory approaches from the outset.

Participants saw strong potential for the repository to complement existing practices and guidance by providing practical, visual resources to support alignment, reflection, and more inclusive ways of working. Tools such as the Shared Purpose Agreement and Engagement Reflection Cards were highlighted for their versatility, with uses ranging from inquiry scoping and committee planning to service design and project management. This adaptability was seen as one of the repository's key strengths.

At the same time, the breadth of the repository could feel overwhelming. Participants suggested clearer signposting of when and how tools might be used (e.g. before, during, or after an inquiry), grouping or cross-referencing tools, and adding jump links to aid navigation. Short case studies—particularly in parliamentary contexts—were seen as essential to help colleagues understand practical application.

Feedback also pointed to opportunities for adaptation. Suggestions included tailoring tools for different audiences (lighter versions for Members, more detailed for staff), using more flexible language to extend relevance beyond engagement, and exploring digital formats for tools such as the Shared Insight Synthesiser. Participants also noted potential for tools to support monitoring and evaluation, for example tracking trust or confidence in engagement over time.

While enthusiasm was high, sustaining momentum was identified as a challenge. Introductory workshops, light-touch guidance, and a menu of support were suggested as ways to embed the repository and encourage experimentation. Finally, buy-in from senior leadership, both political and operational, was seen as critical to ensuring long-term impact.

"It is a fantastic resource, and could be really useful here, especially in supporting people in different teams to work through the preparation/design/alignment phase in a more collaborative and structured way."

"I think the challenge will be bringing other less participation-inclined colleagues onboard."

"I really enjoyed being part of the project, it got me thinking about different ways we could do things... and provided tools that we could use and adapt well within our contexts."

"At the moment they all look great but it's a big sea of lovely looking questions and prompts that I can't quite picture in what context/meeting to use."

07. CASE STUDY 2: CLARIFYING PURPOSE, ALIGNING CAPABILITIES, AND EMBEDDING VALUES IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This organisation supports community development and empowerment at a national level. It works across Scotland to help communities and public bodies implement inclusive, equitable, and values-led approaches to participation. Through training, consultancy, and the development of national standards and frameworks, the team plays a central role in shaping and promoting good engagement practice across sectors and policy areas.

Overview of Engagement Challenges and Priorities

During the SEE-PD project, team members reflected on persistent challenges within the wider participation landscape, particularly consultation fatigue, performative engagement, and the disconnect between community input and tangible outcomes. They highlighted a need to increase compliance and scrutiny of the National Standards for Community Engagement (NSCE) (SCDC, 2020). as a framework co-designed with communities when they were produced and endorsed by most public service organisations. This is especially important where organizations have said they are committed to using them. This should be linked to implementation of them and/or where the NSCE are mentioned in legislative guidance. This should also be more clearly linked to the Audit Scotland principles for community empowerment (2019).

They think that keeping the NSCE and empowerment principles to the fore will help those planning and delivering engagement to embed it in a culture and operational shift towards more strategic, intentional and meaningful real world engagement. Key priorities include clarifying the purpose and expectations of participatory processes, surfacing tacit knowledge within organisations, and aligning internal capabilities with the participatory commitments made to communities.

There was also an interest in extending the legacy of the VOICE tool (VOICE Scotland, 2018), a planning and evaluation framework developed by the organisation in previous years. While VOICE remains a valued and widely used resource, the team recognised the opportunity to build on its principles by developing new tools that could respond to today's more complex and relational engagement challenges. This included a desire for artefacts that are more interactive, visual, and suited to a range of working styles and organisational needs.

Participatory Design Approaches

The participatory design process drew on exploratory, narrative-based practices that foreground reflection, relationships, and purpose. Rather than focusing on new techniques in isolation, the process used visual tools, conceptual canvases, and guided prompts to support internal alignment and surface deeper questions about the why of engagement. Participatory evaluation, framing and reframing, outcome harvesting, and persona-based reflection informed the development process – enabling teams to consider not just how to run effective engagements, but how to understand and act on their results meaningfully and ethically.

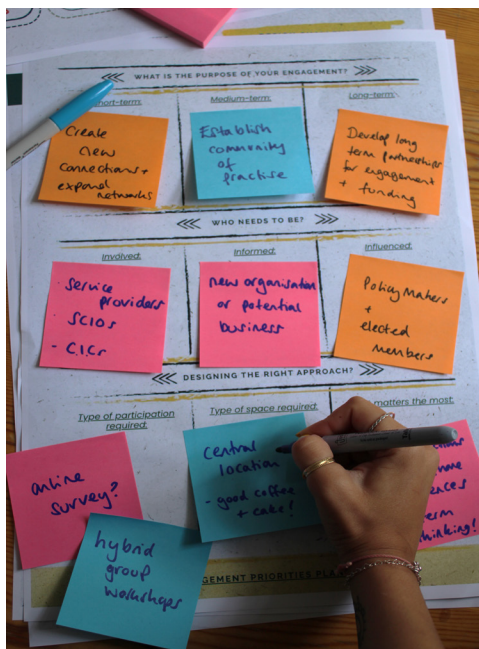


Figure 12. Participation Priorities Planner (photograph). 2025.

Tools Developed and Potential Impact

The four tools shown in Figures 11– 14 were co-developed through collaborative sessions with the team:

1) Participation Priorities Planner

A planning tool that helps teams align on the purpose, scope, and values of a proposed engagement. It encourages early reflection on key drivers, differences in stakeholder expectations, and the routes through which decisions will be made. Particularly useful in complex partnerships or cross-sector work.

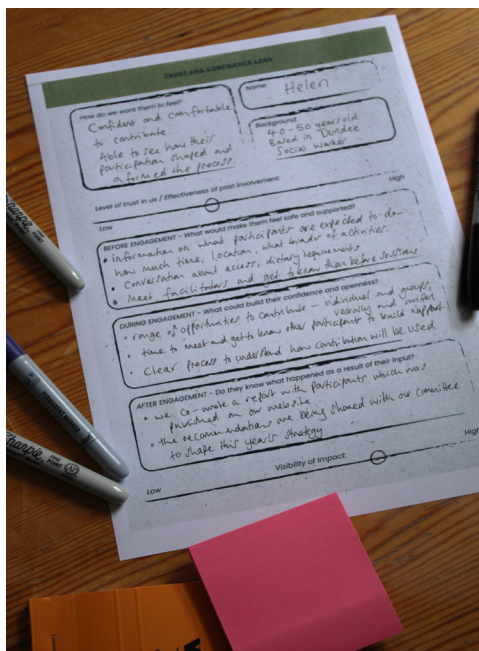


Figure 13. Trust and Confidence Lens (photograph). 2025.

2) Trust and Confidence Lens

A narrative tool that invites teams to step into the shoes of a potential participant—exploring what trust, confidence, and access might look like from their perspective. It supports more inclusive and equity-focused engagement strategies by making hidden barriers and support needs visible.

3) Participatory Capability Wheel

A self-assessment tool that enables individuals and teams to map their current strengths, gaps, and developmental goals around participatory work. It can be used to support peer learning, internal planning, or broader organisational reflection—particularly helpful when engagement roles and responsibilities are distributed.



Figure 14. Participatory Capability Wheel (photograph). 2025.

4) Outcomes Reflection Canvas

A reflective evaluation canvas that prompts teams to consider both intended and unintended consequences of their engagement work. It encourages nuanced thinking about what has changed, for whom, and how – enabling a richer understanding of impact that goes beyond standard metrics.

These tools were well received for their potential to make reflection more visible, strategic, and embedded in practice. Participants noted that many of the discussions prompted by the tools already took place informally, and appreciated the opportunity to surface these reflections more deliberately. The team offered ideas on how to increase the adaptivity and accessibility of the tools while seeing them as useful for on boarding, cross team dialogue, and longer term capacity building

Reflections on Usefulness of the Repository

Participants welcomed the tools as a timely and practical contribution to Scotland's wider landscape of community engagement. They highlighted that the tools are not emerging in isolation but within a longer trajectory of national policy and strategy – including the National Standards for Community Engagement (NSCE) (SCDC, 2020), the Scottish Approach to Service Design (Scottish Government, 2019), and the Community Empowerment Act (Scottish Government, 2017).

From this perspective, the repository was seen as having strong potential to reinforce these frameworks, making them more tangible through visual, participatory prompts that can bridge between strategic principles and everyday practice.

At the same time, participants noted that agencies have often struggled to give sufficient weight to existing standards, viewing high-quality engagement as 'luxurious or unrealistic' under resource pressures. They felt that the SEE-PD tools could help to counteract this tendency by offering a practical means of embedding planning, inclusion, and evaluation in engagement processes. The tools were also seen as useful in extending the legacy of frameworks such as VOiCE, augmenting them with visual, collaborative artefacts that support both strategic reflection and participatory co-design.

A further point of emphasis was that the repository should not only guide public bodies but also acknowledge the role of communities as initiators of engagement. Participants suggested highlighting that many of the tools could be used when communities themselves approach public bodies with ideas or requests to improve services. This design assumption would have implications for the design of the tools especially ensuring the language used is clear and accessible for users. This reinforced the tools' dual value: enabling organisations to plan and align internally, while also supporting more equitable, community-led processes.

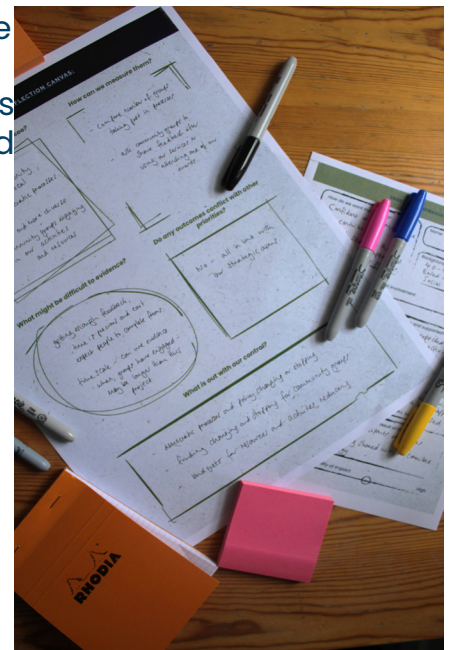


Figure 15. Outcomes Reflection Canvas (photograph). 2025.

"The tools are great but we do think they are being developed in a much longer-term policy context and the existence of the repository should build on that work."

"Some of the tools could be used in collaboration with communities during engagement... One thing that probably all engagement guides and toolkits are guilty of missing is the possibility that communities might want to initiate the engagement sometimes."

"...we see the repository as a very useful development but that it will be stronger if it reinforces the policy and strategy expectations as well as going on to provide folk with practical tools they could use to bring this about."

08. CASE STUDY 3: STRENGTHENING ENGAGEMENT PLANNING ACROSS TEAMS AND DEPARTMENTS

This case study reflects work with a local authority team responsible for supporting community engagement across neighbourhoods and council-led initiatives. Their remit includes strengthening relationships with community councils and area partnerships, coordinating engagement processes around place-based projects, and supporting more inclusive approaches to civic participation.

Overview of Engagement Challenges and Priorities

During our initial conversations, the team described a dual challenge: first, a desire to increase public understanding of the Council's remit and the role of Area Partnerships in shaping local decision-making; and second, the need to broaden the reach of their engagement, particularly with young people and people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

They emphasised that many community members engage with the Council without a full understanding of how decisions are made or what issues fall within its control, making it challenging to manage expectations or build trust. At the same time, the team recognised that their engagement activity often reached a limited range of groups, and that wider participation would require more targeted approaches, clearer communication, and stronger use of local networks.

Internally, they also described a need for more consistent ways of planning and aligning on the scope of engagement work across different departments and individuals. With many teams involved at different stages of a process, they sought structured approaches to support shared expectations, strategic thinking, and more effective collaboration from the outset.

Participatory Design Approaches

To respond to these challenges, we drew on participatory design approaches that foreground preparation, alignment, and relationship mapping. Through facilitated sessions, we explored how tools could help teams reflect on their readiness for engagement, clarify their objectives, and map relevant actors and networks. Rather than simply generating new ideas, this helped externalise existing tacit knowledge, transforming internal 'mental checklists' into shared visual artefacts that could support more collaborative planning and reflection.

Inspired by framing practices such as narrative journey mapping, design brief co-creation, and equity-informed persona development, we shaped a suite of tools that could help identify gaps in reach, clarify the purpose of an engagement, and translate insight into action. These were developed with the flexibility to support both day-to-day work and larger, more structured projects.

Tools Developed and Potential Impact

As shown in Figures 15–17, three tools were developed in response to these priorities, all linked to the theme of Preparation and Groundwork:

1) Engagement Readiness Check

A planning aid that supports internal reflection at the outset of an engagement. It provides prompts to clarify scope, intent, and resourcing, encouraging teams to assess whether an engagement is feasible and well-founded before it begins. This is especially valuable when multiple individuals or departments are involved and assumptions need to be surfaced early.

2) People and Pathways Map

A visual mapping tool that helps teams identify key relationships, networks, and gaps in access. It encourages teams to think relationally about who needs to be involved, how trust can be built, and where additional outreach is required—particularly helpful when working in place-based or equity-focused contexts.

3) Design Brief Builder

A synthesis tool designed to help teams distill key insights, priorities, and next steps into a short, clear summary. It bridges the gap between engagement discovery and follow-through, helping teams align internally and communicate their intent externally in a focused, actionable way.



Figure 17. People and Pathways Map (photograph). 2025.

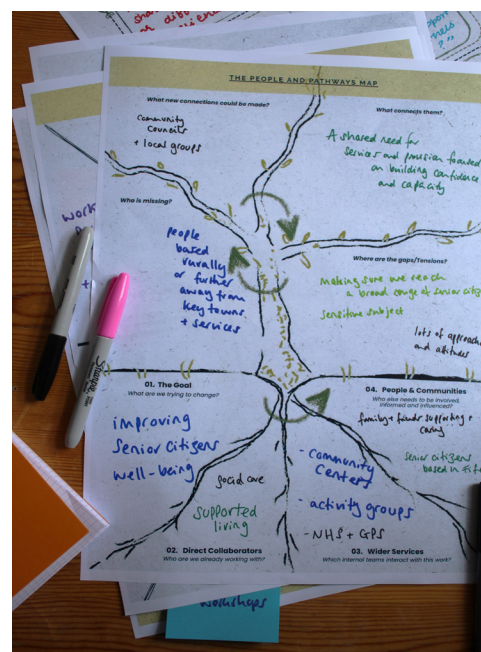


Figure 18. Design Brief Builder (photograph).
2025.



The team reflected that the questions and prompts in these tools resonated with their existing ways of working, but that having physical artefacts to complete together would help formalise and externalise thinking. They saw value in using the tools to support structured discussions across departments, ensuring shared understanding and clearer communication from the outset.

Given the nature of their work, the team saw two main opportunities for applying the tools. For more ad hoc or reactive engagement work, they suggested developing toolkits that could be readily accessed and used as needed, guided by a shared set of principles. For larger, planned initiatives, they were interested in co-developing bespoke tools tailored to the specifics of the project, with clearer integration into strategic timelines.

Reflections on Usefulness of the Repository

Participants emphasised the importance of plain language, simplifying visual layouts to reduce potential distractions, and providing clear explanations of any design metaphors or formats used. They also highlighted the benefits of including worked examples to make each tool's purpose and use more intuitive.

Although their involvement in SEE-PD was towards the latter stages, participants valued the opportunity to reflect on the 'why' and 'how' of engagement and expressed interest in testing the tools with forthcoming projects.

"We got involved very late in the project and had one workshop, but it gave us some space to reflect on the why and how of community engagement. I would like to try these tools with the team on some forthcoming work projects e.g. engagement around the Area Partnership Plans."

"I would be keen to see some of these tools in action – including some of the ones I was less fond of, or I was struggling to understand, as seeing them in action may help me understand the tools, as well as appreciate their usefulness."

"There is great variety in this repository. It's also great that all the tools are all neatly collated together in one document, and each tool is only 2–3 pages long – allowing a facilitator (or hopefully the entire group taking part) to quickly flick through and find the tool that best suits the task at hand."

09. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The SEE–PD project explored how participatory design principles and practices could support more effective, inclusive, and embedded community engagement across the public sector. While each participating organisation brought distinct priorities and contexts, several cross-cutting insights emerged across the three strands of work. These highlight how participatory design can support internal alignment, practical planning, and strategic reflection – providing valuable starting points for future practice.

1. Participatory design can support clearer alignment of purpose, values, and capabilities

Across all participating public sector organisations, participants identified a need for clearer internal alignment before engagement begins, particularly around purpose, scope, and expectations. While existing engagement activity was often thoughtful and values-led, this work was frequently reactive or distributed across teams with limited shared reflection or planning. As an underpinning framework, participatory design helped make this tacit knowledge more visible and actionable, supporting cross-team alignment, critical questioning, and better translation of intent into practice.

The tools created helped to surface embedded tensions between strategic intent and operational delivery, such as the pressure to deliver visible outcomes alongside a desire for more meaningful dialogue. Several participants reflected that the tools provided language and scaffolding to navigate these tensions, encouraging more intentional conversations about what engagement is for, who it includes, and how decisions are made.

2. Tools must be adaptable to context, culture, and constraint

The approach taken to tool development reinforced the importance of flexibility and contextual fit. Participants were clear that no single tool could be universally applied, and that value lies in the ability to tailor approaches to local culture, relationships, and priorities. While the tools developed through SEE–PD were well received, their potential was seen to lie not in their content alone, but in how they could be adapted, owned, and iterated upon by internal teams and collaborators.

This was particularly evident in feedback from teams who saw the repository not as a finished set of solutions, but as a creative resource to be blended, extended, or translated into their own formats and practices. Several participants also identified opportunities to align the SEE–PD tools with existing frameworks or institutional approaches, such as the VOiCE framework, internal project planning structures, or commissioning models, helping bridge new and existing ways of working.

“These will only live if someone takes responsibility – otherwise they’ll sit on a shelf.”

“A menu of support would be useful as people who are using the repository will be at different levels of knowledge and ability.”

3. Visual, participatory artefacts enable shared understanding and deeper reflection

Participants across the project highlighted the value of visual, interactive artefacts in enabling structured, multi-voiced conversations. In contexts where engagement is often planned individually or discussed informally, having tangible tools to prompt discussion, share thinking, and record decisions was seen as particularly useful. By recording decisions, the tools could be used to capture evidence, keep processes on track and support teams to prioritise when resources were limited. Several tools were praised for their potential to foster more inclusive and equity-focused reflection, by encouraging teams to consider participation from the perspective of others, including seldom-heard voices.

The tools also helped shift engagement from an administrative activity toward a more reflective and strategic practice. Rather than simply providing new techniques, the artefacts offered spaces for shared inquiry, supporting sense-making, critical dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving. This reinforced the idea that tools are not only enablers of practice, but also mediators of organisational culture and change.

4. Participatory design can enhance institutional learning and capability development

A key aim of participatory design is to strengthen mutual learning and capacity building. By co-developing the tools with the teams, the project enabled participants to gain a deeper understanding of design approaches and provided rich discussion on practical uses for the tools which supported the refinement of the tool designs. When talking through the spectrum of support, participants could reflect on the tools and tool development process when considering the kinds of support needed to complement their team's capacity.

When introducing participatory design approaches, many of the participants had prior knowledge or experience of design and creative methods. This highlights that design approaches have become part of Scottish public sector culture through initiatives such as the Scottish Government's Scottish Approach to Service Design. Participants demonstrated the potential this project has in supporting and enhancing institutional learning in design-led approaches through their desire to engage with the process and by identifying distinct opportunities for using the tools to inform their ways of working.

"Sometimes it feels a bit too design-y – the words and the structure need to be clearer so anyone can pick it up."

"The worked examples could be made clearer as some of the information is hidden and people like to see an example."

"All the tools are useful and are familiar to us as we use Quality Improvement tools."

"It could do with some simple worked examples – otherwise it risks feeling like a sea of lovely prompts that you don't know where to start with."

Repository Evaluation and Iteration: Parallels and Synergies Across Organisations

While each case study highlighted different challenges and contexts, participants across all organisations expressed notably similar needs and aspirations with regard to the SEE-PD repository. Their feedback points to a shared appetite for approaches that make engagement more purposeful, accessible, and sustainable.

Clarity and accessibility were recurring discussion points. Participants from each organisations stressed the importance of tools that are intuitive and easy to use. They also asked for clearer navigation of the repository, suggesting grouping tools by stage of use, adding jump links, and including short use cases to make practical application easier. All feedback that referenced such concerns was addressed as much as possible within the time constraints of the project in a final round of design iteration.

Across settings there was also recognition of the strategic potential of the tools when embedded within existing frameworks. Participants saw value in connecting SEE-PD outputs to established practices such as VOiCE, clerking manuals, national participation standards, or other improvement methodologies. They also noted that several tools could be applied beyond public engagement, for example in project management, internal consultation, or monitoring trust and confidence over time.

Finally, there was a shared concern around sustainability and organisational commitment. Participants were enthusiastic about the tools but aware of the risks of them being overlooked without clear ownership or structural support:

Taken together, these reflections suggest a strong common ground: a collective desire for practical, adaptable artefacts that connect to existing organisational cultures, supported by clear guidance and senior commitment. The synergies across contexts underline both the transferability of participatory design practices and the need to situate them within the realities of institutional life.

These parallels demonstrate that while SEE-PD tools respond to distinct organisational challenges, they also speak to wider systemic needs across Scotland's public sector: embedding reflection, clarifying purpose, and building sustainable participatory capacity. By drawing together these insights, the project highlights both the opportunity and the imperative to treat participatory design not as a one-off intervention, but as an evolving infrastructure for more democratic, responsive, and equitable governance.

"This feels like a natural extension of VOiCE – more visual, more interactive – but underpinned by the same principles."

"There are contexts beyond engagement and participation where I'd use these tools, but I can see it being a hard sell if the language presents them as being directed towards that sphere."

"All the tools are useful and are familiar to us as we use Quality Improvement tools."

Although this project did not pursue direct commercialisation, it generated several outcomes of significance for research and practice. The tools developed can be scaled or adapted across public service contexts, the project has built institutional relationships that may lead to follow-on collaborations or consultancy, and the insights will shape future funding applications. This includes further work on design-led deliberation and a Royal Society of Edinburgh funded project exploring design and public sector innovation in small countries. There is also clear potential for further knowledge exchange and training opportunities.

This work connects directly with The Glasgow School of Art's School of Innovation and Technology (SIT), where researchers are exploring new approaches to participatory design, democratic innovation, and public sector transformation. SEE-PD contributes to this agenda by providing tested methods, case studies, and collaborative relationships that can inform future research, taught programmes, and applied partnerships.

SEE-PD is intended as a starting point for others to take forward: an invitation to adapt the tools, extend the learning, and contribute to a growing community of practice committed to inclusive, values-driven public participation.

The research will continue to evolve as we test, adapt, and expand the tools in collaboration with public sector partners. We hope you find the methods useful in your own work. If you have any feedback, would like the tools provided in a different format, or are interested in collaborating, please do get in touch.

**SCHOOL OF
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AND TECHNOLOGY
THE GLASGOW
SCHOOL OF ART**

<https://sit.gsa.ac.uk>

Contact

Dr Cara Broadley
Research Fellow

The School of Innovation and Technology (SIT)
The Glasgow School of Art

c.broadley@gsa.ac.uk <https://sit.gsa.ac.uk/author/carabroadley>

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