

Language and engagement self-check

Use this checklist before submitting your application.

Tick honestly. This is a risk-reduction tool, not a compliance exercise.

Language and framing

- We have avoided treating “the community” as a single, uniform group
- We have named different groups with different roles, risks, and incentives
- We have avoided deficit or stereotype-based language (e.g. “vulnerable”, “low capacity” without explanation)
- Our language recognises knowledge, constraints, and agency, not just need

Decision realism

- It is clear who uses the solution, who approves it, who pays for it, and who bears risk if it fails
- We have not assumed that enthusiasm equals authority or adoption
- We have acknowledged constraints that may prevent uptake even if the solution is liked

Engagement quality

- Engagement is described as influencing decisions, not just informing or validating them
- We have been specific about how engagement will change design, delivery, or sequencing
- We have avoided vague claims of “consultation” or “co-design” without explanation

Representation and voice

- We have not implied that one representative speaks for all affected groups
- We have considered who is likely to be missing from engagement and why
- We have thought about language, hierarchy, gender, education, and literacy in shaping who speaks

Credibility check

- An assessor could explain our engagement approach back to us in concrete terms
- Our language reduces delivery risk rather than raising new questions
- We would be comfortable defending our wording if challenged

Final sense-check

- If this section were read sceptically, it would still sound grounded and credible

Examples

How engagement language reflects thinking and practice

The language you use reflects how you think about power, risk, and decision-making, not just how you write applications.

These examples show how assessors read language as evidence of how a project will actually be run, not just described.

Example 1: Homogeneous “community”

Scored poorly

“We will engage the local community to ensure buy-in and acceptance.”

Why this would raise concerns

- No indication of who “the community” is
- No decision logic
- Engagement framed as reassurance

Scored well

“We will engage different groups who influence and experience adoption differently, including end users, local decision-makers, and those responsible for maintenance, to identify constraints and inform delivery choices.”

Why this would work

- Differentiates roles
- Links engagement to decisions
- Signals realism about adoption

Example 2: Representation claim

Scored poorly

“Community representatives will be consulted throughout the project.”

Why this would raise concerns

- No clarity on who selects representatives
- Implied homogeneity
- No influence described

Scored well

“We will work with multiple local actors selected for different roles and perspectives, recognising that no single representative captures all experiences. Engagement will focus on surfacing trade-offs and constraints.”

Why this would work

- Acknowledges limits of representation
- Signals awareness of internal difference
- Reduces false consensus risk

Example 3: Deficit framing

Scored poorly

“The project will support vulnerable, low-literacy communities to adopt new technology.”

Why this would raise concerns

- Stereotyping
- No design implications stated
- Signals weak understanding of context

Scored well

“People with varying literacy levels will use the solution. This informs how training, interfaces, and support will be designed to reduce reliance on written materials.”

Why this would work

- Treats literacy as a design constraint
- Avoids judgement
- Links directly to delivery choices

Example 4: Engagement as activity

Scored poorly

“We will run workshops to gather feedback from users.”

Why this would raise concerns

- Activity without purpose
- No indication feedback will matter

Scored well

“Feedback from engagement sessions will be used to decide between delivery options and to identify risks that would affect uptake or sustainability.”

Why this would work

- Engagement linked to decisions
- Risk-focused
- Assessable

Example 5: Overconfident language

Scored poorly

“The solution will empower communities and improve outcomes.”

Why this would raise concerns

- Vague
- Unverifiable
- Reads as aspirational rather than grounded

Scored well

“The solution aims to reduce specific constraints identified through engagement, including time burden and maintenance risk, which are barriers to sustained use.”

Why this would work

- Specific
- Evidence-linked
- Grounded in engagement insight