

ONE HEALTH FOR CITIES



THE ESSENTIAL GUIDEBOOK FOR CITY MAKERS

SECTION 4: ENGAGING AND MOBILISING CITIZENS FOR ONE HEALTH

AUTHORS: I. Toscano, S. Aivalioti, M. Dussauge,
Dr. M. Dellenbaugh-Losse, Dr. G. Fauvel, D. Sepulveda



INTRODUCTION



WHY DO WE NEED CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT IN ONE HEALTH?

One Health succeeds only when citizens are **active participants**, not passive recipients of policies. Engagement ensures that:

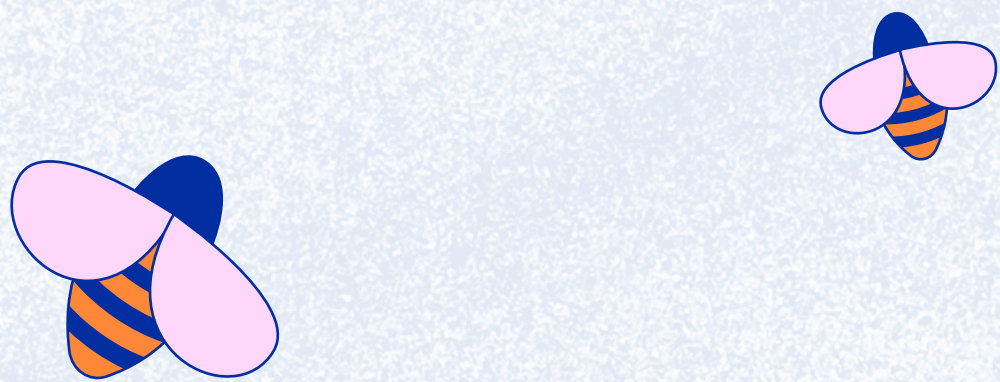
- One Health **actions and solutions** are designed to effectively **meet the needs** and reflect the daily lives of local communities.
- Citizens **build long-term commitment and foster necessary cultural change** by actively co-creating solutions.
- Citizens become more mindful of their own health and behaviours and their interconnectedness with animals and the environment, which supports biodiversity, protects ecosystems, and **minimises conflicts of co-existence**

Without citizen engagement, One Health risks being a top-down technical approach that is not understood or sustained in the long term. When citizens are engaged, One Health transforms into a **movement of shared responsibility and conscious living**.

CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES

Effective citizen participation requires navigating and overcoming a number of complex challenges:

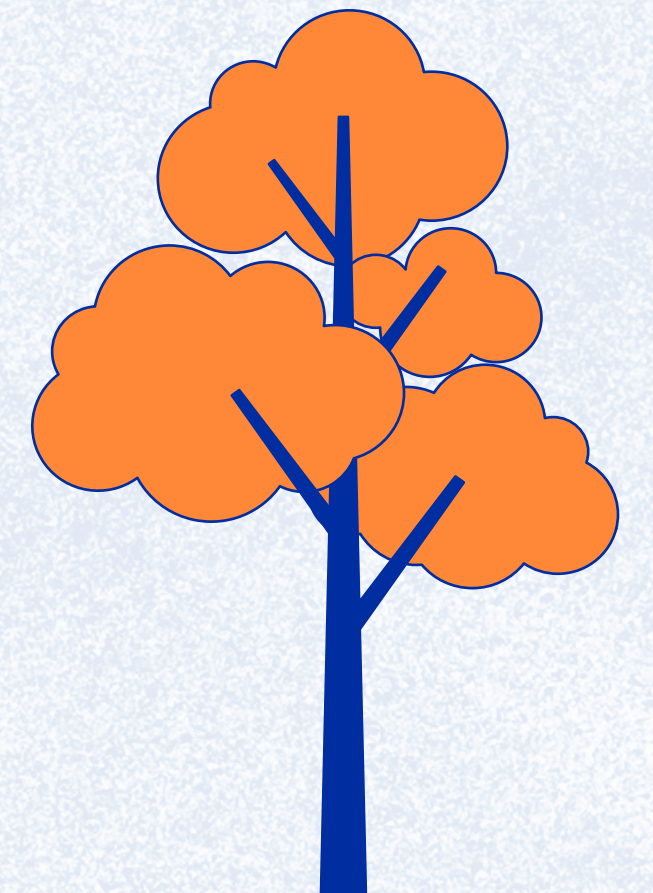
- The **One Health approach** is novel for urban settings. Cities currently lack successful models for its communication to citizens.
- The concept of One Health is complex and spans many domains. It can be **difficult to explain without jargon**.
- Many municipalities **lack expertise in both One Health and participatory processes** (or the knowledge can be siloed into a department).
- Issues such as zoonotic diseases, eco-anxiety, or biodiversity loss can **trigger fear, guilt, or defensiveness** if not carefully managed.
- **Scepticism towards local authorities** is a challenge to citizens' willingness to engage.
- The increasing number of topics covered by citizens' engagement initiatives risks **saturating participation**, particularly if the **processes are poorly managed**.
- Sustaining effective engagement ultimately requires **ongoing investment in communication**, facilitation, and follow-up, demanding both time and effort.



KEY STEPS AND ONE HEALTH PRACTICAL TIPS

In this section, we explore **positive elements to foster engagement for the One Health approach, drawing on experiences from the One Health 4 Cities partners and summarising tips for local authorities willing to implement One Health in a participatory way.** We have identified three main steps necessary to consider in designing and implementing effective participatory processes for One Health promotion.

- **Increase understanding of One Health**
- **Build trust with the citizens and with linked organisations**
- **Design initiatives for long-term participation and engagement**



STEP 1: INCREASE THE UNDERSTANDING OF ONE HEALTH

Empowering lasting behavioural change to sustain healthy human, animal, plant, and environmental systems requires different citizen groups (particularly diverse vulnerable groups) to have a good understanding of the topic. This **understanding is essential for them to become effective change agents** in their neighbourhoods and communities.

— ONE HEALTH TIPS



— DEFINE KEY MESSAGES AND EXPLAIN THEM IN ENGAGING WAYS

- Use **simple, relatable examples** showing how **human well-being depends on animals, plants, and the environment and vice versa**. Not everyone needs the full complexity of One Health.
- **Tailor messages** for children, adults, or professionals; each group has **different motivations** and entry points for engagement.
- Use **creative tools** that build **empathy and curiosity**, such as **storytelling, games, or role-play** linked to **local experiences**.
- Involve **artists, ecologists, and cultural mediators** to **balance science with emotion**. **Cultural events**, film nights, or school projects can help residents **connect emotionally** with One Health ideas.

— ADDRESS SENSITIVE EMOTIONS

- Acknowledge **eco-anxiety and health fears** and offer **constructive actions** instead of blame. Highlight **what communities can do together**, promoting **hopeful, collective narratives** of care and recovery.

— SPOT ANTHROPOCENTRIC VIEWS

- Avoid approaches that **focus only on human benefits**. Include **non-human perspectives**, such as pollinators, pets, trees, meadows or wildlife, to show **interdependence, not hierarchy**.

— PROVIDE INCLUSIVE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- Ensure **everyone can take part** in One Health learning. Use **visual, oral, and digital tools** for **diverse audiences**, including those with **disabilities or limited literacy**. **Translate materials, use familiar community spaces**, keep language simple and approachable, and **work with local leaders to co-design engagement**.
- Make participation **easy, safe, and rewarding** so **everyone feels part of the One Health story**.

TOOLBOX

TOOLS FOR INCREASING ONE HEALTH UNDERSTANDING

- One Health Role Play
- One Health Quiz
- One Health Video
- One Health Board Game
- Observation Grid - Explore Life in Schoolyards



STEP 2: BUILD TRUST WITH THE CITIZENS AND WITH LINKED ORGANISATIONS

Building **trust and collaboration** is essential for One Health to move from ideas to action. When citizens, local institutions, and professionals trust one another, they can share resources, insights, and responsibility for creating healthier, more resilient communities.



— ONE HEALTH TIPS

— COMBINE EXPERTISE AND SUPPORT

- Collaborate with local organisations that already have established **connections with citizens, projects, and knowledge networks**. Many of these local groups are already engaged in One Health-related activities. By coordinating and combining your efforts, you can increase the impact of existing projects and initiatives.
- **Amplify messages, share resources, and coordinate actions** by pooling your strengths. Collaboration across **health, environmental, educational, and social sectors** is key to building credibility and ensuring consistent communication.



— DEVELOP A REFERENCE PROJECT

- Establish a **tangible, local demonstration** of One Health in action, for example, through urban farming initiatives in schoolyards. These **hands-on reference projects** serve to make the concept accessible and concrete, enabling citizens to **visit, learn, and personally experience the advantages** of improved ecosystems and healthier communities.

— MAKE IT PARTICIPATORY AND BOTTOM-UP

- Citizens are **user experts**, especially concerning their health and immediate environment. They possess unique insights into what works, what is important for them, and what they are capable of doing.

- Use **citizen participation methods** to embed One Health in their daily life. Ensure citizens are seen not just as beneficiaries, but as **partners and co-creators** of One Health solutions.
- **Cities must act as guarantors and mediators**, ensuring engagement processes are balanced, transparent, fair and democratic. They must provide **accessible platforms, consistent communication, and visible follow-up** so citizens feel heard and valued.

TOOLBOX

TOOLS FOR COORDINATING CIVIL SOCIETY

- One Health Governance Canva
- One Health Stakeholder Map

STEP 3: DESIGN INITIATIVES FOR LONG-TERM PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Effective One Health implementation necessitates a paradigm shift: moving away from anthropocentrism, embracing co-existence with other living beings, and actively making space for this change. To evolve One Health from a finite project into a **shared community culture**, long-term public participation is essential. Citizens, schools, and organisations must have **ongoing opportunities** to engage, learn, take action, and observe the positive impact of their involvement. This continuity is key to sustaining motivation, fostering trust, and ensuring collective stewardship of health and the environment.

— ONE HEALTH TIPS

— DEVELOP ONE HEALTH AMBASSADOR PROGRAMMES

- Ambassadors can serve as **One Health credible community connectors** by working through existing structures such as **health centres, social centres, or schools**. They can share information, mobilise neighbours, and support small-scale projects.
- **Identify existing community members** who are already engaged in One Health-related activities. Train and provide them **with adapted resources (tools, networks and knowledge)**.
- Encourage ambassadors to **give a voice to the unspeaking** nature, animals, and future generations.
- Ensure **diversity among ambassadors** can help to reach diverse resident groups.

— ONE HEALTH TIPS



— CREATE CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECTS

- Design **citizen science programmes** that invite residents to **monitor local health and environmental indicators**, such as air quality, biodiversity, or well-being. This creates a **sense of ownership and shared evidence** about local change.
- Use existing groups or structures such as schools, community gardens, and conservation groups that can serve as **natural hubs** for citizen science projects.

— DEVELOP LONG-TERM PROJECTS AND SPACES

- Support **long-term community projects** that promote **health, nature restoration, and social connection**, such as **urban gardens, conservation sites, or healthy lifestyle programmes**. Encourage citizens to **co-design and implement such activities**
- Ensure there is **funding, space, knowledge and policy support** for these initiatives so they can evolve in the long term.



— CELEBRATE ONE HEALTH

- Create **annual or seasonal One Health Action or Festive Days** to bring citizens, schools, and organisations together in visible, hands-on activities and celebrations. These can include **talks, walks, cultural events, neighbourhood clean-ups, tree planting, health fairs, or biodiversity counts**. The One Health days raise awareness, **celebrate local achievements**, and reinforce a sense of **community ownership and pride**. They also serve as **entry points** for new participants to join long-term One Health efforts.
- Embed One Health events, messages, and activities into existing, well-known public events that naturally align with One Health themes (e.g., park festivals, science fairs, river-celebration events).

TOOLBOX

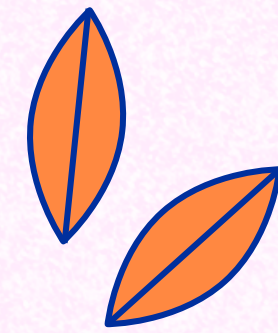
TOOLS FOR CO-CREATING ONE HEALTH INITIATIVES

- Participatory Citizens Workshop
- Action Ideas for One Health
- The Wheel of One Health Challenges

“It’s important to recognise that citizen participation is not part of the natural DNA of public authorities, but it is becoming a new imperative. It is getting harder and harder to make policies without involving citizens, and One Health is no exception.”

– Christophe Gouache, Senior policy designer at Strategic Design Scenarios

CASE STUDY



FROM SEED TO FRUIT FROM THE CITY OF ELEFSINA

In Elefsina, a historic but highly urbanised city in Greece, the municipality sought new ways to strengthen awareness of sustainability and the interconnectedness of human, animal, plant and environmental health. Young children and their families had limited exposure to gardening, biodiversity, and healthy nutrition. Environmental pressures from urbanisation created additional challenges. Recognising that early education can build long-term habits, the city launched the project “From Seed to Fruit” in public kindergartens, aiming to introduce One Health concepts at an early age through direct interaction with nature.

The project created small gardens in schoolyards, where children planted seeds, watered and cared for plants, observed insects and pollinators, and harvested fruits and vegetables. Teachers used stories and play-based activities to explain how plants, animals, and people depend on one another, making complex concepts accessible to young learners. Parents were actively involved through gardening days and workshops on healthy eating and sustainable practices, reinforcing habits at home and encouraging family participation. Initial concerns, such as whether children

would stay engaged or whether One Health concepts could be understood at such a young age, were overcome through hands-on learning and close collaboration between teachers, municipal staff, and families.

The initiative led to greater environmental awareness among children, healthier nutrition habits at home, and increased family engagement with green spaces. By creating positive early experiences with nature, the project helped children develop care and responsibility for plants and local ecosystems. The approach is simple, low-cost, and highly adaptable, making it easy for other cities and schools to replicate. Elefsina’s experience shows how early education and family participation can nurture future citizens who value biodiversity, sustainability, and the health of all living systems. The programme will continue and expand to all public kindergartens in the city.

SUCCESS FACTORS OF ELEFISINA'S INITIATIVE

- The vegetable gardens are a **low-cost, simple solution** with no need for expensive equipment or infrastructure. This allows scalability and easy replication in other schools and public spaces.
- **Experiential learning helped overcome initial scepticism** about whether young children could grasp such concepts. The approach turned abstract ideas like “One Health” into visible, everyday experiences.
- **Schools were proactive and enthusiastic**, helping ensure smooth implementation.
- Once the gardens and activities were established, **schools can maintain them independently**. This reduces reliance on city resources and allows the programme to continue growing organically.
- The initiative successfully **engaged parents through their children**: pupils brought new habits, knowledge, and enthusiasm home, motivating families to participate in gardening days and adopt healthier eating practices. This **intergenerational influence** amplified the programme's overall impact

