

# changes news

## Echo is about empowering agencies to engage communities

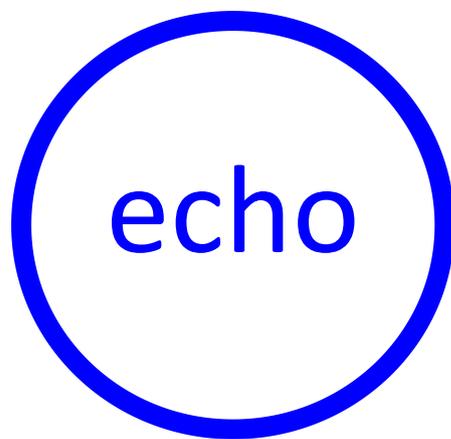
It is a 'tool' for public agencies and partnerships to plot:

### How open they are to community influence

*This is about the structures, processes, attitudes, skills and cultures that make an agency open to influence by communities*

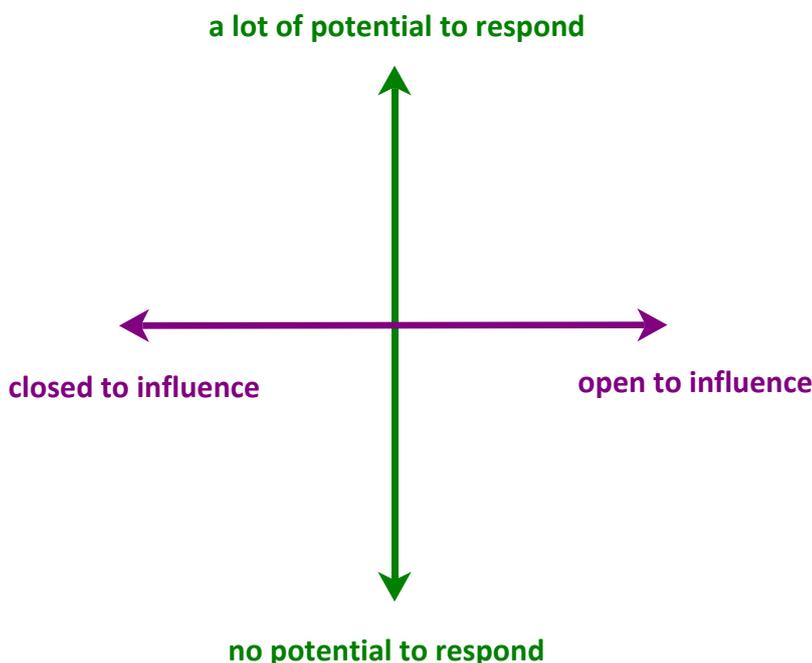
### In relation to their potential to respond to community influence

*This is about legal, financial and practical constraints which impact on an agency's potential to respond*



The relationship between 'assessing how open you are to community influence' and 'your potential to respond', are demonstrated on an axis. It is about moving towards being more open with a proviso that public agencies need to be clear about when influence is not possible.

Eight intermediate positions are identified between being open and closed to community influence, each with a descriptor and a series of characteristics which explain the detail.



### Vertical axis – potential to respond

Through identifying where they are placed on the vertical axis, public agencies and their partners are encouraged to discuss the issues that affect their potential to respond, and establish the difference between enduring constraints and those which can be changed with a will to do so! Some examples include: targets (and performance measures); political machinery; the law & national rules; power differentials; how 'community' is defined and understood.

### Echo can be used to help:

- prompt discussion about your agency and community influence
- identify your position on the framework
- compare your position with others, with partners
- recognise why things are – or are not – working
- understand and articulate the complexities of community engagement
- identify the things you need to do to be more open to influence
- plan improvement

### During the research to develop echo, officers in public agencies told us why agencies need/want to be influenced:

- it is a requirement through the White paper: duty to cooperate with partners and a duty to engage
- we are public servants and communities are tax payers
- it can be part of 'giving ownership' and increasing respect for facilities, for example, so they don't get ruined
- research shows that the more that people feel engaged in the design and delivery of services, the more satisfied they are likely to be with our organisation
- to be able to provide quality and flexible services that meet community needs
- so that people can have some power and influence over their lives

## The positions and their characteristics

The positions on the horizontal axis, illustrate a shift from doing things **to** communities to doing **with** – encouraging an empowered and engaged community. There are many characteristics, all of which have arisen from research, some examples are given below. Examples of the characteristics are given below to illustrate the types of characteristics identified.

### Position 1: Closed to community influence

Agencies put up (intentional – or unintentional) barriers to communities influencing

Structures are bureaucratic and acronyms are used

Agencies do not see what communities can offer

### Position 2: Respond to individuals

Agencies have a customer focused approach which responds to individuals

They are reactive and listen to those who shout the loudest

They fulfil legal requirements to inform and consult

### Position 3: Make contact with people

The agency is likely to be visible to the public so that people know about available services and how to make contact, although contact tends to be made on the agency's terms, expecting people to fit into existing structures.

### Position 4: Change focus to groups and communities

The agency shifts its focus from individuals and actively seeks the opinions of organised and constituted groups.

The agency understands what it means by 'community' and understands why some communities work with it more readily than others

### Position 5: Recognise the value of community influence

There is an understanding that community influence can be beneficial to agencies as well as communities and it is viewed as a challenge and an opportunity rather than a threat

### Position 6: Recognise the possibilities for community influence

The agency begins to explore the broader 'landscape' that it operates within: the political landscape, the community landscape, the organisational landscape. It recognises the relationship between representative and participative democracy and understands how communities organise

### Position 7: Support communities to influence

Agencies take a proactive role to support and inform communities so that they meet service providers on an equal footing and are influential on relevant bodies and committees

### Position 8: Work together

Agencies create positive alliances with communities, other departments and agencies. They have a variety and range of engagement processes, structures and opportunities that are responsive to the ways that communities organise

### Position 9: Change how we do things

This is about cultural change, not about individuals.

There is willingness and flexibility to change how things are done at all levels of the agency.

### Position 10: Fully open to influence

The characteristics here reflect the outcomes of positions 2 – 9.

