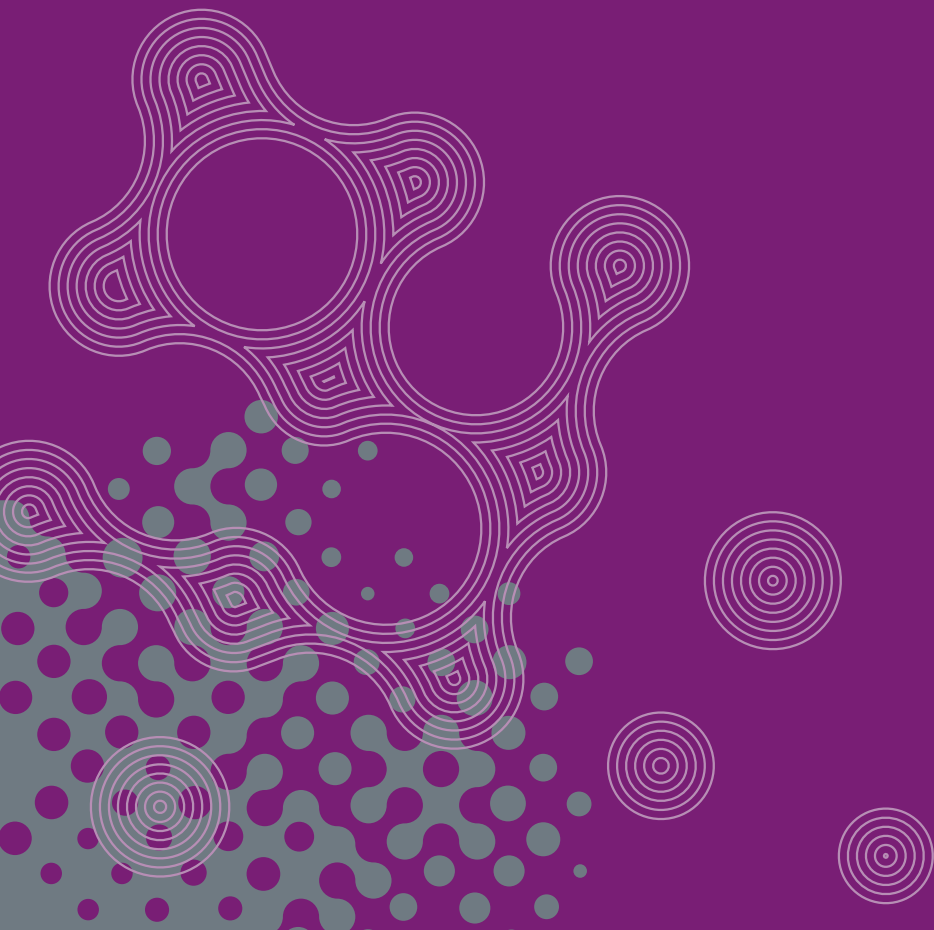


# Engaging Queenslanders:

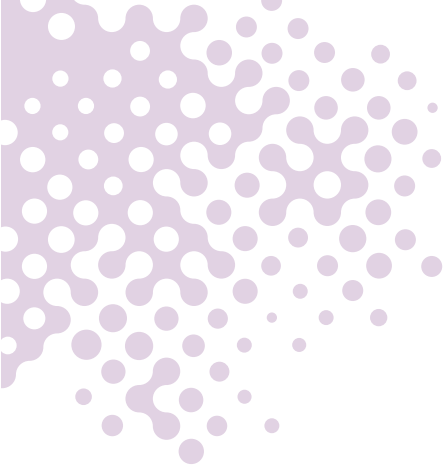
A guide to community engagement methods and techniques





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## The purpose of this guide



*Engaging Queenslanders: A guide to community engagement methods and techniques* brings together introductory information on a range of traditional and innovative techniques. It is intended to assist public officials at all levels and other practitioners to choose the most appropriate community engagement process. Strengths and weaknesses are summarised for each technique to support decision making.

A broad spectrum of community engagement techniques can be used by clients and other agencies to engage with citizens and stakeholders. Some are designed specifically to share information or to elicit views and opinions, while others aim to effectively involve people in government planning, decision-making, service delivery and evaluation.

This guide is not intended to provide detailed 'how to' information on each of the methods described. References and website details are provided for each of the techniques so more detailed information can be accessed to support the effective use of these techniques.

This guide acknowledges that the most appropriate community engagement technique for any given circumstance will be determined by the issue, the engagement objectives and goals, the stakeholders and the available resources. In some instances a range of engagement techniques beyond those outlined in this guide may be required or a technique may have to be adapted to suit particular circumstances. Information about other resources which may inform decision-making about engagement processes is provided at the end of this guide.

No single engagement technique will suit every issue. Using more than one technique in an engagement activity may provide the opportunity for government to reach beyond its usual

stakeholders and to increase representation and participation.

This guide is part of a suite of resources being produced by the Department of Communities, in collaboration with other agencies, to support and promote effective community engagement practice across the public sector.

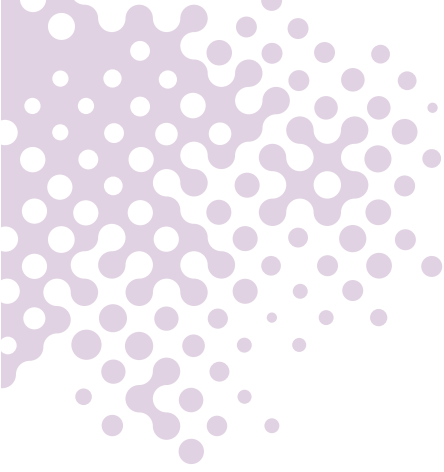
The first seven resources in the suite, available on the government's community engagement website [www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au) are:

- *Engaging Queenslanders: Improving community engagement across the Queensland Public Sector*
- *Engaging Queenslanders: An introduction to community engagement*
- *Engaging Queenslanders: Community engagement in the business of government*
- *Engaging Queenslanders: A guide to community engagement showcasing events*
- *Engaging Queenslanders: Evaluating community engagement*
- *Engaging Queenslanders: Introduction to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*
- *Engaging Queenslanders: A guide to engaging people with a disability.*

An electronic version of these guides are also available on the website.

Further resources being developed include:

- *Engaging Queenslanders: Introduction to working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities*
- *Engaging Queenslanders: An information kit for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities connecting with the Queensland Government*
- *Engaging Queenslanders: Government and communities working together.*



## **Acknowledgements**

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# Planning community engagement

## 1.1 Introduction

The Queensland Government, like many others nationally and internationally, has recognised the value of engaging community members in decision-making processes. Broadly, engagement allows governments to tap into wider perspectives, sources of information, and potential solutions to improve decisions and services. It also provides the basis for productive relationships, improved dialogue and deliberation, and ultimately, better democracy.

Being able to have a say and to get involved is expected in a democratic society. Whilst feedback is often positive, it also sometimes indicates that approaches to communication and consultation have not been as good as might be expected. There is a significant challenge in being able to provide avenues for involvement that are inclusive, productive and cost-effective, within the parameters of our system of government, and the diversity of our community.

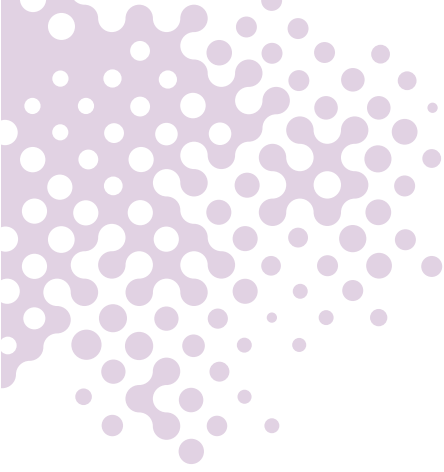
The Queensland Government has responded to citizen expectations and international trends with a significant commitment to improving community engagement. The correct application of the methods described in this guide will support improved government and better outcomes for clients, citizens and communities.

## 1.2 Planning community engagement

A key task for public agencies and officials in planning community engagement is to assess which engagement techniques are most appropriate in the particular circumstances. To plan effectively, other useful resources and websites are listed in section 10. These resources provide detailed information for planning community engagement with specific community groups.

The first steps of planning any engagement process are to clarify the engagement objectives and the desired levels of engagement. *Engaging Queenslanders: Community engagement in the business of government* ([www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au)) includes a useful checklist to support this planning process. Once these decisions have been made, appropriate engagement techniques can be selected.

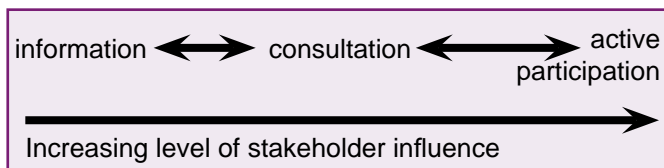
It is important that decisions about how best to engage the community be made early in the planning stage of policy, program or service development. Involving stakeholders in the planning stage will help create a sense of ownership of the issue and enable clients, citizens, communities and government to work together to determine the most appropriate approach to engagement.



### 1.3 Deciding on the level of engagement

Careful consideration needs to be given to determining and delivering an appropriate level of engagement, deciding which stakeholders should be involved, the issue to be considered and the objectives of engagement.

The Queensland Government has adopted the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's ([www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)) engagement model:



Adapted from *Engaging Queenslanders: An introduction to community engagement*

Information, consultation and active participation can be considered along a community engagement continuum, with increasing levels of engagement and influence towards the 'active participation' end of the spectrum.

Each of the levels of engagement are appropriate in particular circumstances to achieve particular outcomes. Whilst there has been a shift towards agencies using engagement strategies which are more consultative or involve greater community participation, at times it will be necessary to engage at two or more levels to achieve the desired outcomes.

#### Information

Information provision is a one-way relationship in which government disseminates information to citizens and clients. It covers both passive access to information by people via a range of avenues such as the telephone, publications and websites, and more active measures by government to disseminate information through education and awareness activities.

Effective information strategies require information that:

- is accurate, easy to access and easy to understand
- is relevant and interesting to the intended audience
- is delivered through appropriate channels
- is tailored where necessary in language, style and content and
- directs citizens to where they can access further information if required.

The effectiveness of government information sharing and information sharing processes should be evaluated with opportunities for citizens and clients to provide feedback. Chapter eight discusses the evaluation of community engagement processes.

#### Consultation

Consultation is a two-way relationship in which government seeks and receives the views of citizens, clients or communities on policies, programs or services that affect them directly or in which they may have a significant interest.

Consultation can occur at various points in the process of planning or developing policies, programs or services and can be used to help frame an issue, identify or assess options and to evaluate existing policies, programs or services. Consultation can involve issues that are specific or quite general.

Critical elements of effective consultation include a shared understanding of how community input will inform policy or decision-making processes and timely feedback to participants on how the input contributed to the final outcome.



### **Active participation**

Active participation recognises and acknowledges a role for citizens and clients in proposing and/or shaping policy dialogue, program and service options. Participation is achieved through a range of deliberative techniques such as citizens' juries, citizens' panels, search conferences, negotiation tables, steering committees, and reference groups. Such processes engage people in active partnership and/or co-production with government. Deliberative processes often take time and resources as participants need to build their awareness and knowledge about the issues in order to contribute effectively.

Active participation processes enable people to raise their own issues with government and can also encourage or enable participants to take responsibility for their contribution to solutions. Responsibility for the final decision usually rests with government but may, in some instances, be shared with citizens, communities or stakeholders. It is critical that the final decision maker is predetermined and agreed in the planning process.

Involvement of citizens/stakeholders and communities in government planning or decision-making requires specific techniques to facilitate learning, debate and the development of options and proposals. Public sector employees seeking to facilitate such processes also require significant skills, often different from those required for information or consultation, in order to achieve effective outcomes.

# 2



## Choosing engagement techniques

**When deciding which engagement method or technique to use in a particular situation or with a particular group, it is important to consider a number of issues including:**

- **agency issues**
- **community issues and**
- **process issues.**

### 2.1 Agency issues

A number of corporate or agency issues will influence decision-making about the use of methods and tools. Some of these issues are summarised in the following table.

Agency issue	Considerations include
Goals and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• why is the agency engaging the community?</li> <li>• what does the agency hope to achieve from the engagement?</li> <li>• what time commitments must be met?</li> <li>• do the benefits of engaging outweigh the costs of not engaging?</li> </ul>
Community to be targeted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is the agency targeting:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– a geographic community?</li> <li>– an ethnic or faith community?</li> <li>– an Indigenous community?</li> <li>– a professional community?</li> <li>– a community of interest?</li> <li>– some combination of the above?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• are other agencies also engaging this community? Is collaboration possible?</li> </ul>
Political environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what level of political support or awareness exists about the proposed engagement?</li> <li>• is your process part of a broader government agenda?</li> <li>• is this a contested issue?</li> </ul>
Capacity to influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is this a government or a community initiated activity?</li> <li>• what decisions have already been made?</li> <li>• what decisions can the community have input into?</li> </ul>
Legislative environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is engagement required by legislation?</li> <li>• are any parts of this project or engagement process supported or constrained by legislation?</li> </ul>
Policy and planning cycles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• where does your engagement fit within the policy or planning cycle?</li> </ul>
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what resources are available to support the engagement, for example:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– skilled facilitators and managers?*</li> <li>– information and communication technologies?</li> <li>– engagement structures such as Advisory Committees?</li> <li>– budget allocation?</li> <li>– staff time?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

\*\*The availability of staff and/or consultants with the skills to implement engagement techniques is a key consideration. Competencies for community engagement have been included within the Public Sector Training Package [www.pseta.gov.au](http://www.pseta.gov.au). Tools for recruiting, selecting, inducting and performance managing staff with engagement skills can be found at [www.getinvolved.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.gov.au)



Agency issue	Considerations include
Corporate culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is there a community engagement framework, policy or similar to support this process?</li> <li>• is there a high level of understanding of, and commitment to engagement within the organisation?</li> <li>• is there an openness to use more innovative engagement processes?</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Community issues

Communities are increasingly more diverse and are not generally a homogenous group. They can be categorised into either communities of interest, and/or geographical communities. The primary aim of any community engagement process is to connect with the community. In order to do this effectively, it is important to develop a sound understanding of that community. This understanding can be achieved via a number of processes.

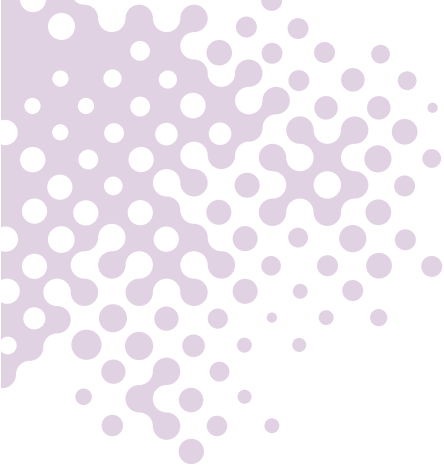
*Community profiling* involves reviewing a range of data sources to build a picture of the demographic makeup of a community and in the case of geographic communities; the land use mix, population trends, business and employment patterns and available infrastructure. Community profiles can be established to inform decision-making for a specific engagement process. Organisations including local governments and community based organisations may have existing community profiles which could be useful.

*Stakeholder segmentation* is a way of clustering the community into groups. By identifying the nature and size of 'segments' within a community it is possible to design a community engagement strategy which ensures balanced engagement with each of the identified groups.

*Media research* can be undertaken by scanning stored print and electronic media articles. Such a scan may provide useful information about the frequency with which particular issues are raised in the community and what responses have been made, the location of 'hot spots', community spokespeople and whether public opinion is positive or negative.

*Talking with others* within or beyond your own organisation may provide useful information about the community and any previous engagement processes and outcomes.

Undertaking one or more of these research processes will reveal important community features that will impact upon decision-making about appropriate community engagement methods and techniques.



Community feature	Considerations include
Demographic features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what is the age and gender mix?</li> <li>• what levels of literacy exist?</li> <li>• what is the socio-economic mix?</li> <li>• what languages are spoken in the community?</li> <li>• what cultural protocols are adhered to?</li> <li>• what percentage of the community is employed and when do they work?</li> <li>• do community members have access to transport?</li> </ul>
Preferences for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have community members expressed particular preferences regarding engagement eg. to be involved in information sharing, consultation or active participation?</li> </ul>
Previous experience(s) with government engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has previous engagement with government been largely positive or largely negative?</li> <li>• what percentage of the population has not previously engaged with government?</li> <li>• is there trust and connectedness within the community? Between government and the community?</li> </ul>
Capacity for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• do community members have the <i>knowledge</i> needed to participate? (eg. to critique planning models)</li> <li>• do community members have the <i>resources</i> needed to participate? (eg. time, internet access)</li> <li>• do community members have the <i>skills</i> needed to participate? (eg. public speaking)</li> <li>• do community members have access to necessary <i>infrastructure</i> needed to participate? (eg. child care networks, transport and disability access)</li> </ul>
Existing engagement structures and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are there existing networks, committees, structures to support engagement within the community?</li> <li>• are there sporting, religious, professional and other groups who already engage with the community? Will they support this engagement?</li> <li>• are there existing newsletters, radio stations, websites etc. that the community accesses?</li> </ul>
Nature of impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• who is directly impacted by the issue?</li> <li>• who is indirectly impacted by the issue?</li> <li>• who is interested but not necessarily impacted?</li> <li>• is public opinion positive, negative, divided or indifferent?</li> </ul>

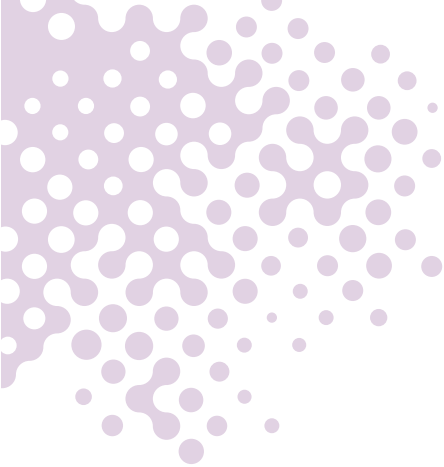


## 2.3 Process issues

The Queensland Government has adopted six guiding principles which provide the basis for improved community engagement in Queensland public sector processes.

The following table summarises some of the questions which need to be considered when selecting engagement techniques to ensure that these guiding principles can be addressed.

Guiding principle	Considerations include
Inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what consideration needs to be given to venues, language, print type, timing etc. to ensure that engagement is accessible to all?</li> <li>• is capacity building required to enable all people to be effectively engaged?</li> <li>• what techniques are required to enable all voices to be heard?</li> <li>• what promotion is required to encourage wide participation?</li> </ul>
Reaching out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are there groups of disengaged or unengaged people within the community who could be engaged?</li> <li>• what will it take to engage these groups?</li> <li>• can engagement processes be implemented in times and places that are comfortable to the community?</li> <li>• can engagement processes link with community radio stations, newsletters, websites etc.?</li> </ul>
Mutual respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what will community members gain from being engaged?</li> <li>• how will community members' contributions be recognised and valued?</li> <li>• how will community feedback on the engagement process be received and used?</li> <li>• will engagement processes be flexible to accommodate changing community issues?</li> <li>• is the agency listening or just talking?</li> </ul>
Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how can the honesty, openness and accountability of the engagement process be demonstrated?</li> <li>• is there a commitment to carefully planning, implementing and evaluating the engagement technique?</li> <li>• are there sufficient resources to implement the technique effectively including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– advertising and publishing, printing and circulating information?</li> <li>– hire of venue, facilitators, translators, child care staff?</li> <li>– catering, transport arrangements for a range of participants who would not otherwise be able to attend, disability access for people in wheel chairs or using prams, meeting costs?</li> <li>– time?</li> <li>– purchase or hire of equipment, stalls, marquees, workshop materials?</li> <li>– professional, technical, casual and support staff (some of which may have existing networks with some of the participants?)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



Guiding principle	Considerations include
Affirming diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• does information need to be provided in languages other than English and/or large font format?</li> <li>• can the information be articulated to those who are illiterate or those with disabilities?</li> <li>• will diverse groups interact well in group situations or are parallel processes required?</li> <li>• are there cultural protocols which need to be honoured?</li> <li>• will targeted processes and/or culturally, age and gender appropriate facilitators enhance the effectiveness of engagement?</li> <li>• have there been measures to cater for child care and/or people with a disability?</li> </ul>
Adding value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• will the technique build government and/or community capacity for future engagement?</li> <li>• will the technique build trust between the agency and the community?</li> <li>• will the technique support sustainable community and/or government outcomes?</li> </ul>

Having developed an understanding of the range of organisational, community and process issues, it is possible to make informed decisions about which engagement technique(s) will be most effective.

Chapters three and four of this guide provide summary advice regarding some of the more commonly used information and consultation techniques. Chapter five explores traditional and innovative engagement techniques which support the active participation of citizens and communities.

The classification of techniques into information, consultation and active participation reflects how the various techniques are generally used. It is important to remember that some techniques may be used for a variety of information sharing, consultation and/or participation outcomes, for example, shop fronts may be used to provide

information, to seek community opinion or to facilitate local participation. The following table provides an alphabetical listing of the techniques discussed in this guide and the various levels of engagement that they can support.



**Ready reference to tools and techniques**  
(alphabetical order)

METHOD AND/OR TECHNIQUE	Information	Consultation	Participation	Page
Action research	✓		✓	30
Advertising	✓	✓		14
Advisory committees	✓	✓	✓	31
Briefings	✓	✓		15
Charrettes	✓		✓	32
Citizens' juries	✓		✓	32
Citizens' panels	✓		✓	48
Collective learning techniques (World café)	✓	✓	✓	51
Community cultural development	✓	✓	✓	52
Community fairs/events	✓	✓	✓	21
Community meetings	✓	✓		22
Community reference groups	✓	✓	✓	33
Community visioning	✓	✓	✓	52
Deliberative polling	✓		✓	49
Deliberative retreats	✓		✓	34
Design workshops	✓		✓	36
Discussion groups and workshops	✓	✓		24
Displays	✓	✓		20
Drama workshops	✓	✓	✓	34
Education and awareness programs	✓			16
Fact sheets	✓			16
Fishbowls	✓	✓	✓	45
Focus groups	✓	✓	✓	37
Future search conferences	✓		✓	40
Imagine	✓		✓	42

METHOD AND/OR TECHNIQUE	Information	Consultation	Participation	Page
Informal club forums	✓	✓		23
Learning circles	✓		✓	35
Media stories	✓			18
Negotiation tables	✓		✓	42
Newsletters	✓			17
News conferences	✓			19
Newspaper inserts	✓			20
Nominal group workshops	✓		✓	43
One-on-one interviews	✓	✓		24
Open space technology	✓		✓	47
Online information processes	✓			15
Open days	✓	✓		25
Participatory editing	✓		✓	38
Partnerships for active participation	✓		✓	39
Photovoice	✓		✓	44
Planning for real	✓		✓	46
Policy action teams	✓		✓	45
Polls	✓	✓		26
Precinct committees	✓		✓	38
Road shows	✓	✓		27
Shop fronts	✓	✓	✓	22
Summits	✓		✓	50
Survey research	✓	✓		27
Telephone hotlines	✓	✓		19
Web-based consultation processes	✓	✓	✓	28

# 3



## Information-sharing techniques

Information strategies underpin any community engagement activity. Effective information provision allows citizens and clients to understand the issue and to decide whether they want to participate in a consultation or active participation activity. Internal information provision strategies should also be developed to ensure government decision-makers are well informed about the engagement process, its progress and any issues that may arise throughout the process.

Government may seek to simply provide information to community members (ie. information provision) or to provide information to the community whilst also being open to receiving information from the community (ie. information sharing). For example, information sessions were provided to the Gold Coast community members prior to Gold Coast Schoolies 2003. During these sessions, information was provided by state government representatives with regard to the management of the Gold Coast Schoolies week preparations. Information sharing was also encouraged to progress some issues.

While one-way information provision can enable a large number of people in a community to learn about an issue, the reasons for focussing the level of engagement activity to information provision only must be made explicit at the outset.

Before initiating either an information provision or an information sharing process it is important to reflect on the insights gained from community research (refer section 2.2) and consider:

- what is the key message to be delivered?
- why is this information important to the target group?

- why is it important to government that this information be provided?

The benefits of information provision strategies are that they are able to quickly inform the community of a specific topic alerting them of appropriate behavioural change. Further, information sessions can be part of a much bigger engagement process, and not just a stand alone process.

The following information provision strategies can be used as part of a community engagement activity. The scale and budget required for each technique is likely to vary in accordance with the engagement goals.

### 3.1 Advertising

Advertising involves agencies developing specific information in particular formats and languages for distribution through print, radio, television and online media. It can be an effective way to bring issues and activities to the attention of people in a certain geographic area or demographic group very quickly. Advertising can be targeted to relatively small and specific groups, or can address much wider and more diverse populations. Advertising can be obligatory in certain legislative processes. When advertising, it is important to use the range of media that the target group may access.

#### Strengths:

- the content of the information disseminated can be tightly controlled
- can be relatively cost effective if using community newsletters, and/or community radio
- is an effective way to reach a large and diverse population(s)
- can be targeted to print and electronic media that the community of interest accesses and
- advertisements can be produced in a number of languages and can include diagrams, maps etc, to convey visual information.



### Weaknesses:

- can be seen as ‘propaganda’
- can be expensive if using large circulation and television media
- does not build two-way relationships with the community and
- can be constrained by agency processes and protocols.

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#### References and websites:

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System – Prepared for Planning NSW by Elton Consulting (2003)

[www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

Project Safe Neighborhoods Community Engagement and Media Outreach Technical Assistance Program: New York (2004)

[www.ojp.usdoj.gov](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov)

### Case Study: Non-smoking campaign

Queensland Health has a number of campaigns including a non-smoking campaign which provide direct messages targeting various members of the population.

[www.feelinggood.com.au](http://www.feelinggood.com.au)

## 3.2 Online information processes

Websites are a growing and significant channel for providing government information to the public and key stakeholders. Information provided via websites can be directed at all Queenslanders, translated to languages other than English to facilitate information provision to key groups, or presented on targeted sites to reach specific audiences such as [www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au) developed specifically to support engagement with young people.

Websites can be important for providing information to support the range of community engagement activity as well as lending greater transparency to government decision-making processes. Other electronic information sharing

processes are also increasing in popularity including e-mail groups, e-newsletters and SMS messaging.

### Strengths:

- electronic processes can reach a large number of people quickly and generally cost effectively and
- changes to the information being conveyed can be made quickly and relatively cost effectively.

### Weaknesses:

- not all Queenslanders have reliable access to the information and telecommunication technologies needed to share information in this way
- some groups within the community may distrust electronic processes and
- information needs to be kept up to date.

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#### References and websites:

The Queensland Government’s youth engagement site

[www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

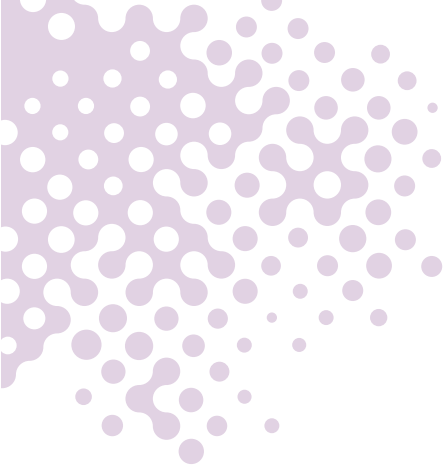
The Queensland Government’s community engagement site

[www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au)

Coleman S & Götze J (2001) *Bowling Together. Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation.* [www.bowlingtogether.net](http://www.bowlingtogether.net)

## 3.3 Briefings

Briefings are a technique to provide key information to agency decision-makers, Members of Parliament, other agencies and key stakeholders at regular intervals to assist them to stay informed about the progress of an engagement activity. Whilst often one-way in nature, by raising awareness amongst key stakeholders, briefings can lead to more effective two-way communication and the identification of issues or options not previously considered. It is particularly important to provide briefings if an engagement activity could have political implications, or if the stakeholders being briefed are likely to be impacted by decisions made as a result of the engagement activity.



### Strengths:

- can be a useful way to build relationships with important stakeholders and
- often an effective way of ensuring stakeholder issues are regularly identified and dealt with.

### Weaknesses:

- care needs to be taken to ensure that Ministers and others are aware of briefings being undertaken with local Members of Parliament and elected representatives from other tiers of government and
- can raise expectations about the level of influence those being briefed may have over the process.

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#### References and websites:

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System – Prepared for Planning NSW by Elton Consulting (2003) [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

### 3.4 Education and awareness programs

Education and awareness raising techniques involve providing a specific set of often factual information, for example, regarding safe blood alcohol concentration levels. They can be designed to target a range of stakeholders and can support a variety of community engagement techniques and methods. Education and awareness programs can be one-off or ongoing.

#### Strengths:

- very important when seeking to generate behaviour change
- can support sustained engagement by contributing to community capacity and
- some agencies have staff with responsibility for community education and awareness who may support such initiatives.

#### Weaknesses:

- can be seen as a one-sided, non-consultative process

- the ‘facts’ being disseminated may be contested
- can be costly to develop and
- if processes of engagement are not made transparent, the provision of information can be alienating to some key stakeholders.

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#### References and websites:

The State of Queensland (2003) [www.qld.gov.au](http://www.qld.gov.au)

The State of Queensland. Department of Communities (2003) [www.schooliesweek.qld.gov.au](http://www.schooliesweek.qld.gov.au)

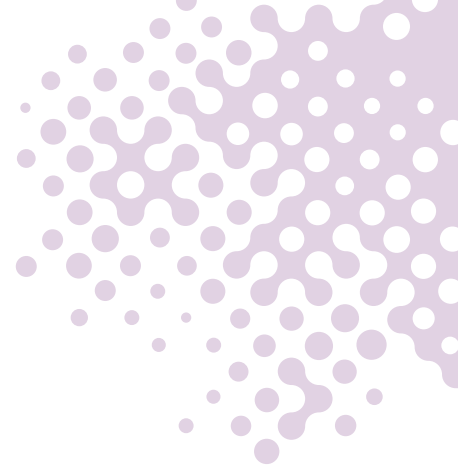
### Case Study: Gold Coast Schoolies Week information panel

2003 Gold Coast Schoolies Week preparations included a cross agency information panel which prepared and presented messages targeted at Year 12 leavers across South East Queensland. This was a culmination of both government and non-government agencies working together to improve the safety of young people.

[www.schooliesweek.qld.gov.au](http://www.schooliesweek.qld.gov.au)

### 3.5 Fact sheets

Fact sheets are generally brief, paper based or online documents which summarise the ‘facts’ about a program or issue. Developing and distributing fact sheets can be a simple, timely and inexpensive way to summarise the state of play in an engagement process. Fact sheets can be directed at a range of stakeholders including those who are deeply involved in the issue and others who are maintaining a ‘watching brief’ and expect to receive up-to-date information. The messages contained in fact sheets should be tailored and relevant to the needs of the recipients and should avoid editorial comment.



### Strengths:

- often an efficient way of summarising significant information for dissemination to a wide range of people and
- can be developed in languages other than English and large text formats.

### Weaknesses:

- may not be accessible to people with low literacy levels or visual impairments
- distribution strategies need to be planned carefully to ensure that all of those with an interest receive copies and
- facts may be contested or mistrusted.

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#### References and websites:

Walsh K & Sarkissian W (2000) *Improving Community Participation in the City of Port Phillip. A toolbook of Participatory Techniques*. Melbourne: Walsh Planning Research & Design

VicRoads (1997) *Community participation: Strategies and guidelines*. Melbourne: VicRoads [www.vicroads.vic.gov.au](http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au)

#### Case Study: Q Health fact sheets

Fact sheets are used widely by Queensland Health when informing the public of diseases such as Meningococcal Disease or Influenza.

[www.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.health.qld.gov.au)

### 3.6 Newsletters

Like fact sheets, newsletters provide information about a program or issue in a paper or online format. Along with containing 'facts' however, newsletters also often contain a variety of additional information including photographs, diagrams, maps and editorial comment. Typically, newsletters are targeted at citizens and stakeholders who are most interested in the issue. They enable agencies to provide regular information and feedback about communal issues, and the contribution made by participants and future proposed steps. Newsletters usually include contact details for people who require more information, or wish to become more involved.

Newsletters can be used to inform the community of decision-making developments and are considered as excellent community engagement tools in their own right. Some communities have been active in setting up their own websites as an example of interactive newsletters promoting community capacity building.

### Strengths:

- if distributed on a regular basis can build community awareness and understanding
- demonstrates government's commitment to ongoing engagement
- can contain information from a range of stakeholders including departmental staff, community members, 'experts' and others
- is an effective means of developing and sustaining interest throughout a community engagement activity that may run over a period of time and
- can be developed in a format that appeals to the target group.

### Weaknesses:

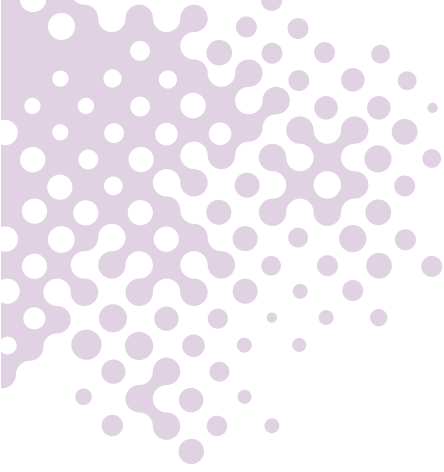
- can be relatively expensive to develop, publish and distribute and
- may not be accessible to people with low levels of literacy or visual impairments.

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#### References and websites:

Walsh K & Sarkissian W (2000) *Improving Community Participation in the City of Port Phillip. A toolbook of Participatory Techniques*. Walsh Planning Research & Design: Melbourne.

VicRoads (1997) *Community participation: Strategies and guidelines*. Melbourne: VicRoads [www.vicroads.vic.gov.au](http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au)



### Case Study: Van News

The Onsite Network of South-East Queensland established a newsletter which is prepared by caravan park residents. The newsletter contains poetry, art, upcoming events, and other interesting caravan park community interests. The Onsite Network distributes the newsletters and residents provide the content with the valuable assistance of the Kyabra Community Centre. The developmental process adds a unique capacity building dimension to a wide range of readers.

Email: onsite@qshelter.asn.au

### 3.7 Media stories

Sending a press release to a media outlet for inclusion in a print or electronic bulletin is one way to raise interest, or inform the community of a decision-making process or community engagement activity. Making contact with a reporter who has an interest in the issue may however achieve a better outcome. It is often helpful if reporters understand the background to an issue and the engagement process. Preparing a media kit that provides a summary of the key information can ensure journalists have an authoritative source of information. The emphasis should be on making sure that the media is provided with information that is timely, factual, and objective. Care should be taken to ensure that, where necessary, appropriate Departmental or Ministerial approval is obtained prior to providing material to a media outlet. Media contact will usually be handled by the Minister's Office.

It may be important to provide press releases to a range of community radio and print media outlets in order to ensure that your message reaches the target group. If your media release is to be published in the print media in a language other than English, it may be important that your agency pay to have the press release translated rather than relying on others to fully understand

and accurately translate your message. The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters Ltd website [www.naati.com.au](http://www.naati.com.au) contains a list of qualified translators who may be of assistance.

#### Strengths:

- can reach a large number of people
- can generally be arranged quite quickly enabling swift information provision and
- is cost effective.

#### Weaknesses:

- the target group may not access media
- editing by media outlets may result in key messages not being delivered
- does not generally promote two-way relationships between government and the community and
- can usually only convey a limited amount of information.

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#### References and websites:

- Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management  
[www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)
- International Association for Public Participation (2000) *IAP2 Public Participation Toolbox*. [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)
- PR Web The Free Wire Service (2004) [www.prweb.com](http://www.prweb.com)
- RCRA (1996). *Public Participation Manual*. Ch 5: Public participation activities. [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)
- Queensland Government Youth Website  
[www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)
- Social Change Online (2000) *Using the Media*  
[www.media.socialchange.net.au](http://www.media.socialchange.net.au)
- Thornton P et al (1997) 1 Sydney, Pluto Press. Warringah Council. (2000). *Community Consultation Toolkit*.  
[www.warringah.nsw.gov.au](http://www.warringah.nsw.gov.au)



### Case Study: Gold Coast Schoolies Week 2003

A media information kit was prepared during the Gold Coast Schoolies Week festival 2003. Timely and accurate information was provided to a number of stakeholders on a regular basis during the schoolies week preparations and celebrations.

[www.schooliesweek.qld.gov.au](http://www.schooliesweek.qld.gov.au)

### 3.8 News conferences

A news conference is a way to stimulate public interest by enabling either a Minister or a public official to speak directly to the public via the media. For a news conference to be effective the topic should be newsworthy and timely, therefore, news conferences are usually reserved for announcements which may have a significant community impact.

#### Strengths:

- can usually be arranged within relatively short timeframes in order to disseminate information quickly and
- there are generally no costs associated with calling a conference.

#### Weaknesses:

- editing by media outlets may result in key messages not being delivered
- cannot control when, or if, the news conference will be aired and
- the target group may not access media outlets which feature the conference.

#### References and websites:

Queensland Government Youth Website

[www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

PR Web The Free Wire Service (2004) [www.prweb.com](http://www.prweb.com)

### 3.9 Telephone hotline

A hotline is a widely advertised phone number that people can call to access pre-recorded messages, leave comments on selected topics, or talk directly to a person who can answer their questions about an issue or an engagement activity, based on their interest and need. The key to a successful staffed hotline is to have the right person at the receiving end of the line. Callers must feel that the person taking their calls is really listening to and interested in what they have to say, and is both knowledgeable and responsive. Depending upon the group you are seeking to engage, it may be important to have bi-lingual or multi-lingual staff answering calls to the hotline.

#### Strengths:

- target group members may access the hotline at a time and on a day which suits them and
- can be used to elicit information from the community, or to provide opportunities for community members to ask questions.

#### Weaknesses:

- can be relatively resource intensive to establish and operate.

#### References and websites:

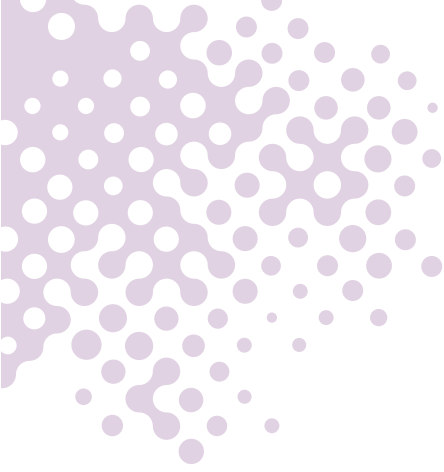
Carson L (1999b) *The telephone as a participatory mechanism at a Local Government Level*. With commentaries by Ann Moyal, Wendy Sarkissian & Monica Wolf, in Brian Martin, ed. *Technology and Public Participation*. Wollongong: Science and Technology Studies: University of Wollongong: 37-60.

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management. [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

Department of Public Health (Flinders University) & South Australian Community Health Research Unit (2000) *Improving Health Services through Consumer Participation - A Resource Guide for Organisations*. Commonwealth Department of Health & Aged Care. Canberra. [www.participateinhealth.org.au](http://www.participateinhealth.org.au).

RCRA (1996) *Public Participation Manual*. Ch 5: Public participation activities. [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

US EPA (2002) National Pollution Elimination System (NPDES) Public Involvement/Participation Hotlines. [www.cfpub.epa.gov](http://www.cfpub.epa.gov)



In addition to these processes which are well suited to reaching larger numbers of people, the following information strategies can also be used when information is required to be shared with a definable geographic community, or with a group or groups within a community who are expected to congregate in a specific place at a specific time.

### 3.10 Displays

Displays involve the provision of a range of often highly visual materials relating to the engagement topic. Displays can inform the public and stimulate citizens and stakeholders to participate in an engagement activity. Displays are generally located in community locations such as shopping centres, libraries, community centres and community events and festivals. Although producing a display can be costly, it can often be designed so that it can be used again at other events or locations.

#### Strengths:

- can be established in places that the community of interest is known to use and therefore support effective information dissemination
- is a cost effective way of sharing highly visual materials, for example, maps, photographs, and colour designs, which are often expensive to print
- written materials can be produced in languages other than English and large text format
- can support relationship building and improve understanding if staffed by an appropriate person who has knowledge about the issue and a commitment to engagement and
- can be used as an engagement tool within the community if poster/display competitions are coordinated.

#### Weaknesses:

- can be resource intensive if staff are required to be present to discuss issues with people viewing the displays
- not all information can be effectively displayed in a visual format and
- are only accessible to people who use the venues at which the displays are installed.

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#### References and websites:

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management. [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

International Association for Public Participation (2000) *IAP2 Public Participation Toolbox*. [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

Dept of Transportation (1997) *Public Involvement and Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Transportation Fair*. Washington, [www.fhwa.dot.gov](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov)

Wates N (1999) *The Community Planning Handbook*. London, Earthscan. [www.communityplanning.net](http://www.communityplanning.net)

### 3.11 Newspaper inserts

Distributing fact sheets or other written material via a newspaper insert is a good way to provide information to a large number of people in a community. Depending on the breadth and timing of newspaper circulation, inserts can be useful to reach beyond actively involved citizens to the broader public. Many media outlets include features targeting particular groups, for example young people, on particular days. Coordinating inserts with these established features can increase confidence that the target group will receive the insert. As with all information methods, the insert should present objective and balanced information which is tailored to the target audience. It is important to consider placing inserts in a range of community papers and journals as well as more mainstream publications.

#### Strengths:

- can be customised to a particular group
- can be targeted to the geographic community of interest and
- can reach large numbers of people.



### Weaknesses:

- relatively expensive
- the target group may not read newspapers and
- may not be accessible to people with low literacy levels or visual impairments.

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### References and websites:

Queensland Government Youth Website

[www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

PR Web. The free wire service (2004) [www.prweb.com](http://www.prweb.com)



### 3.12 Community fairs or events

A community fair or event provides a fun and enjoyable venue for sharing project information and raising awareness about a particular issue. A fair should incorporate a range of activities and events to cater for the broadest possible audience. Activities can include sausage sizzles, rides and activities for children, hands-on art activities for young people and events of interest to adults. As well as distributing information, a fair provides a range of opportunities for consultation and active participation. Community fairs or events can be organised specifically as part of an engagement activity, or the engagement activities could be planned to coincide with existing community fairs or events.

### Strengths:

- can increase the 'visibility' and 'approachability' of the agency/issue
- is often attended by a wide variety of people, many of whom have time to look at displays, ask questions, participate in activities and
- can support relationship building efforts.

### Weaknesses:

- often attended by people beyond the immediate geographic community that may be targeted
- can require significant staff resources to establish and maintain and
- requires good collaborative practice

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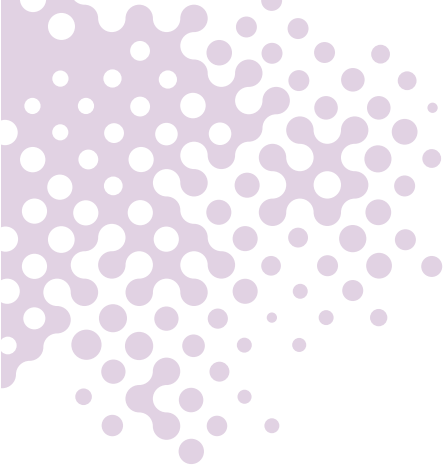
### References and websites:

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management. [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

International Association for Public Participation (2000) *IAP2 Public Participation Toolbox* [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

US Dept of Transportation (1997) *Public Involvement and Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making : Transportation Fair*. Washington. [www.fhwa.dot.gov](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov)

Queensland Health (2002) *The Methods Manual – Engaging Communities in Participatory Action Research*. Public Health Services: Southport



### Case Study: The Jacaranda Festival

The Jacaranda festival is a yearly event which is sponsored by a number of organisations and community members. A significant amount of community co-operation is required. The festival has the capacity to promote community development by raising awareness around a number of issues, and celebrating the multi-cultural diversity of the community.

[www.goodnarsljacfest.gil.com.au](http://www.goodnarsljacfest.gil.com.au)

### 3.13 Community meetings

Community public meetings are one of the most familiar methods of increasing awareness about an issue or proposal and can be suitable for small and large groups. Community meetings are generally called by the agency and have a specified time, date, venue, agenda and invitation list. Opportunities may also exist to provide information, or to create consultations at existing community meetings, at the invitation of other groups. Attending existing meetings makes good use of community infrastructure, and if negotiated in advance, is likely to minimise community frustration, demonstrate respect for community processes and to lead to more coordinated engagement. There are a range of innovative methods which can be used in workshopping forums.

A well facilitated community meeting can generate a wide range of feedback about a topic and ensure that many people have their say, not just the loudest and most articulate attendees. Community meetings can be used at the start of, or throughout, a consultative and deliberative engagement processes. The timing, format, audience mix and venues are important considerations in planning effective meetings.

Risks of conducting community meetings need to be considered in the planning. For example,

if there is a contentious issue and considerable conflict within the community, other methods such as nominal group processes should be considered.

#### Strengths:

- particular people/groups/sectors can be targeted and invited
- is time limited
- the agenda is known in advance
- is relatively efficient to implement and
- can be structured in a number of ways to achieve a number of outcomes.

#### Weaknesses:

- may not attract participants who are representative of the community
- can frustrate participants as discussion is often artificially constrained to a limited number of government priorities and
- is not suitable for topics around which there is significant controversy or negative opinion.

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#### References and websites:

Queensland Health (2002) *The Methods Manual – Engaging Communities in Participatory Action Research*. Public Health Services: Southport

Walsh K & Sarkissian W (2000) *Improving Community Participation in the City of Port Phillip. A toolbook of Participatory Techniques*. Walsh Planning Research & Design: Melbourne

### 3.14 Shop fronts

Shop fronts can be a temporary project office or site generally set up in a heavily used public area such as a main street, mall or shopping centre. People can drop in at their convenience to collect information, view displays and ask questions. Shop fronts can also be used as a semi-permanent meeting place to convene discussions throughout the duration of an engagement activity. Shop fronts work best when they are effectively located to attract the target audience and are staffed by knowledgeable and approachable people. It is also important that the opening hours of a shop front are clearly advertised and honoured.



### Strengths:

- increases the visibility and accessibility of the agency/issue
- community members can access at a time and on a day which suits them and
- can support local infrastructure by providing an additional space for people to meet to discuss community issues

### Weaknesses:

- if shopfronts only operate during business hours they may not be accessible to people in full-time employment
- can be expensive to establish and operate and
- workplace health and safety of staff needs to be carefully considered.

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#### References and websites:

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management. [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

Industry and community participation. *EPA Information Sheet* IS No. 23 July (2001) [www.environment.sa.gov.au](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au)

The University of Queensland Service and Research Centre (2002) *Regional Engagement & Consultation Projects. The Shopfronts and Community Hubs Project in Esk Shire* [www.uq.edu.au/boilerhouse](http://www.uq.edu.au/boilerhouse)

Walsh K & Sarkissian W (2000) *Improving Community Participation in the City of Port Phillip. A toolbook of Participatory Techniques*. Walsh Planning Research & Design: Melbourne

Finally, when seeking to share information with small, very localised and targeted groups, highly personalised approaches may be most appropriate including the following.

### 3.15 Informal club forums

Informal club forums are informal meetings either online, or with small groups of people, often in a private home or gathering, to share and discuss issues and ideas. They are sometimes an effective way to achieve genuine engagement with people who may be unable or reluctant to attend other public activities. The casual environment in which the informal club forum can be held creates a space in which people feel safe to share their

views. It may be helpful to discuss catering and participation with the person in whose home the gathering will be held in order to avoid imposing or offending.

### Strengths:

- very useful when engaging with people with limited mobility, limited literacy skills or who are reluctant to participate in wider community engagement processes for cultural or other reasons
- demonstrates a strong commitment to communicating with the participants and
- often builds trust and confidence for participants who may be more likely to participate in broader community processes in the future.

### Weaknesses:

- resource intensive
- needs to ensure the safety of staff participating
- can only be delivered with small groups of people and
- skilled facilitators in group processes required.

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#### References and websites:

International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

Goizueta Magazine. Summer 1999 [www.goizuetamag.emory.edu](http://www.goizuetamag.emory.edu)

### Case Study: The Goodna-Gailes Caravan Park Project

Coffee and breakfast BBQ's were used as activities to welcome and talk with residents in their own community. This provided a safe and welcoming environment for a transient population enabling them to make connections and progress projects within their own environment. Trusting relationships were developed enabling residents to become more involved in their wider community. [www.communityrenewal.qld.gov.au](http://www.communityrenewal.qld.gov.au)

# 4



## Consultation techniques

**Consultation provides important opportunities to develop two-way relationships between government and citizens or communities. Consultation processes may run parallel with information and active participation strategies. Often, the public has been informed about an issue or an engagement activity. To progress the issue, it may be useful to use more consultative mechanisms in order to explore a wider range of opinions. A variety of consultation techniques are available.**

**It should be noted that it may be appropriate to use a number of these techniques within a consultation strategy either in sequence, or in parallel, for example, road shows and forums complemented by an online survey.**

### 4.1 Discussion groups and workshops

Facilitated discussion groups or workshops involving participants selected either randomly or to approximate the demographics of a community, can be a good way to draw out a range of views and opinions. Discussion groups and workshops usually explore a limited number of community or government established issues over a brief period of time. Discussion groups tend to involve relatively open-ended dialogue whereas workshops are generally more structured activities which often combine dialogue with other strategies such as information provision. An action research approach is sometimes the basis for the coordination of these techniques.

#### Strengths:

- targets specific groups
- can be structured in a number of ways to achieve a range of outcomes
- harnesses community energy and knowledge to generate innovative options

- can build capacity, consensus, ownership and relationships and
- can be iterative or cyclical, evolving in scope over the course of a project.

#### Weaknesses:

- participants may not be representative
- produces qualitative not quantitative information which may not be easily understood or valued and
- consideration regarding the collection and analysis of qualitative data is required, and may sometimes require skilled expertise in qualitative analysis.

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#### References and websites:

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

COSLA (1998) *Focusing on Citizens: A guide to Approaches and Methods*. [www.communityplanning.org.uk](http://www.communityplanning.org.uk)

International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

### 4.2 One-on-one interviews

One-on-one interviews involve a person who has been thoroughly briefed on their task posing a standard set of questions to individuals within a community. One-on-one interviews can be conducted in public places, at events, via telephone and doorknocks. Although interviewing everyone in a community is generally not feasible, two or three days may allow enough time to talk with a cross-section of people. Interviewing provides important qualitative information at a level of detail that is difficult to obtain any other way.

Care needs to be taken when selecting people as interviewers and interviewees regarding their role and influence in the community, other time commitments and personal circumstances. In an engagement process run over an extended period of time there may be a need to conduct a round of interviews near the beginning of the process to gather information, and one or two other rounds at key points in the process to inform progress.



Providing opportunities for community members to act as paid or voluntary interviewers can be an important capacity and relationship building strategy.

More in-depth interviewing, carried out on a one-to-one basis over a period of one to two hours, can provide a more detailed understanding of people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour on important issues. The aim of in-depth interviews is to explore the reasons underlying a problem or practice in a target group and to gather ideas and information.

#### Strengths:

- people will often provide much more detailed information in a one-on-one interview or discussion than they will in a public forum
- is useful to gain views on sensitive or complex issues
- can be conducted in languages other than English
- is effective when working with people with limited literacy and
- has the ability to be empowering and/or therapeutic for the participants because of the narrative response.

#### Weaknesses:

- expertise in qualitative analysis is required to produce a quality report
- it is generally not possible to interview all community members and
- can be resource intensive.

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#### References and websites:

COSLA (1998) *Focusing on Citizens: A guide to Approaches and Methods*. [www.dundeeecity.gov.uk](http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk)

Mahoney C (1997) *Indepth Interview Guide* [www.ehr.nsf.gov](http://www.ehr.nsf.gov)

Queensland Health (2002) *The Methods Manual – Engaging Communities in Participatory Action Research*: Southport Public Health Services

Sarantakos S (1998) *Social Research*. 2nd edition, Melbourne: MacMillian Education Australia.

### 4.3 Open days

Open days involve providing community members with access to an office/centre/project site that they would not normally access, for a limited period of time. They provide important learning opportunities for interested citizens as well providing a forum for people to raise concerns and issues and to celebrate progress. Open days can incorporate displays, printed handout materials as well as tours, scheduled presentations and question and answer sessions. Open days need to be well planned, advertised and suitably resourced.

#### Strengths:

- demonstrates transparency and credibility
- provides concrete, first hand, learning opportunities
- is time limited and
- often fun for community members and staff alike.

#### Weaknesses:

- safety and access issues need to be considered and
- can be resource intensive.

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#### References and websites:

Abelson J, Forest P-G Eyles J, Smith P, Martin E & Gauvin F-P (2001) *A Review of Public Participation and Consultation Methods*. Canadian Centre for Analysis of Regionalization and Health [www.regionalization.org](http://www.regionalization.org)

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

Connor D (nd) *Public Participation: A Manual*. Victoria B C. Canada: Connor Development Services Ltd. [www.maroochy.qld.gov.au](http://www.maroochy.qld.gov.au)

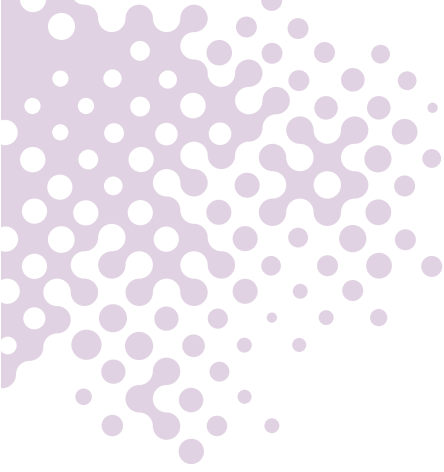
International Association for Public Participation (2000) IAP2 Public Participation Toolbox [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

NSW Minerals Council (1999-02) *Guidelines for best practice community consultation in the NSW Mining and Extractive Industries* (available free) NSW Minerals Council [www.nswmin.com.au](http://www.nswmin.com.au)

Northwest Regional Facilitators (1999) *Public Participation Resource Guide* September, Chapter One Public Participation Methods & Techniques [www.nrf.org](http://www.nrf.org)

RCRA (1996) *Public Participation Manual* Ch 5: Public participation activities. [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

Sarkissian W & Hirst A (2002) *SpeakOut. A Manual for Organisers*. [www.maroochy.qld.gov.au](http://www.maroochy.qld.gov.au)



### Case Study: Maroochyore Council SpeakOut/Open Day

A SpeakOut was conducted by the Maroochyore Shire Council in order to narrow down the selection of designs for a civic centre in Maroochyore. The final decision involved a jury panel decision.

[www.maroochy.qld.gov.au](http://www.maroochy.qld.gov.au)

### 4.4 Polls

Polls generally involve posing a small number of closed questions to a range of people in order to identify community opinion. The answers sought are often “yes” or “no”, or scaled responses, for example, “strongly supported”, “supported”, “not supported”, “unsure”. It has become increasingly affordable to conduct polls, and in particular telephone polls, in recent years. Polls are often a suitable adjunct to public participation activities. Polls do not always predict an outcome, rather, they provide a snapshot of public opinion at one moment in time. If people are still learning about an issue, a poll may tell you how they feel given their current level of knowledge but may not reflect how they’ll react once they learn more unless a deliberative component is built in to the process (refer Deliberative Polling section 5.14).

#### Strengths:

- permits a quantitative assessment of community opinion
- responses are relatively easy to collate and
- is a relatively quick and cost effective way to sample a large number of people on a variety of topics.

#### Weaknesses:

- requires significant effort to ensure that the sample of the population polled is representative of the broader community
- assumes a level of knowledge/opinion that may not exist

- does not generally provide information regarding the reasons underlying certain opinions and
- does not contribute to two-way relationship building.

#### References and websites:

COSLA (1998) *Focusing on Citizens: A guide to Approaches and Methods*. [www.dundeeecity.gov.uk](http://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk)

Carson L & Martin B (1999) *Random Selection in Politics*. Westport CT: Praeger.

Carson L (1999a) *Random Selection: Achieving Representation in Planning*. Alison Burton Memorial Lecture. Canberra: Royal Australian Planning Institute.

### Case Study: Televoting in New Zealand

New Zealand conducted a nationwide televote which was widely publicised. A number of strategies included a nationwide televote by three universities, televote brochures printed in national newspapers, and radio network coverage on the process. Alternative futures for the country were voted on. The overall process was noted to observe a shift in national opinion which resulted in increased awareness and community debate.

Lyn Carson & Kath Gelber (2001) *Ideas for Community Consultation: A discussion on principles and procedures for making consultation work*, a report prepared for the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning.



## 4.5 Road shows

Road shows are a travelling presentation and/or display used to seek feedback about, or input into a project which potentially affects more than one community. Road shows travel to where the people are thereby reducing the distance people have to travel to have their say about a project. For road shows to be effective they should be complemented by pre-event advertising and appropriate local media exposure.

### Strengths:

- inclusive of a number of geographic communities
- ensures consistency of the information provided to different communities
- can coincide with local events and
- presentation of verbal and visual information provides access to a range of people.

### Weaknesses:

- can be resource intensive to establish, move and staff and
- outcomes can be difficult to interpret across different communities.

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### References and websites

Life Education Australia (2003) [www.life-educationaustralia.com.au](http://www.life-educationaustralia.com.au)  
Santa Barbara County Housing Element 2003-2008  
[www.countyofsb.org](http://www.countyofsb.org)

## 4.6 Survey research

Surveys involve posing a standard set of open and/or closed questions to a range of people. They are a popular method of collecting qualitative and quantitative information from a population at certain a point in time. Surveys can be conducted through face-to-face interviews, self-completion written forms, over the telephone, or electronically via the internet or email.

Careful planning is needed for surveys to be successful. It may be helpful to seek assistance from skilled researchers in designing a survey

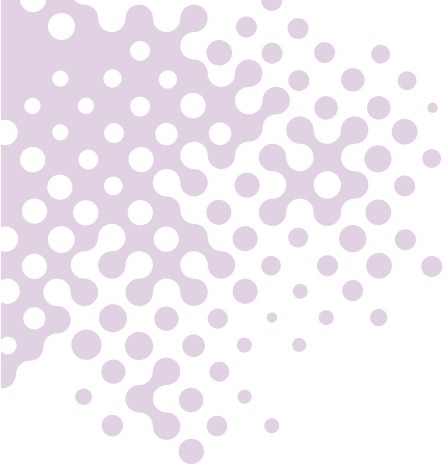
tool to ensure that it generates useful and reliable information. Questions must be clear, impartial, easily understood, unambiguous and should ideally be trialled before the survey is distributed. Sampling strategies need to match engagement objectives. Care should be taken when using self-completed, telephone or computer-aided techniques as they may bias a sample by excluding people such as those with low literacy, no telephone or low computer skills respectively.

### Strengths:

- can be used to gain feedback from large and diverse groups of people
- can often be produced and distributed in large quantities relatively cheaply
- enables comparison between groups in the community, or between different stages of the process and
- can provide large amounts of qualitative and quantitative data.

### Weaknesses:

- many groups in the community feel they have been over-consulted by government and may react negatively to being asked to complete 'yet another survey'
- may not be accessible for people with limited literacy, English as a second language or with visual impairments
- analysing the data provided via surveys requires time, resources and skill and
- often only useful for providing and collecting information on a limited number of topics.



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#### References and websites:

- Abelson J, Forest P-G, Eyles J, Smith P, Martin E & Gauvin F-P (2001) *A Review of Public Participation and Consultation Methods*. Canadian Centre for Analysis of Regionalization and Health.
- Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)
- COSLA (1998) *Focusing on Citizens: A Guide to Approaches and Methods*. [www.dundeecity.gov.au](http://www.dundeecity.gov.au)
- Flinders University Department of Public Health & South Australian Community Health Research Unit (2000) *Improving Health Services through Consumer Participation - A Resource Guide for Organisations*. Commonwealth Department of Health & Aged Care. Canberra. [www.participateinhealth.org.au](http://www.participateinhealth.org.au)
- Northwest Regional Facilitators (1999) *Public Participation Resource Guide* September, Chapter One Public Participation Methods & Techniques. [www.nrf.org](http://www.nrf.org)
- Queensland Health (2002) *The Methods Manual – Engaging Communities in Participatory Action Research*. Public Health Services: Southport
- RCRA (1996) *Public Participation Manual*. Ch 5: Public participation activities. [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)
- US Department of Transportation (1996) *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making*. [www.fhwa.dot.gov](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov)
- Sarantakos S (1998) *Social Research*. 2nd edition, Melbourne: MacMillan Education Australia.

## 4.7 Web-based consultation

New information and communication technologies have opened up innovative channels for citizens to engage in the processes of government policy development, program and service planning and decision-making. Online chats, surveys and questionnaires enable citizens to contribute their views and opinions to government. They also allow government to provide information and feedback to citizens. Online consultation is one tool which should be considered as part of a range of other consultative tools.

### 4.7.1 Interactive websites

Websites are primarily a tool for informing citizens about government programs and services. Websites can also be used to support consultation by encouraging technology-based participation, including surveys, polls, online discussions and email feedback. Measuring website statistics can also be used as a means of tracking public

interest.

### 4.7.2 Internet surveys

Internet surveys can be used to gain information from the public on a single issue or to gauge public opinion on a number of topics. Used in conjunction with an existing website, they can be an effective way for users of the internet to submit their ideas and opinions directly to government. A suitable questionnaire will need to be developed and posted on the internet, with ongoing monitoring and analysis of the results. Internet surveys can be an effective means of obtaining information from the sector of the public that is online. If access and capability issues are not addressed in this technique the results may not be representative of the public as a whole.

### 4.7.3 Discussion boards and listserves

Discussion boards are places on the internet that people can access to engage in conversations and discussions around issues. A listserv is an automated mailing list which allows the subscribers to the list to send email messages to all other members of the list. They can allow similar discussion and debate as discussion boards except that the messages are transmitted via email. Discussion boards and listserves are generally founded on a single issue of concern. Monitoring the discussion boards and listserves can be a useful way of gaining insight into the often uncensored thoughts and ideas of people who are communicating on the internet. It may be appropriate to appoint a moderator to facilitate discussion or to monitor contributions in order to ensure compliance with legal and policy frameworks.



#### 4.7.4 Email feedback

Email feedback can be an easy way to obtain ideas from the public on an issue or a range of issues. It can be used with an existing website with a feedback system. It is quicker than most forms of participation and may be attractive to those with little time.

#### 4.7.5 Internet-based forums

These can be limited to certain individuals (e.g. a core group of stakeholders) or open to anyone. They can be designed to allow citizens to respond to government proposals online, read and view the comments of all participants, and engage with other citizens in dialogue centred around proposals. Generally internet-based forums take one of two forms – issue-based forum and policy-based forum. *ConsultQld* which can be found at [www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au) provides a structured tool for seeking community views on particular policy issues, and subject to a moderation process, making public submissions available on the website to inform other participants in the consultation.

#### 4.7.6 Online chat events

Citizens can exchange views within a fixed period of time with Ministers, Members of Parliament and other public officials.

Chats can take place during internet discussion forums. Online chat events may also require a moderator, particularly if large numbers of participants are expected.

#### Strengths:

- a number of existing ICT platforms exist to support this type of engagement
- can be very cost efficient, particularly if using established online engagement mechanisms
- can reach a wide audience quickly

- people can participate at a time and on a date that suits them and
- may be appealing to people who do not wish to participate in group gatherings.

#### Weaknesses:

- the anonymity afforded by online processes may result in some people providing multiple responses to surveys and skewing results
- resources must be allocated to moderating online discussions and ensuring that questions raised are responded to in a timely manner
- concerns about privacy and confidentiality may need to be carefully addressed to ensure participation and
- participation is limited to those with access to the internet.

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#### References and websites:

Further information can be located at [www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au)  
The Department of Communities administers the Generate Website, a site established to facilitate on-line engagement with young people  
[www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

The Department of Education, Training and the Arts provides guidance on setting up information with online publishing  
[www.education.qld.gov.au](http://www.education.qld.gov.au)



# 5

## Active participation techniques

**There are international trends towards increasing inclusiveness of citizen opinions and values in government policies and decisions. Queensland Government agencies are seeking to move beyond information-sharing and consultation to more actively involve citizens and communities in planning and decision-making processes. A range of active participation techniques are available. These techniques should be supported by an effective information program and may be implemented in conjunction with consultation processes.**

**This section groups the techniques according to the size of the group being engaged:**

- less than 20
- 20 – 100
- 100 plus

**The following processes are often used to actively engage relatively small numbers of people, generally less than 20, as key stakeholders.**

### 5.1 Action research

Action research refers to a set of research methods that enables public officials, community members and others to explore issues, difficulties and experiences in a collaborative and participative way and to identify and test solutions. The two key principles of action research are that the research processes have both an action focus and a specific focus upon developing understanding.

Action research can be defined as ‘learning by doing’ and involves a cyclical process which includes identifying a problem, planning, taking action, reflecting on outcomes and amending action based on evolving understanding. The primary difference between action research and other research is that it deliberately seeks to engage

stakeholders as active participants in the research and learning process. It also differs from traditional models of research due to its iterative orientation and because it is usually led internally by staff and stakeholders rather than by an external expert.

For action research to be effective, public officials need to sensitively engage with community members, either one-on-one or in groups, and build trusting relationships within which experiences and needs can be explored. Interviews, surveys, focus groups and informal meetings can be used to support the research process. There is a high emphasis on collecting and analysing qualitative, rather than quantitative data.

#### Strengths:

- can be incorporated into everyday work
- is inclusive – it can be used with any stakeholder group and is appropriate for socially excluded groups
- is flexible and responsive – has the ability to develop/reformulate the research agenda in parallel with the project work and
- supports problem solving and solution testing.

#### Weaknesses:

- can lose focus unless the research question is tightly defined
- the qualitative data generated via action research processes may not be easily understood or valued and
- participation may not be representative.

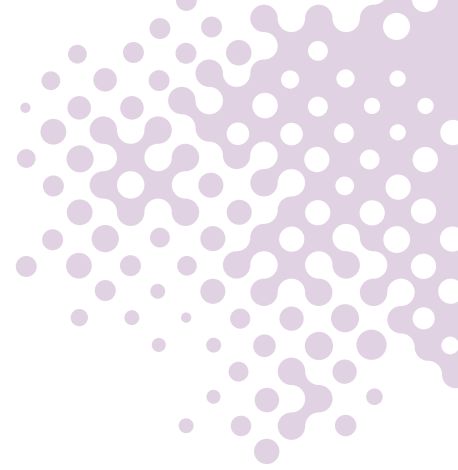
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#### References and websites:

Action Research Toolkit, Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Partnership 2000 [www.culturalpolicy.arts.gla.ac.uk](http://www.culturalpolicy.arts.gla.ac.uk)

Action research resources. Southern Cross University: [www.actionresearch.net.au](http://www.actionresearch.net.au)

Dick B (2002) *Action Research*: [www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/aandr.html](http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/aandr.html)



### Case Study: Goodna Service Integration Project

The methodology for the project was action research based. Throughout the project cyclical processes ensured that changes were informed by research and worked to ensure that the services offered in Goodna were integrated, improved community well-being and strengthened the Goodna community. Specific areas tackled included the ways in which government plans, funds, implements and evaluates strategies to reduce crime, improve school retention rates, improve community health and address a variety of other issues identified by the Goodna community as being important. Active participation techniques were the core methods used to inform and deliver project objectives.

[www.uq.edu.au/boilerhouse/goodna-sip/](http://www.uq.edu.au/boilerhouse/goodna-sip/)

## 5.2 Advisory committees

Advisory committees are generally made up of representatives from a particular profession, industry, peak-body, community or interest group who are appointed to provide technical or specific information on often complex or multi-faceted proposal(s) or issue(s). Establishing an advisory committee enables expert and ongoing input into planning and decision-making from a range of groups and agencies that have relevant skills or knowledge.

Advisory committee members may meet throughout the duration of a specific project to provide input and advice. Other advisory committees or councils may have a mandate to provide ongoing, high level policy and planning advice to Ministers, departments and others.

Membership and terms of reference of the committee, including committee and participant roles and responsibilities, time frames and decision-making processes, need to be clearly articulated and agreed prior to commencement. It is important to establish whether the committee members are representing a broader group or participating as individuals.

### Strengths:

- values a wide range of technical and local expertise and knowledge
- provides committee members and government with an understanding of a range of perspectives, data sets and other knowledge bases in order to develop informed, agreed and integrated solutions
- can support a range of other engagement processes, for example action research
- provides opportunities to explore alternative strategies and build on commonalities and alliances and
- enables information and decisions to be distributed to members of the organisations or community sectors represented on the committee.

### Weaknesses:

- participants may not be representative of the various groups with relevant knowledge or skills
- it can be difficult to manage the diversity of opinion, data, frameworks and other information provided via committee members and
- standing committees may lose impetus or relevance.

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### References and websites:

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System, 2003  
[www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy. Good practice standards for Advisory Councils [www.nrm.qld.gov.au](http://www.nrm.qld.gov.au)



### 5.3 Charrettes

A charrette or 'inquiry by design' workshop is an intensive workshop where stakeholders come together to identify issues, deliberate about preferred outcomes and create plans for the future. A charrette can be held over several days or weekends and involves participants splitting into small groups to discuss and brainstorm issues and topics. Once these groups identify options they are collated and fed back to all participants for further comment with a view to developing more formal plans.

A charrette can be a cost effective way to identify potential outcomes and solutions for complex issues, for example, planning decisions which require balancing social, environmental and economic demands. Participants at a charrette can include community stakeholders plus representatives from interest groups, although it is not limited to these groups. All participants in a charrette, including public officials, should agree that something needs to be done about the issues being discussed and be clear about their role in decision-making.

#### Strengths:

- promotes joint problem-solving and creative thinking and
- creates partnerships and positive working relationships with the community.

#### Weaknesses:

- participants may not be representative of the community and
- it can be difficult to engage groups usually marginalised from consultative processes.

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#### References and websites:

Community Consultation Resource Website – Victorian Local Government Association [www.vlgaconsultation.org.au](http://www.vlgaconsultation.org.au)

Community engagement in the New South Wales planning system. [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

National Charrette Institute (NCI) (2003) [www.charretteinstitute.org](http://www.charretteinstitute.org)

### Case Study: The Villawood Charrette

A five day charrette was conducted to discuss the commercial centre of Villawood. A steering committee was established and there was a three month planning period with a budget of \$80,000. A pre-consultation meeting with key stakeholders informed them of the process and its purpose. Day one of the charrette involved a field site visit. On day two, stakeholders met and formulated a policy statement on days three and four, design meetings were conducted in a design studio, and finally, on day five, a public meeting was conducted to present findings. Follow-up meetings with the steering committee confirmed support for the design.

Lyn Carson & Kath Gelber (2001) *Ideas for Community Consultation: A discussion on principles and procedures for making consultation work*, a report prepared for the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning.

### 5.4 Citizens' juries

In a citizens' jury, a randomly recruited and demographically representative panel of between 12 and 20 citizens meets for three to five days to carefully examine an issue of public significance or community concern. The jurors are typically provided with a question or series of questions on which to deliberate. Jurors hear from, and can ask questions of, a variety of expert and other witnesses. They then deliberate, discuss and debate issues together. On the final day of their moderated hearings, the members of the jury present their recommendations to the public or to the Minister.

Convening a citizens' jury needs high level facilitation, coordination, negotiation and conflict resolution skills. Witness testimony needs to be carefully balanced to ensure all sides receive fair treatment. This does not mean each perspective needs to be impartial, but that a range of views are presented for jurors' consideration and



deliberation. Processes for reporting on and responding to recommendations made by a citizens' jury need to be carefully planned and agreed by all. Expert witnesses who are able to present clear arguments need to be found, and generally paid. Jurors will require training and briefing and are also often paid for their time.

#### **Strengths:**

- good for obtaining informed community opinions on complex or controversial issues which have obvious solution
- is transparent process
- can promote a culture of citizenship and participation
- can help to identify solutions to problems
- provides a good opportunity to develop a deep understanding of an issue
- provides informed feedback and
- the general public can usually identify with jury members.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- expensive and time-consuming
- it may be difficult to sustain panel member participation
- doubt exists about representativeness because of the small numbers of jurors
- can exclude people with low literacy or non-English speakers
- in many cases, there is no guarantee that the jury's decisions will be taken into account in government decision-making
- not all issues are suitable for consideration via a jury process and
- extensive preparatory work is needed.

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#### **References and websites:**

The Citizen's Handbook. *A guide to building community/Charles Dobson/Vancouver Citizen's Committee.*

[www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook](http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook)

Citizen Juries - Coastal Cooperative Research Centre Project — *Urban Research Program Community Toolbox* [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

Jefferson Center. Originator of the Citizen's Jury Process.

[www.jefferson-center.org](http://www.jefferson-center.org)

#### **Case Study: Cooloola State Land Audit**

A citizens' jury was used during an investigation into the future preferred sustainable use of unallocated state land on the Cooloola Coast. A two day citizens' panel involved the use of an expert panel, and a citizens' jury. Preliminary planning included three trial citizens' juries, and the development of an expert panel. The process was deemed to be well suited to determining a multi-faceted complex issue.

Cooloola Council Information Paper (2003) *An investigation into the future preferred sustainable use of unallocated State Land on the Cooloola coast.*

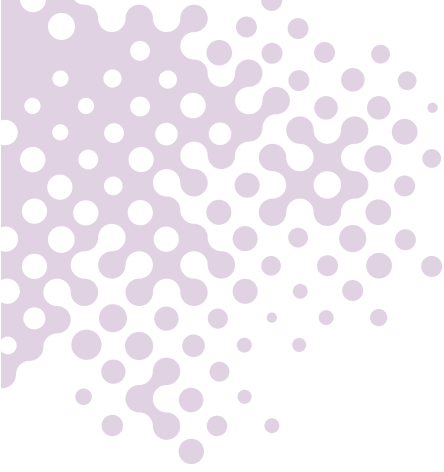
#### **5.5 Community reference groups**

Community reference groups are made up of invited representatives from a particular community who have an interest in a given topic. Reference group members attend regular meetings, represent their group or community's views and provide input into the development, implementation and evaluation of strategies, plans, programs and services.

It is important to support members to ensure they have the capacity, knowledge and time to both represent their group or community and to participate effectively. The activities of the group can be publicised in order to generate and sustain interest and energy.

#### **Strengths:**

- supports long term community engagement and relationship building
- can build the capacity of community members
- enables sharing of local knowledge and expertise
- generates new ideas and provides a snapshot of likely community reaction to a particular decision or process and
- can create intra-group rapport and trust over time.



### Weaknesses:

- may be too formal and structured for some community representatives
- if not well-resourced and supported, community members may not be able to sustain involvement
- can be difficult to sustain in remote communities
- may attract vocal community members and fail to engage representatives of more marginalised groups and
- difficult to ensure genuine representation.

### References and websites:

Queensland Government. Department of Housing  
[www.communityrenewal.qld.gov.au](http://www.communityrenewal.qld.gov.au)

Forth Valley SAT Operating structure. Forth Valley Substance Action Team, UK. [www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org](http://www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org)

### Case Study: Community Renewal Reference Groups

Residents, businesses and community groups are encouraged to join local Community Renewal Reference Groups to make sure that their views are heard. Community Renewal Reference Groups are involved in activities such as the management of Community Action Plans, priority setting and project validation. Community Renewal facilitators are assigned to each renewal area.

[www.communityrenewal.qld.gov.au](http://www.communityrenewal.qld.gov.au)

## 5.6 Deliberative retreats

Deliberative retreats are framed around a specific decision or action that requires the attention of key stakeholders. The chief decision-makers need to attend, including those who may oppose proposed change. The major aim of a retreat is to achieve consensus about future actions. A skilled facilitator may be able to assist with designing and conducting the retreat.

Deliberative retreats seek to move people away from their everyday work environment for a concentrated period of time to a setting

that encourages social interaction as well as discussion, deliberation and decision making. Moving participants to new surroundings can prompt new or different perspectives and allows people to interact on an informal basis. There is a much higher chance of building consensus when people can really talk the issue through in a concentrated, yet informal setting.

A retreat can be useful at a certain stage of an engagement activity, for example, when an advisory committee is getting close to a key decision point.

### Strengths:

- intensive and focused
- a good way to build and strengthen relationships between key stakeholders and decision makers
- can take place at a neutral venue and
- enables sufficient time and space to share, discuss and deliberate.

### Weaknesses:

- can be costly to convene
- requires very careful planning, clearly articulated goals and objectives and facilitation
- may be negatively portrayed as a 'junket' and
- may exclude key people who are unable to participate in overnight events for example, single parents and carers.

### References and websites:

Marcus L PhD & Dorn B MD (2003) *Create a 'tipping point' when planning a retreat. Renegotiating Health Care.* By AMNews contributors. [www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)

## 5.7 Drama workshops

Participants at a drama workshop are encouraged to act out their interpretation of a future vision for their community, including what they want and don't want to happen. Time is then spent exploring and discussing the issues arising from



performances. Public officials can attend the workshop to answer questions and clarify key points, to consider community perspectives, and may also perform their own interpretation of a future vision. Outcomes of a drama workshop may include a series of options for discussion with the broader community or consensus about the future direction.

Incorporating drama and theatre in a community engagement activity can provide people with useful 'hands-on' participation in decision-making processes. Drama can be especially attractive to people who are not comfortable with traditional and more formal engagement methods such as public meetings and surveys.

Careful consideration is required for debriefing and reflection with the audience following the role-plays/drama workshops.

### Strengths

- a good way to tap in to diverse and creative views in the community
- can be enjoyable, fun and spontaneous and
- can be used with specific people or groups in the community e.g. youth, art workers, people with learning difficulties or those who speak English as second language.

### Weaknesses:

- may not suit participants who feel inhibited in role-playing situations
- deliver qualitative results which may be difficult to analyse and
- reaching consensus can be difficult.

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### References and websites:

Participation Works: 12 techniques of community participation for the 21st century, (1999) [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)

New Economics Foundation (1999) *Participation Works: 12 techniques of community participation for the 21st century.*  
[www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)

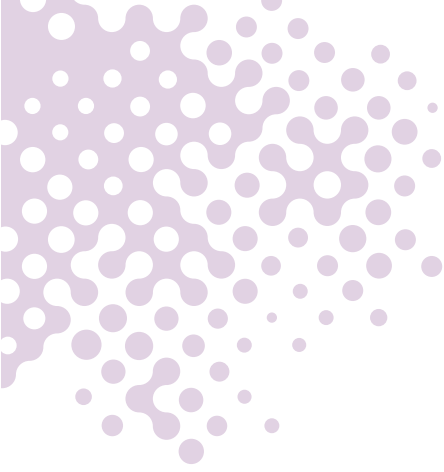
## 5.8 Learning circles

Learning circles provide an effective, practical and democratic opportunity for small groups of people (generally between five and 20) to come together to discuss and learn about issues which are important to them and their community. Learning circles have been used by community groups, trade unions, churches and social justice groups for many years to help explore social and political issues and provide a forum to make decisions and take action.

They can be used at the start of a process to gather people's ideas and also as a way to measure people's understanding about issues and to explore contentious topics.

Learning circle sessions last around two hours and run for a number of weeks. They work best when well supported by balanced but provocative written materials and carefully facilitated to explore predetermined and emerging questions. It is critical to ensure the discussion is focused, fair and that everyone has an opportunity to contribute. Throughout the process participants are encouraged to keep an open mind and make an effort to understand and value different views. As the name suggests, participants should sit in a circle so they can see all other participants.

As the session progresses participants share previous experiences, recall good and bad memories and describe feelings associated with a topic. Providing people with the opportunity to describe events and feelings in their own way and in their own time is a useful way to maintain interest from all participants.



### Strengths:

- builds respectful relationships
- provides more focus than discussion groups and seeks to have action-oriented outcomes
- uncovers opinions and feelings about a topic
- provides a non-threatening forum which can draw out a variety of views and ideas, including from reserved participants and
- provides a democratic forum by providing equal time and attention for each participant.

### Weaknesses:

- some participants may feel intimidated by the views and opinions of other participants and
- participants may not be totally representative.

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#### References and websites:

Learning Circles Australia [www.learningcircles.org.au](http://www.learningcircles.org.au)  
Educators for Community Engagement  
[www.e4ce.org/pages/learning.htm](http://www.e4ce.org/pages/learning.htm)

## 5.9 Design workshops

Design workshops are structured around specific, complex issues. The main objective of a design workshop is to give a number of stakeholders an opportunity to provide information and advice and plan for creative problem solving. It is strongly suggested that a detailed agenda is provided to each participant prior to the event. Membership of a workshop group is defined, often limited to eight people and each member is encouraged to participate in preparing possible potential solutions to the issue being considered prior to the meeting.

There is an opportunity for other stakeholders to be invited into the group for later follow-up meetings. These particular workshops can be repeated. Workshops enable participants to understand the needs of other stakeholders. A skilled facilitator is required to conduct the workshop.

### Strengths:

- can be used in initial planning and problem solving phases
- requires a commitment from all participants to share information
- can be highly productive over a short period of time
- techniques are easily learnt and applied
- provides an opportunity for a range of knowledge and skills to be used
- enables technical and non-technical people to participate at the same forum and
- allows development and/or enhancement of relationships.

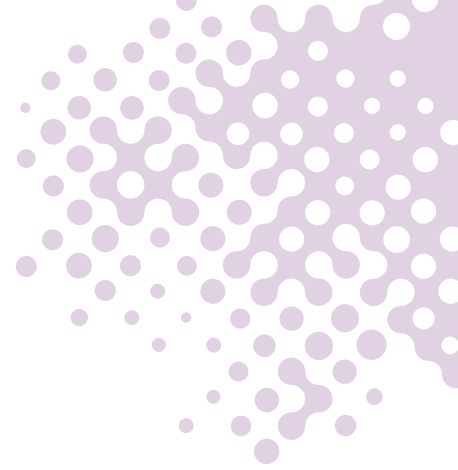
### Weaknesses:

- needs to be used in the early phases of project development
- does not allow for wide participation (targeted participant involvement) and
- usually requires expert knowledge or lived experience regarding a particular issue.

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#### References and websites:

Gaffney G (1999) [www.infodesign.com.au](http://www.infodesign.com.au)  
Information and Design (2003) [www.infodesign.com.au](http://www.infodesign.com.au)  
Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System (2003) [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)  
Sarkissian W & Walsh K (1998) *Community Participation in Practice. Casebook*. Murdoch: Institute for Science and Technology Policy.  
Wates N (1998) *The Community Planning Handbook*. London: Earthscan



## 5.10 Focus groups

Focus groups are one example of an active participation methodology used to explore the opinions, knowledge, perceptions, and concerns of individuals in regard to a particular topic. A focus group typically involves six to ten people who have some knowledge of or experience with an issue.

Group discussion is led by a moderator who guides participants through a series of open-ended questions. The information gathered can provide important clues to the participants' attitudes and values as they relate to an issue. Convening multiple focus groups with different community members on the same topic can strengthen an agency's level of understanding about issues associated with the topic of concern.

It is important to have a skilled facilitator who encourages all members of the group to participate, to provide a comfortable venue and to ensure that the participants feel confident about expressing their views (refer also section 2.3). The latter can be encouraged by ensuring participants have an interest in the topic before they are recruited and, if necessary, providing support for them to attend.

Further efforts may be required to obtain additional comments or views which may not have been articulated during the focus group. This may include follow up phone calls with participants, opportunities to have an informal discussion with participants following the focus group, and/or opportunities for participants to make written or email comments following the event.

### Strengths:

- can be used to gain the views of those who may not respond to other forms of consultation, for example, surveys, written exercises

- good for in-depth exploration of people's views on an issue/service including their likes and dislikes
- can be used at different stages of a consultation process from preliminary planning to the feedback stage and
- can target specific groups.

### Weaknesses:

- some people may feel inhibited in expressing non-consensus views
- risk of 'group think' and
- not guaranteed to be statistically representative because of small numbers involved.

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### References and websites:

Dick R (2000) Structured focus groups. [www.scu.edu.au](http://www.scu.edu.au)

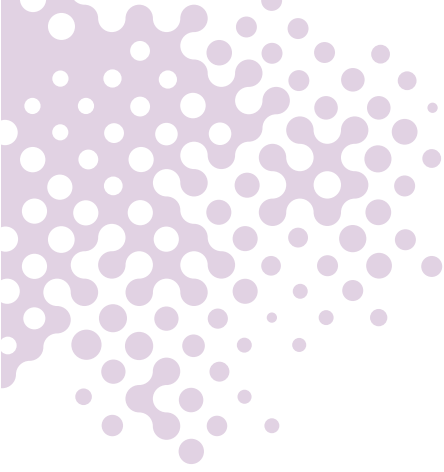
Scottish Executive (2000) *Stop youth crime now: making it work together*. [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)

Silverman G (2003) *How to get*. Market Navigation. [www.mnav.com](http://www.mnav.com)

### Case Study: Development of an after hours crisis centre for youth focus group

The NSW government commissioned a series of focus groups to inform the development of an after hours crisis centre. Separate focus groups representing young people (who were paid \$20 to attend), and community service providers were conducted. The feedback from the young people was creative and thoughtful providing a fresh outlook on the development.

Lyn Carson & Kath Gelber (2001) *Ideas for Community Consultation: A discussion on principles and procedures for making consultation work*, a report prepared for the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning.



## 5.11 Participatory editing

Participatory editing provides citizens with the opportunity to shape written reports and documents, without necessarily leaving their homes. Drafts are circulated to stakeholders in hard copy or electronically for comments and feedback. An editor goes through the submitted comments and produces a revised version of the report which is then returned to the participating stakeholders for their endorsement or amendment. The process may be repeated several times until consensus is reached on the content.

For participatory editing to be effective those providing feedback should represent a cross-section of stakeholders. Participants need to be clearly informed about the steps involved and need to understand that their comments may not automatically be included, but will inform the editor's improvements.

### Strengths:

- builds ownership of documents/plans edited in this way
- enables people to participate at times and on days which suit them
- enables feedback to be received from a cross-section of participants from different geographic locations and
- can provide the basis for a variety of other engagement techniques.

### Weaknesses:

- needs sufficient time and detailed information and briefing material to ensure clarity about the requirements of participants
- may be unsuitable for people who speak English as a second language, with low literacy levels or with visual impairments
- is difficult to ensure genuine representation and

- editing may attract criticism if the final result does not adequately reflect all of the input provided.

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### References and websites:

North Sydney City Council (2004) [www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au](http://www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au)  
Randwick City Council (2004) [www.randwick.nsw.gov.au](http://www.randwick.nsw.gov.au)  
The Community Planning Handbook. Nick Wates.  
[www.wates.demon.co.uk](http://www.wates.demon.co.uk)

## 5.12 Precinct committees

Precinct committees provide a forum for residents within a defined geographic community or precinct to actively participate in government decision-making relevant to their area. Residents from local areas make up the committee and meet regularly to discuss existing or emerging issues which affect them. Precinct committees are organised by local residents who are often elected by fellow committee members, or who volunteer to take on the role. Meetings are open to any person living within the precinct boundaries.

Precinct committees discuss matters of local relevance and may make recommendations to government, for example, about park and landscape issues, recreation areas and events. Where there is interest by residents it is possible to:

- arrange an initial public meeting to set up the committee
- notify relevant households of the time, date and venue of the meeting
- encourage the boards or management committees of local community services to have precinct/resident representation and
- provide advice and support to committees.

### Strengths:

- supports two-way flow of communication and information between community and government



- can provide residents with an opportunity to influence the provision of services and programs in their neighbourhood
- can support active citizenship and
- provides opportunities for discussion and deliberation.

#### Weaknesses:

- may not be representative of the community
- formality may discourage certain people from seeking to get involved and
- needs a clear role and objectives so as not to become a 'talk fest'.

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#### References and websites:

North Sydney City Council (2004) [www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au](http://www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au)

Randwick City Council (2004) [www.randwick.nsw.gov.au](http://www.randwick.nsw.gov.au)

Waverley Council, New South Wales. [www.waverley.nsw.gov.au](http://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au)

### 5.13 Partnerships for active participation

Partnerships can be an important strategy for promoting ongoing government and community engagement. All partnerships involve an agreement to work together to achieve specific outcomes. Partnerships recognise the important contribution that each party makes to achieving an outcome. Partnerships can be formal such as the arrangements negotiated between State and Commonwealth Government agencies and various community and industry groups to support natural resource management. Other partnerships are informal such as when a government agency and a community group agree to work together to host a consultation event. Informal relationships are increasingly being recognised as significant enablers of great partnership alliances.

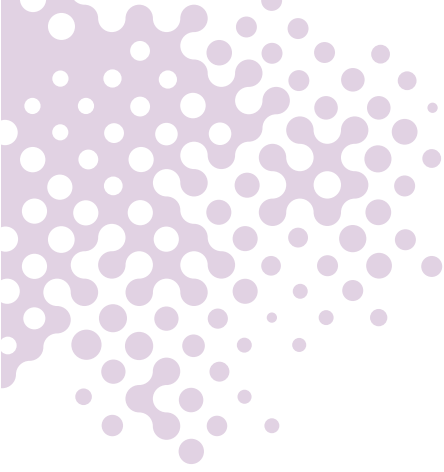
Partnerships can significantly affect communities. Maintaining relationships within partnerships depends on practicing the key principles listed below. Processes such as networking activities, sharing meals and joint learning activities can play

an important part in developing, maintaining and sustaining partnerships.

There are several key principles of encouraging active community participation in partnerships.

These are:

1. **Trust** – can be earned in a number of ways, mostly through introductions by people who already have established trust with the community and/or key stakeholders. Shared action and working together on a sustainable basis will generate trust provided the additional principles are applied.
2. **Mutual respect** – commitment to respect should be communicated through verbal and non-verbal behaviour and through action, such as setting up ground rules for engagement in the initial meeting.
3. **Clarity of roles and responsibilities** – roles need to be communicated in a number of forums including at meetings and in written or video material.
4. **Agreement to listen** – there needs to be a commitment from all players to active listening. This can be conveyed in a group setting through the establishment of ground rules which are determined by the participants.
5. **Power sharing** – structures and agreements have to be put in place to acknowledge how power will be shared between partners.
6. **Accessible and transparent decision-making structures** – decision-making structures need to be agreed, respected and communicated by all participants through a variety of mediums being sensitive to the learning needs of the community.
7. **Empowerment** – provide an environment where there is conscious sharing of activities, decision-making, advocacy, and recognition of human rights.



8. **Training, skills development and education for all partners** – through skill development in the areas of collaboration and leadership meaningful community capacity can be harnessed and supported. Concrete contributions to personal, organisational, and community change can be effected.

**Strengths:**

- harnesses the resources and energy of government and community members to achieve shared outcomes
- can be established in a variety of ways to achieve a variety of outcomes
- is a useful to build longer term relationships and
- can build the knowledge, skills and awareness of all partners.

**Weaknesses:**

- not all stakeholders have the resources, desire or need to partner government
- no matter how well-intentioned partnerships may be, power is often not equal and in some instances it is difficult for some stakeholders to 'let go' of their power
- often requires extensive discussion and negotiation to agree on the nature and terms of the partnership and
- requires significant commitment of resources to maintain partnerships.

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**References and websites:**

Community Planning Implementation Group  
[www.communityplanning.org.uk](http://www.communityplanning.org.uk)

National Resource Centre for Consumer Participation *The Consumer and Community Participation Toolkit*. The Adelaide Community Health Service. [www.participateinhealth.org.au](http://www.participateinhealth.org.au)

Scottish Executive Central Research Unit. *Community Participation in Social Inclusive Partnership*. [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)

**Case Study: The Goodna Integrated Family Support Service Project**

This service provides a supportive model of collaborative case management to families, targeting children and young people. Information is provided on available services through a single, accessible point (an agency they already have contact with) with access provided to counselling and support and advocacy services from a variety of partner organisations.

[www.communities.qld.gov.au](http://www.communities.qld.gov.au)

The techniques which are described below are most often used to engage medium sized groups, generally 20-100 people, as active participants in an engagement process.

**5.14 Future search conferences**

A future search conference is a participative method often used to develop a shared future vision and plan for a community. A future search conference is an effective way of developing a partnership with the community. It can be used for developing and gaining broad commitment in a strategic planning process, but depends on a strong commitment to follow through with conference outcomes.

Future search conferences initially focus on identifying desirable futures and then concentrating on ways to achieve them. They are intensive events, usually taking place over a number of days. Participants are generally stakeholders who have power or information on the topic or who may be affected by any resulting decisions or outcomes.

The ideal number of participants is 64 people – this breaks down into eight groups of eight. People from similar interest groups are usually placed together for some or all of the conference to take part in a highly structured process covering five stages:



1. **Review the past** – each participant writes key events in the history of themselves, the community and the world onto three parallel time lines.
2. **Explore the present** – a mind map is made of trends affecting the local community. Specific interest groups identify important trends and what they would like to be done about them. Groups share what they are proud of and sorry about in their community.
3. **Create ideal futures** – small mixed groups develop visions. Barriers to achieving the visions are identified. Each group acts out its vision to everyone else.
4. **Identify common ground** – first the small groups, then the whole group, work out the common ground or shared vision, identify projects to achieve it, and identify any unresolved differences.
5. **Make action plans** – self-selected action groups plan projects and publicly commit to their action.

#### Strengths:

- good technique for developing a vision for a community
- can drive community and government action
- involves a broad range of relevant stakeholders and
- can develop support and consensus among stakeholders with diverse views early in the planning process.

#### Weaknesses:

- there may be difficulties in reaching consensus
- the process may be dominated by large interest groups if not carefully planned and facilitated and
- can be logistically challenging.

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#### References and websites:

Future Search Network [www.futuresearch.net](http://www.futuresearch.net)

Weisbord M (2000) *Productive Workplaces Revisited: Dignity, Meaning and Community in the 21st Century*. John Wiley and Co [www.mountainplains.org](http://www.mountainplains.org)

Emery M & Purser R (1996) *The Search Conference: A Powerful Method for Planning Organizational Change and Community Action*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

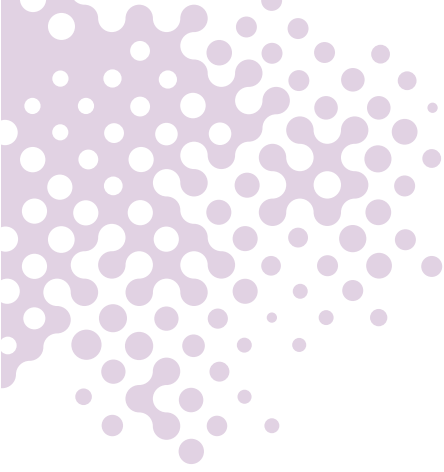
Emery M (1997) *Participative Strategic Planning: the Search Conference* in Open Government Network, Reaching Common Ground: Open Government, Community Consultation and Public Participation. Proceedings of the Reaching Common Ground Conference, 23-24 October, 1996. Sydney: The Open Government Network.

Sarkissian W, Cook A & Walsh K (1999) *Community Participation in Practice. A Practical Guide*. Murdoch: The Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.

#### Case Study: Future Search. Victoria Roads Corporation

The future search conference was conducted as part of a wider research project into the arterial road formation in Melbourne. A diverse number of stakeholders were invited to discuss economic, ecological, sociological and urban design issues. The goals for the conference were to search for issues and explore problems, form cooperative networks, seek ways of implementing principles of ecologically sustainable development and provide guidance for the larger study.

Lyn Carson & Kath Gelber (2001) *Ideas for Community Consultation: A discussion on principles and procedures for making consultation work*, a report prepared for the NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning.



### 5.15 Imagine

Imagine is a new approach to community participation based on 'appreciative inquiry'. Appreciative inquiry can be used to discover, understand and foster innovations in communities by gathering positive stories and images and constructing positive interactions.

Imagine focuses on exploring ways to consider 'what could be' and 'what is possible' by reflecting on past positive experiences. It helps participants identify a collectively desired future and vision and consider ways of translating possibilities into reality and belief into practice.

Imagine asks people to tell stories of what works and involves a six-stage process of:

1. defining the issues and a set of exploratory questions
2. using the questions to draw out stories
3. dreaming how the future could be and expressing people's ideas as 'provocative propositions' – ideally done in a one-day workshop
4. co-creating the dream by forming partnerships that in turn use the Imagine method for continuing workshops
5. celebrating the project and its achievements and
6. evaluating the project.

A core group of participants should be trained to facilitate the Imagine process prior to commencing the event. The core group can then guide and train other participants. Skilled and independent facilitation for a workshop/s is desirable.

#### Strengths:

- is inclusive – all sections of the community can take part
- is based on storytelling, which is familiar and fun

- links people who don't normally meet
- participants learn skills
- is flexible – it can be used for a variety of topics and locations
- creates a shared vision
- visions are rooted in success, so should have realistic outcomes and
- generates commitment and social action – the willingness and ability of people to act for the common interest.

#### Weaknesses:

- may be seen as trendy or superficial
- may create expectations which cannot be met and
- participants may not be representative.

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#### References and websites:

Imagine Chicago. [www.imaginechicago.org](http://www.imaginechicago.org)

Engwicht D (1993) *'Just Image'* The 1993 Meares Oration. Sydney: Disability Advisory Council of Australia.

Engwicht D (1999) *Street Reclaiming: Creating Livable Street and Vibrant Communities*. Annandale NSW: Pluto Press.

### 5.16 Negotiation tables

Negotiation tables have been initiated in Queensland as part of the state government's Ten Year Partnership, which is a state-wide, issues-based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy. Negotiation tables are one strategy being implemented to provide for more effective engagement between the state government and the state's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This model of engagement can be used in most communities where issues are culturally specific. Negotiation tables are a sustained process of consultation, planning and negotiation between community leaders and senior public officials. State and Commonwealth government agencies, regional and local Indigenous organisations and community groups work together in a collaborative way. The process involves reviewing existing plans, producing community development plans which



identify priority needs, negotiating a government response and establishing a mutually agreed Shared Responsibility Agreement and Community Action Plan which clearly defines the commitment of all participants.

Negotiation Tables may be locally or regionally (cluster) oriented. A cluster Negotiation Table may be convened when a group of communities has identified a common issue and agreed that there would be advantages in negotiating cross-community resolutions.

The key responsibility of government representatives participating in Negotiation Tables is to listen to the priorities identified by communities and harness resources to deliver agreed government strategies.

#### **Strengths:**

- is based on a partnership approach which brings multiple agencies to the table with community
- community representatives can directly influence government decision-making
- promotes diversity, flexibility and equality of opportunity for communities and
- uses mutual planning and goal setting to develop agreements and plans.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- are formal and highly structured and
- are resource intensive.

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#### **References and websites:**

Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships  
[www.datsip.qld.gov.au](http://www.datsip.qld.gov.au)

#### **Case Study: Meeting Challenges Making Choices**

The indigenous community within the Cape York region have forged together strong government partnerships using negotiation tables. The community has been able to enforce changes which will positively impact on the community.

[www.datsip.qld.gov.au](http://www.datsip.qld.gov.au)

#### **5.17 Nominal group workshops**

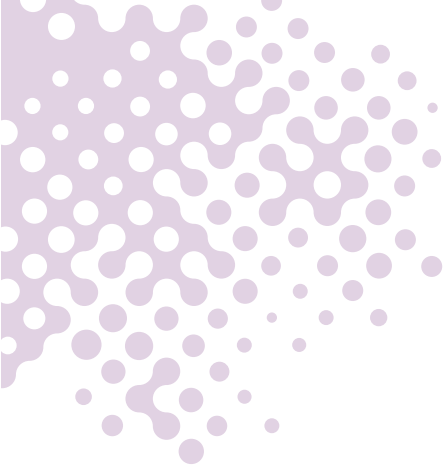
Nominal group workshops are based on the idea that any reasonably representative group of people with an interest in a topic can identify almost all of the issues associated with the topic and make compromises so that most important issues are identified and prioritised.

Nominal group workshops consist of approximately 25 people. Stage one involves a facilitator distributing a background report and providing a chance for people to ask questions (public officials or other 'experts' can attend to such questions and clarify issues). Working alone, each participant is asked to list one major issue and several associated challenges relating to the topic, for example 'What are the essential features of a quality transport system?'

In stage two, participants are assigned to small (nominal) groups of four to six people to share their responses. During stage three, members of the small group discuss, clarify and record their responses. Once the small groups have identified all of their issues, the large group reconvenes and all the responses are displayed around the room.

Stage four involves participants being provided with ballots. Each person is asked to vote on the issues that they feel are the most important. The votes are then counted, and the issues are ranked by the number of votes that they received. Following the prioritisation of the issues, there is a discussion, guided by the facilitator, on the results of the process. This can be followed by a final voting process if required.

This process can also be implemented using online tools to gather the opinions and priorities of geographically dispersed stakeholders and those who prefer not to participate in group discussions. With these groups stages two, three and four are managed remotely by a central facilitator who collects



and collates information from each of the participants before recirculating the materials using online or traditional postal services. This process continues until consensus is reached.

#### **Strengths:**

- can identify problems, explore solutions and establish priorities
- allows individual judgements to be pooled in situations where uncertainty or disagreement exists about the nature of a problem
- all participants have an equal opportunity to have their say and
- delivers timely results.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- the group may not be representative
- may result in ill-informed or impractical outcomes and
- is not especially in-depth and therefore does not allow comprehensive exploration of people's feelings.

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#### **References and website:**

Borrini-Feyerabend G (ed) (1997) *Beyond Fences: Seeking social sustainability in conservation*. [www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org)

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

Commonwealth Department of Health & Aged Care. Canberra. Available as pdf as [www.participateinhealth.org.au](http://www.participateinhealth.org.au)

COSLA (1998) *Focusing on Citizens: A Guide to Approaches and Methods*. Available at:

[www.improvementservice.org.uk/community-planning](http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/community-planning)

Flinders University Department of Public Health & South Australian Community Health Research Unit. (2000) *Improving Health Services through Consumer Participation – A Resource Guide for Organisations*.

### **5.18 Photovoice**

Photovoice involves providing cameras (generally disposable) to people in the community to identify, record, represent, and enhance their community through photography. It uses the immediacy of the visual image and accompanying stories to enable community members to describe their priorities. It can be used to inform and organise community

members and enable them to prioritise their concerns and discuss problems and solutions. Photovoice can also be a useful tool for identifying community strengths and assets.

Photovoice is an innovative and creative engagement activity which seeks to inform policy-making by enabling people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns. It also promotes critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs.

Photovoice is highly flexible and can be adapted to specific participatory goals (such as needs assessment, asset mapping and evaluation) and used to engage different groups and communities in relation to planning and policy issues.

#### **Strengths:**

- provides pictorial evidence of community issues
- provides an alternative means of expression which may help to include those who prefer visual rather than textual or verbal information
- allows detailed information to be collected from participants and
- can easily be used in the media, including print, television and online.

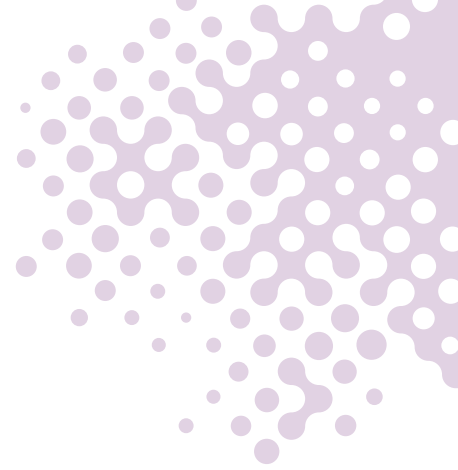
#### **Weaknesses:**

- can be costly, including cameras, developing and printing photographs
- may generate ambiguous information and
- may be difficult to manage and coordinate.

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#### **References and website:**

Photovoice, Social Change Through Photography [www.photovoice.com](http://www.photovoice.com)



### 5.19 Policy action teams

Policy Action Teams are responsible for an intensive program of policy development around a particular issue e.g. anti-social behaviour in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. Teams are composed of 20 to 40 members representing a cross-section of government departments, as well as experts from the community, industry and tertiary education sectors.

The teams bring together the expertise of those 'on the ground' with that of public officials who have been working on the relevant issue – often in isolation. While policy action teams are encouraged to engage in 'blue skies' thinking, all recommendations must be evidence-based.

Where relevant, the team may work in the community affected by the policy issue to gain first-hand experience. Teams are often chaired by a senior public official and have a 'champion' Minister, who is assigned to take a proactive role in the work of the team. A lead agency provides a supporting secretariat and careful consideration is given to how the team can maximise the contribution of communities to the policy issue and what capacity building is required to support that contribution.

Policy action teams are potentially best suited to addressing issues which are complex and cut across traditional departmental boundaries and which require innovative and new perspectives. Experiences from the United Kingdom suggest that teams work best when tackling policy issues which need to involve stakeholders from across the social spectrum and when it is important to have stakeholders take ownership of issues at a local or service delivery level.

#### Strengths:

- reports and recommendations of policy action teams are grounded in first-hand practical experience and balanced by specialist knowledge

- public officials, community and industry representatives work in equal partnership with a responsibility to find solutions that may have eluded them in the past
- representatives from across government and from different levels of government work in a collaborative manner alongside external stakeholders who represent the views of the community and other expert bodies and
- the teams provide an opportunity for a new approach to policy development, generating energy, ideas and relationships.

#### Weaknesses:

- time consuming and
- managing expectations can be challenging – members may be unsure whether their role is to act as an expert on a particular issue or to represent the interests of their organisation or government agency.

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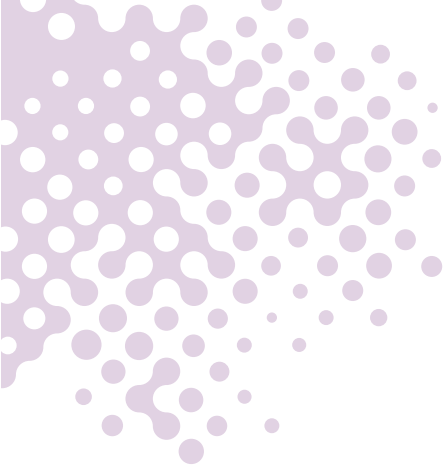
#### References and website:

Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team Approach to Policy Development. [www.policyhub.gov.uk](http://www.policyhub.gov.uk)

### 5.20 Fishbowls

A fishbowl is a discussion strategy that seeks to maximise participation in identifying and understanding issues in response to set questions. Questions for discussion are prepared and considered one at a time. Fishbowl participants are assigned to either a listening or a discussion group. The two discreet groups are positioned so that the listening group is seated around the discussion group (usually in concentric circles).

The first discussion group has an agreed amount of time to discuss the question (only one question per discussion round). During the active discussion, the listening group takes notes and prepares commentary. The groups then swap places and the listening group provides rebuttal or further examination of the issues discussed and



any further issues not raised previously. The group may also provide feedback on their observation of the dynamics within the first discussion group. This process can be repeated for a number of questions. Recording and/or documenting of the discussions is necessary.

This is a focused activity based on intense exploration of a specific issue. It requires careful planning and participant selection. The process can be aided by follow-up small group workshops for further action planning.

#### **Strengths:**

- is particularly useful for a diverse group of people to explore complex issues in a short timeframe
- provides an opportunity for participants to actively listen, and then reflect/respond
- can inform solutions through creative dialogue and
- opportunity for trust development and a wider awareness of issues from a diverse group.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- the questions considered need to be significant and prompt energetic discussion
- there needs to be a certain level of comfort within the group and an agreement to adhere to the rules of polite conversation for an inclusive interaction
- only able to accommodate medium-sized groups of people as participants
- requires skilled facilitators and good timekeeping
- must be culturally sensitive and
- follow-up planning and debriefing maybe required after this process.

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#### **References and websites:**

Active Training (2003) [www.activetraining.com](http://www.activetraining.com)

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

Walsh K & Sarkissian W (2000) *Improving Community Participation in the City of Port Phillip. A Toolbook of Participatory Techniques*. Walsh Planning Research and Design: Melbourne (p. 99)

**The final set of active participation techniques which are described below are generally used with large groups of people, often more than 100, who are all encouraged to become actively involved in the process.**

#### **5.21 Planning For Real**

Planning For Real has been used to give people a voice in decisions effecting their neighbourhoods and communities. The key piece of equipment in Planning For Real is a community-assembled, three-dimensional model of a geographical area (e.g. the neighbourhood or catchment area), on which problems and improvements for the community are identified by the placement of cards.

The model and cards are used to:

- overcome the difficulties of verbal communication by providing an 'alternative currency' to words as a means of exchanging views and information
- provide a common reference point around which to structure feedback and comments and
- permit a broader perspective of issues as well as a physical base for suggestions.

Planning For Real has three basic stages. Stage one involves key stakeholders such as either volunteers, a local club, students, or others, assembling the model within the community. The model is used to publicise public meetings to begin the process of identifying problems and opportunities. The model is designed to be transportable so that it can be used in multiple locations.

Stage two involves training sessions with a few local residents to familiarise them with the Planning For Real process. Stage three involves public meetings which are often held in large, preferably



community-based venues. Participants view and place cards or small flags on the model to identify their issues of care or concern. It is often useful for business and government stakeholders to attend the public meetings to get a clear idea of local people's needs and to answer specific questions. Careful planning and facilitation is prudent to ensure that the presence of 'experts' does not set up an 'us against them' environment.

As the Planning For Real process develops momentum is created about specific practical proposals.

Small, ad hoc working parties are formed around each issue of concern. The working parties meet to work out details and to negotiate between conflicting interests and priorities. Providing a 'follow-up' pack which describes how issues raised will be followed up can be useful to sustain the energy.

#### **Strengths:**

- starts with an open agenda
- large numbers of people can take part (no finite number)
- is inclusive – all sections of the community can take part
- discussion of a large number of topics is permitted
- can be used to develop a community action plan
- can bridge language gaps
- is fun, simple and easy to understand
- is non-confrontational and informal and
- is particularly appropriate for geographical/ physical issues, e.g. environment, planning.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- can take a lot of time and effort to organise
- feedback to participants may be difficult and
- may not be totally representative.

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#### **References and websites:**

Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (1995) *A Practical Handbook for Planning for Real Consultation Exercise*. Telford: U.K.

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

Gibson T et al (1986) *Us Plus Them? How to use the Experts to get What People Really Want*. London: Town and Country Planning Association

### **5.22 Open Space Technology**

Open Space Technology is a large group facilitation technique for up to 1000 participants which has been used in a wide variety of circumstances including peace-making between factional groups, strategic redirection of companies in crisis, innovation and visioning sessions, knowledge sharing and community development.

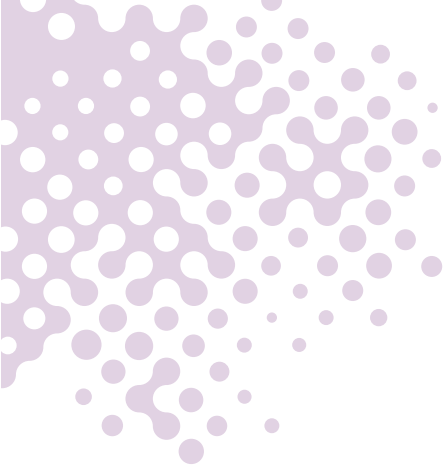
Open Space Technology is based on the premise that people will take ownership of issues they feel strongly about. Participants, rather than organisers, set the agenda, decide the length of the event (generally between one to three days) and the outcomes.

Four principles of engagement for Open Space Technology forums apply:

1. Whoever comes are the right people
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
3. Whenever it starts is the right time
4. When it's over, it's over.

In addition to these four principles, the law of two feet applies. This simply means that people have the right and responsibility to walk away if they are disinterested.

Participants write on a piece of paper the issues that are important to them and that they are willing to work on by convening or contributing to a workshop. All issues are placed on a wall or matrix for everyone to see. Other participants then 'sign up' for workshops which they are interested in attending to discuss and agree further action.



By providing an open and participative environment, people self-organise and work on issues which they feel passionate about and for which they will take responsibility. Participants are encouraged to exchange views and seek to understand different viewpoints.

Open Space Technology can be used with community groups in local settings or large numbers of people at a specially convened event. It can be especially useful wherever complex issues need to be resolved, where commitment and passion of individuals can be embraced, or when it is necessary to motivate a group or organisation to urgent action or change, and where formal procedural methods have failed or are inappropriate.

As Open Space Technology sessions progress dominant themes emerge. Workshops and outcomes are written up and distributed back to participants for reflection and action.

#### **Strengths:**

- a broad range of issues can be tackled
- it allows a bottom-up agenda to emerge
- it enables new alliances to form across social barriers
- all participants have an equal opportunity to have their say and
- it inspires ownership and action.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- focusing on action, rather than issues, can be difficult
- the group may not be representative
- a large amount of data is collected and consideration needs to be given to data collection, analysis and reporting
- it can be relatively time consuming and
- it can sometimes be difficult to sustain the energy from the workshop in order to generate longer term outcomes.

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#### **References and websites:**

- Change Management Toolbook [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)  
Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)  
Open Space World [www.openspaceworld.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org)  
Owen H (1993) *Open Space Technology: A User's Guide*: Potomac Maryland: Abbott Publishing.  
Sarkissian W Cook A & Walsh K (1999) *Community Participation in Practice. A Practical Guide*. Murdoch: The Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.  
Wates N (2000) *The Community Planning Handbook*. UK: Earthscan.

### **5.23 Citizens' panels**

A citizens' panel can involve large numbers of people, often between 100 and 2000, who are selected to be representative of the population. Participants agree to take part in regular deliberations about a range of issues over a period of time. The panel members are surveyed on a regular basis on specific issues or processes to track changes in attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. Approximately one-third of the panel is replaced each year to ensure it remains representative.

#### **Strengths:**

- access is open to a wide range of people including minority groups
- is a useful way to test new ideas and plans
- is a timely and economical method once established
- can undertake research at short notice
- views can be tracked and measured over time (although care needs to be taken with interpreting results given panel membership changes over time)
- panel members develop an understanding of issues over time and
- participants feel valued as long as adequate feedback is given.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- panel members may lose interest
- 'representativeness' of the panel can be



compromised if panel members pull out before their term expires

- may be difficult to sustain participation by panel members
- can be time consuming to replace members throughout the process
- resource intensive to establish
- requires considerable degree of ongoing commitment from all parties involved and
- there is a risk that as some representatives become more informed, that they become less representative of the community.

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**References and websites:**

South Lanarkshire Citizens Panel, UK [www.step.gb.com](http://www.step.gb.com)  
Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System, 2003  
[www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

### 5.24 Deliberative polling

Deliberative polling is an attempt to use public opinion research in a new way. A random, representative sample is first polled on an issue (refer section 4.4). After the baseline poll, members of the sample are sent an information pack containing carefully balanced briefing material on the issue and invited to gather at a single place to discuss the issue over a number of days. In some instances, one-on-one, face-to-face interviews have been conducted in the initial recruitment stage.

Once together, participants engage with various experts and political leaders to explore questions they develop in small group discussions with trained moderators. After the deliberations, the sample is polled again using the same questions from the pre-poll survey. In some instances, written material can be sent to the sample group and further participation can be generated by asking the participants to discuss the material with family and friends. The resulting changes in opinion are thought to reflect the conclusions the broader public would reach if they had an opportunity to become more informed about the issue being considered.

Over 20 deliberative polls have been held in the United States, Australia and elsewhere. Two national deliberative polls have been conducted in Australia, the first before the November 1999 referendum on whether Australia should become a republic and the second on Aboriginal reconciliation in February 2001. These events involved national random samples of Australians who met in Canberra for three days of nationally televised discussions with experts and key political leaders.

#### Strengths:

- highly representative sample
- provides a human face to poll results
- can inform policy decisions by tracking the impact of education processes on opinion
- the sample population can be targeted for ongoing decision-making processes
- is a form of public education in the broadest sense and
- can be staged at a national, state or local level.

#### Weaknesses:

- issues need to be clearly viewed as being in the public interest and of significance
- requires participants to have a high level of literacy
- high costs of organising, staging and broadcasting the event, plus paying the travel costs for the participants (which may number anywhere between 100 and 500) and
- careful consideration needs to be given to the level of importance surrounding the issue versus the cost benefits.

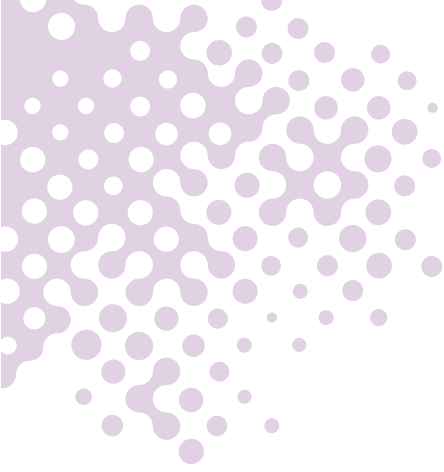
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**References and websites:**

Carson L (1999) *Enabling Mechanisms for Public Participation in Science*. [www.ies.unsw.edu.au](http://www.ies.unsw.edu.au)

The Center for Deliberative Polling [www.utexas.edu](http://www.utexas.edu)

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)



## 5.25 Summits

A summit is a large scale, time limited event which brings together large numbers of diverse participants to consider information, engage in dialogue and to make recommendations for action. Summits are often used in the early phases of developing strategies to address particularly complex issues. They can be both a visioning and exploratory exercise. Intensive planning is required to organise a summit. Summits are interactive and can be tailored to suit a diverse group of interested community participants, key stakeholders and policy makers.

The summit process is structured and transparent and requires significant forms of consultation prior to the event. It also requires a high level of commitment and resourcing from political leaders and key stakeholders. A summit is normally held over two to three days. Consultation can be expanded to include a web based chat link during the summit, and information sharing processes for those who are unable to attend the summit.

The methods for delivering a summit may vary, but generally the first day features introductory speakers from a diverse group including politicians, experts, and community members. The second day features exploration of existing policies with international, national and local perspectives being discussed. Expert panel members inform participants, and working groups are established and operate throughout the summit. A special resolution group is established and informed by the other working groups, this can also include an online forum. The final day features the establishment of draft policies which are discussed within a plenary session.

### Strengths:

- can 'defuse' a contentious issue by providing all stakeholders with the opportunity to put forward options for consideration

- enables open and rapid communication
- supports collaborative policy making
- enables multi-sectoral engagement which has the potential to develop and enhance relationships between key stakeholders and community participants
- blends the reality of the lived experience, with laws, existing services, and the costs and benefits of all these factors
- can deliver a high degree of bi-partisan and public support for key directions that emerge through summit processes and
- the sharing of group skills and experiences can support education and awareness raising outcomes.

### Weaknesses:

- requires high-level commitment and leadership for preparation and planning
- effective stakeholder engagement is critical
- requires effective risk management
- requires significant investment in planning, engagement, coordination, management, delivery and follow up
- requires a high level of skill and expertise in planning, consultation and facilitation
- participants must be prepared to be exposed to a variety of responses based on perceived flaws in current policies, programs, expenditures and practices.

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### References and websites:

NSW Alcohol Summit 03 [www.alcoholsummit.nsw.gov.au](http://www.alcoholsummit.nsw.gov.au)

Collins D & Lapsley H (2003) *Counting the cost: estimates of the social costs of drug abuse in Australia in 1998-9*, Commonwealth of Australia, cited in NSW Summit Preliminary Background Paper, April 2003

Queensland Education (2002) [www.education.qld.gov.au](http://www.education.qld.gov.au)

Walsh K & Sarkissian W (2000) *Improving Community Participation in the City of Port Phillip. A Toolbook of Participatory Techniques*. Melbourne: Walsh Planning Research and Design with Sarkissian Associates Planners.



### Case Study: NSW Alcohol Summit

The NSW government conducted a summit on alcohol as a result of community concern. A diverse group of participants included, multi-cultural communities, rural communities, young people, government and non-government representatives, and industry representatives. The goals for the summit were to develop a better understanding of issues, better inform the community, examine existing approaches, consider evidence and new ideas, identify areas of improvement, and finally, build political and community consensus. Following the summit, a government action plan and relevant implementation resources were developed and announced.

NSW Alcohol Summit –

[www.alcoholsummit.nsw.gov.au](http://www.alcoholsummit.nsw.gov.au)

### 5.26 Collective learning technique (also known as World café)

The aim of the World café is to create a discussion environment that feels like a café. World café can either be conducted online or in a public space. This method is suitable for large groups of people (has been practiced in groups of over 1,200 people). It provides a diverse group of people with an opportunity to share information and insights into complex issues. A number of questions are prepared and documented on a number of tables. Either a tablecloth (which can be written on) or large note pads are provided at each table. Groups are initially assigned to a table, and then given a set amount of time to respond to the questions. People are invited to talk in small, intimate groups about topics of interest. They are then asked to rotate to another table (and another question) and to add to the responses made by previous groups. The number of rotations can be tailored to the time requirements of the event.

When the final rotation has occurred, a plenary session is conducted to create a sense of

connection with the wider group. This offers the whole group an opportunity to connect the overall themes or questions which are presented, and talk about the possibility for further action.

#### Strengths:

- the method is simple in design
- allows a large, diverse group of people to participate
- enables information sharing on a large scale
- responses do not have to be limited to written material, drawing would be equally as effective in articulating issues
- allows cross-pollination of ideas across a large group of people and
- is a powerful technique for creating shared knowledge of a community's issues and a subsequent sense of 'community'.

#### Weaknesses:

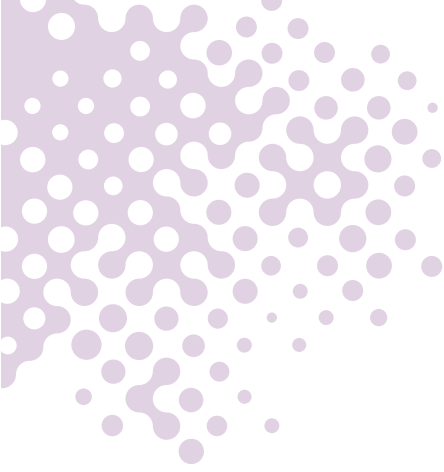
- resource intensive (venues, resources, people, marketing)
- requires significant planning
- requires a number of skilled facilitators preferably one for each table and
- a significant amount of follow-up is required for further action planning.

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#### References and websites:

The World café Community Foundation (2003)  
[www.theworldcafe.com/storyawwd.html](http://www.theworldcafe.com/storyawwd.html)

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (2003)  
[www.thataway.org](http://www.thataway.org)



## 5.27 Community visioning

Creative or community visioning is an exploratory method for any number of community participants. It normally involves the facilitation of sessions in which participants are asked to close their eyes and imagine what their community looks like now, and what it could look like into the future. A scenario can be set which may provide stimuli for the visioning experience. Visualisation is the technique used and a skilled facilitator provides an atmosphere with a dialogue closely mapping out the community featured. Small group sessions can be facilitated to capture the creative thoughts of participants and follow-up planning activities begin to translate the community vision into concrete plans. There are a number of forms of community visioning, and it can be expanded to include creative arts, such as drawing, or making models out of craft materials (these can be particularly good for children).

### Strengths:

- large numbers and diverse participants can be involved
- can be a great community building exercise creating a sense of community through the sharing of visions
- explores a variety of visions for the future
- focuses on possible strengths rather than issues or conflict and
- is able to generate forward planning and regenerate a positive spirit and purpose.

### Weaknesses:

- may create anxiety in some prospective participants and impact on recruitment for the day
- requires a number of facilitators to compile and interpret the visions described
- generates a lot of ideas and data for collation and analysis may be difficult and
- requires careful documentation and clarity of purpose to ensure sound links to concrete outcomes.

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### References and websites:

- COSLA (1998) *Focusing on Citizens: A guide to approaches and methods* [www.cosla.gov.uk](http://www.cosla.gov.uk)
- Walsh K & Sarkissian W (2000) *Improving Community Participation in the City of Port Phillip. A Toolbook of Participatory Techniques*. Melbourne. Walsh Planning Research and Design (p. 99)
- Ames S (ed) (1989) *A Guide to Community Visioning*. Portland Oregon: Steve Ames Planning.
- Ames S (1993) *The Agency Visioning Handbook: Developing a Vision for the Future in Public Agencies, A Hands-On Guide for Planners and Facilitators in State and Federal National Agencies*. Arlington, Virginia: U S Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Federal Aid.

## 5.28 Community cultural development

Community cultural development refers to a cluster of community-based arts practices that involve artists working with community members to build skills, to share information, understandings and experiences and to actively involve people in developing their community and/or their culture. A wide range of arts practices can be used to engage people including, but not limited to, dance, theatre, festivals and events, exhibitions, video, digital arts, public art, circus and fashion design.

Community cultural development processes have been used to achieve diverse outcomes including fostering harmony, creating a sense of place, giving voice to the disengaged and unengaged, generating creative solutions to local issues, community revitalisation, promoting health and well-being, natural resource management, informing and/or improving the design of the built environment, recording the history of communities and creating employment.

### Strengths:

- creates artistic outcomes alongside community, cultural and economic development outcomes by exploring ideas and issues of importance to the community
- supports skills development, relationship building and belonging
- allows communities significant control over what messages, plans and products are developed and how they are developed



- may support the achievement of government requirements such as the 'art built in' or two percent for art' policy for capital works projects
- is often effective when engaging people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, young people and people who prefer to express themselves using images and concepts rather than words and
- unleashing creativity can often result in more innovative thinking and problem solving.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- requires skilled qualitative expertise and/or advice on data analysis
- skills and confidence need to be built to ensure that community cultural development processes link to, and inform, government processes and
- can be resource intensive and time consuming.

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#### **References and websites:**

Australia Council for Arts – Community Cultural Development Board  
[www.ozco.gov.au/boards/ccd](http://www.ozco.gov.au/boards/ccd)

Hirst A & Sarkissian W (2002) *Community Participation in Practice. New Directions*. Murdoch: Institute of Sustainability and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.

Queensland Community Arts Network [www.qldcan.org.au](http://www.qldcan.org.au)

*The Art of Renewal – Thinking culturally about strengthening communities* [www.communityrenewal.qld.gov.au](http://www.communityrenewal.qld.gov.au)



# 6

## Feedback and follow-up

**Feedback and follow-up are critical elements of an engagement process.**

### 6.1 Providing participants with feedback

Providing feedback to those who have participated in an engagement process, allows them to see whether their views have been accurately represented when decisions are being made. Participants are often interested in receiving a summary of the range of information generated via an engagement process and how this is being considered, not simply a summary of their own ideas. Sharing summary materials across groups is often an effective way of raising awareness and can lay the foundations for relationship and consensus building.

Citizens and stakeholders take time out of their busy lives to contribute to government engagement activities and it is therefore important for them to receive feedback on how their views were taken into account. Without feedback, citizens and stakeholders may assume public officials were not listening and may not know whether their contribution has made a difference. Both situations are likely to result in a reluctance to participate in future engagement processes.

Feedback to participants and others with an interest in the particular issue, such as other government departments, organisations and the wider public, can enhance the legitimacy and quality of decisions by ensuring that they are subject to a robust and effective public scrutiny.

#### Ongoing feedback will:

- encourages continuing participation
- clarifies whether community issues have been accurately understood
- improves relationships
- builds trust and confidence in the engagement process

- assesses the appropriateness and effectiveness of the engagement techniques used and
- clarifies whether the original government/ community goals and objectives are being met.

### 6.2 Following up on engagement

Community engagement activities are generally undertaken to inform action and to generate change. Follow-up strategies provide those who participated in an engagement process with advice regarding progress made in addressing the issues raised. Follow-up information provided to participants may include:

- details of subsequent engagement activities with other groups
- answers to questions raised by participants
- confirmation that information generated via engagement has been forwarded/is being considered by relevant agencies
- details of any changes made or planned in response to participant comment and
- details of any future opportunities for further participation.

### 6.3 When should feedback and follow-up occur?

It is often useful to establish a protocol during the planning and design phase of an engagement process that outlines when and how feedback will be provided, and also what information will be shared with whom. Depending on the nature of the engagement, feedback might be offered at regular intervals, and/or within a pre-determined period after each engagement activity and further opportunities to be involved. Feedback and follow-up should generally be incorporated throughout the engagement process and have a focus on letting participants know what the next step is and when

and how they will be advised of the outcomes from any activity.

It is important that follow-up be timely and that commitments to follow up particular issues or matters of concern are addressed within agreed time frames. This helps to build faith in government engagement processes. Follow-up may also be a critical part of the evaluation process. So it is important that the capacity to provide regular and ongoing feedback is woven into the process at the planning stage.

#### **6.4 How should feedback be given?**

A range of feedback techniques should be employed to reach a variety of participants. Depending on the group you are seeking to provide feedback to, it may be important to use both written and verbal feedback methods. It is usually important to provide people with information, but also to create opportunities for them to ask questions or to seek additional information if required. Some techniques to consider include:

- writing letters to all participants—this can be via email
  - posting reports
  - providing summary reports of meetings/workshops
  - acknowledging written submissions
  - providing information via telephone hotlines
  - holding meetings to relay findings, outcomes, progress
  - giving presentations to groups within the community
  - offering discussion/issues papers
  - publishing newsletters, charts and posters
- using a dedicated community engagement project email group
  - establishing an interactive or informative website
  - issuing media releases and updates within organisation newsletters
  - using informal communications and
  - issuing reports.

# 7



## Celebration, transition and handover

### 7.1 Community celebrations

Community celebrations can mark the end of a stage of a particular engagement process or be planned as a technique to enable diverse community engagement (refer also section 3.12). Celebrations can create a sense of fun around community issues and provide public acknowledgement of collaborative efforts within the community.

Celebrations have the ability to create a sense of community pride and identity and provide an avenue for a number of purposes such as information/awareness raising, active participation and consultation.

When planning a community celebration, consideration needs to be given to the purpose of the event, the budget, who will coordinate the event, and who will be invited to participate.

The process for coordination can follow the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW and WHY format.

#### Strengths:

- can be multipurpose in its design, including showcasing of projects, informing residents and others of what is going on in the community; it can have an active participation and consultative component
- can create a sense of energy and community in the preparatory phase of an engagement process and build momentum to support the implementation phases
- has the capacity to further inform planning for change within the community
- diverse groups of people from the community can be involved such as children, families, government and non-government agencies and industry and
- demonstrates respect for the community.

#### Weaknesses:

- requires intensive planning
- budget considerations are a priority
- requires skilled coordination
- requires significant collaboration from a number of agencies and stakeholders and
- media and publicity can be a significant issue.

#### References and websites:

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)  
Queensland Health (2002) *Methods Manual. Engaging Communities in Participatory Action Research*. Southport: Public Health Services.  
Vichealth and RMIT (2004) *Community Celebrations Project (project in partnership with Vichealth)* [www.rmit.edu.au](http://www.rmit.edu.au)

### Case Study: Community Renewal Program Eagleby-Logan Celebration

A local community celebration based within this community was multi-dimensional with community entertainment, visual arts displays, and feasting. The end stage of the celebration was a symbolic burning of the stigma of the community, signifying a stage of renewal.

[www.communityrenewal.qld.gov.au](http://www.communityrenewal.qld.gov.au)

### 7.2 Transition and handover

Community engagement can be seen as a cyclic process moving through different stages until the agency ultimately winds down or ceases initiated engagement (though engagement may increase again in the future). These lifecycle phases and the accompanying activities are shown on the following page.

Whilst some community engagement processes may go on for a long time, other engagement projects are of finite duration. To 'disengage' from communities, particularly those which have been more actively involved in your engagement process, requires careful thought and planning.

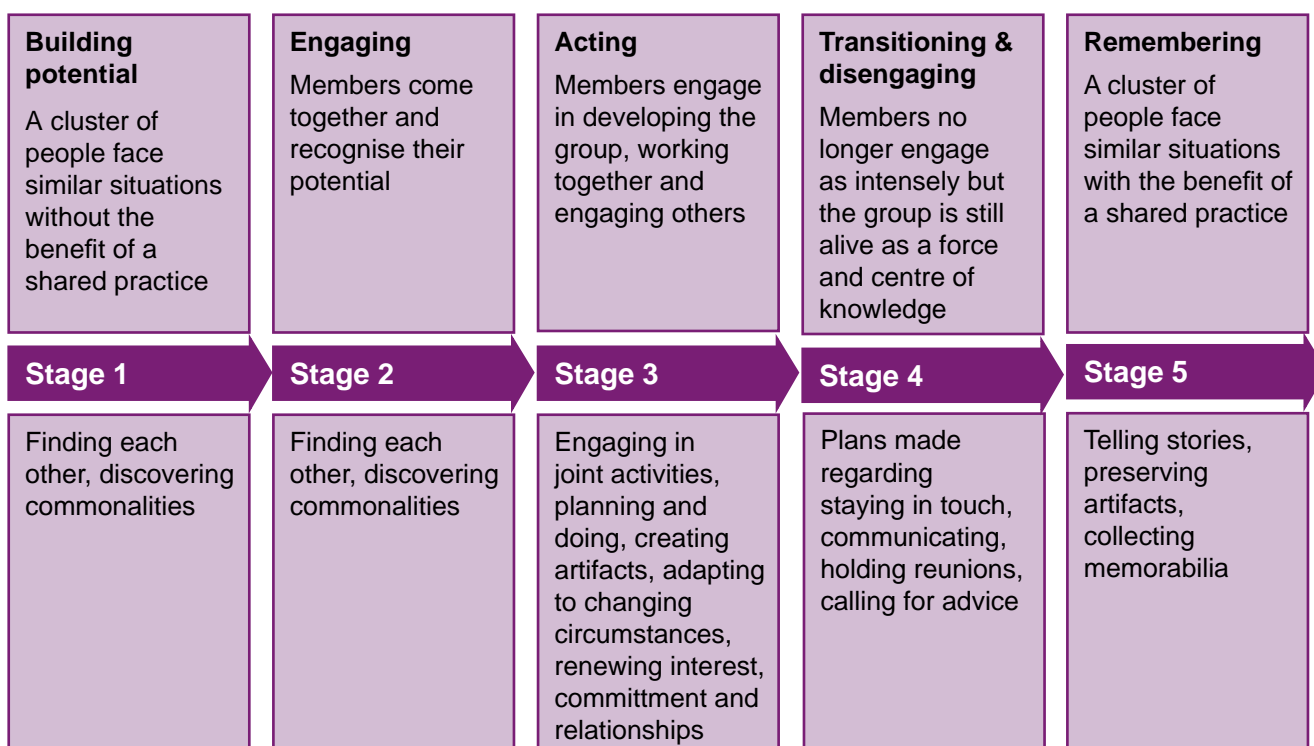
Community engagement often includes the concept of empowerment. If an agency exits from an engagement before the community has the capacity to sustain progress made through the engagement, then all the good work previously undertaken may be wasted. It may be necessary to have a transitional phase, where agencies provide skilling or resourcing (facilitation, planning and coordination etc.) until the community has the

capacity to run or sustain their own processes. In planning your community engagement, consider any transition and exit strategies that might be appropriate. Make sure they are consistent with the cyclic nature of engagement.

**References and websites:**

*Doing what we know we should: The final report of the Goodna Service Integration Project (2003) [www.uq.edu.au/boilerhouse/](http://www.uq.edu.au/boilerhouse/)*

### 7.3 Lifecycle phases of community engagement





## Evaluating engagement activities

Evaluation is a process that facilitates learning and examines what worked well, what did not work well, and why. Evaluation should begin in the planning stages of a community engagement activity and continue throughout the activity.

Evaluating community engagement techniques can help you to:

- find out what worked and what did not
- identify unanticipated outcomes
- apply learning to improve future practice in engagement activities
- know whether involving citizens or communities actually met the community engagement objectives of the program and contributed to improved decision-making and
- assess whether the exercise was cost effective in terms of time and resources.

The information generated by evaluation is used to inform future community engagement planning and decision-making and to report on, and improve practice.

Effective evaluation of community engagement activities can provide considerable benefits to government agencies. They include:

- improving practice by identifying and articulating lessons and achievements
- developing a shared understanding of what contributes to, and what hinders, successful community engagement
- analysing strengths and weaknesses to inform future planning and decision-making
- contributing to setting good-practice standards for future engagement

- helping to build an evidence base for innovative approaches to community engagement
- contributing to engagement capability development by providing feedback on performance
- presenting opportunities for further citizen involvement in the evaluation process and
- building support for citizen and community involvement in government planning and decision-making by providing evidence of how effective engagement works.

### 8.1 Guidance on evaluating community engagement

*Engaging Queenslanders: Evaluating community engagement* has been developed by the Department of Communities, in collaboration with government agencies. It aims to assist public officials in evaluating community engagement activities and provides guidance in:

- developing an evaluation framework
- developing data collection tools
- interpreting and analysing data and
- ensuring evaluation outcomes feed into future planning and decision-making.

The resource also provides guidance in developing key evaluation questions, performance criteria and indicators, and, importantly, how the results of evaluation will be reported and shared across agencies, across government and across the sectors. The resource is available at [www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au)



## 8.2 What does evaluation involve?

Community engagement evaluation involves four main activities:

- developing an evaluation framework including a research plan
- developing data collection tools
- collecting and analysing data and
- interpreting, sharing, reporting, and responding to results.

The scope of these activities will vary depending on the scale of the community engagement activity and the purpose of the evaluation.

Evaluation may require setting up new or concurrent project management arrangements including:

- an evaluation steering committee, which includes key government and community representatives, to direct the design of the evaluation framework and the interpretation of the results
- project plans for data collection, analysis and reporting, including timelines, deadlines and budgets
- project and tender briefs for outside consultants or contractors
- systems for reporting the results of the evaluations to internal and external stakeholders and into knowledge bases and
- systems for the on-going review of projects, programs or policies.

## 8.3 Developing an evaluation framework

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about evaluation is that there is no one-size-fits-all process for evaluating community engagement. Therefore an evaluation framework must be developed for each engagement activity which is tailored to the purpose for which the evaluation will be used, the intended audience of the evaluation, the type of community engagement activity to be evaluated and the scale and significance of the activity.

Scale and significance refers to:

- the amount of resources that have been committed to the community engagement activity (and/or may be committed in the future)
- the significance of the activity to government, including the degree of political support and attention and
- the nature of public expectations surrounding the activity.



## Managing contractors and consultants

**If a government agency decides to engage with citizens and stakeholders using a more innovative or complex technique, there may be a need to consider involving a skilled, independent facilitator. Using a contractor or consultant as a facilitator can also be useful when there are poor trust relations between a community and an agency and can improve perceptions of neutrality and impartiality.**

**Contractors are procured by agencies on a regular basis where required skills within the public sector may not be available at the time. Consultants are a type of contractor that the government defines separately for reporting purposes. The roles of the consultant need to be clarified providing itemised details of the contract being considered.**

**If a contractor/consultant is enlisted to undertake a community engagement activity on behalf of an agency, it is important to remember that the agency retains ultimate responsibility for developing and maintaining relationships with citizens, stakeholders and communities throughout the engagement activity. The onus is also on the agency to ensure the information provided in the engagement process is accurate and that feedback and follow-up processes are timely and effective. This will generally require regular and close liaison between a contractor and the contracting agency. It is also important to ensure that learnings about engagement processes and outcomes are fed into the agency in order to support internal capability development.**

### 9.1 Choosing and managing contractors/consultants

#### Effective communication

When enlisting a contractor/consultant to undertake community engagement activities on behalf of the agency, it is important to ensure that

the roles and responsibilities of the contractor/consultant, the agency project manager, external stakeholders and the agency and government decision-makers are clearly communicated and understood. This requires comprehensive briefings and ongoing communication between the contractor/consultant and the agency throughout the engagement process.

#### Managing expectations

Developing strategies for effective communication, clarity of roles and responsibilities and transparency of process will assist the agency and the contractor/consultant in managing expectations about community engagement activities. Setting and clearly communicating the parameters for the community engagement activity is an important part of managing the expectations of a range of stakeholders. Many risks or issues can be addressed in advance by selecting the correct engagement techniques to make sure all stakeholders are properly engaged.

#### Skills and knowledge

To maximise effectiveness of the engagement, it is important that contractors/consultants have appropriate community engagement skills and knowledge which is aligned with the Queensland Government's priorities, and a clear understanding about:

- the purpose and objectives of the engagement activity
- agency expectations
- their role and responsibilities
- any government or agency legislative or policy requirements associated with the engagement activity
- limitations or constraints in the engagement activity
- the level of influence of the community in decision-making processes
- the groups to be engaged
- timelines and resources



- their primary contact within the agency and community
- how the expectations of those involved will be managed and
- how risks and issues will be addressed and managed as they arise throughout the engagement process.

The skills and knowledge of possible consultants should be verified with reference to demonstrated examples of how such skills have been applied in past. This may be achieved by asking consultants to provide examples of previous work (videos, reports etc.) and by contacting referees nominated by the contractor or consultant.

### Contract management

A critical part of managing a contractor/consultant is the contract. All consultancies, regardless of the cost, require a written contract between the parties that is signed and dated. This may be in the form of a simple 'Letter of Acceptance' or a purchase order for low value and low risk consultancies. The letter should clearly define the requirements and obligations of both parties. Individual agency policies and procedures should be confirmed and adhered to in order to ensure that the correct processes are followed.

It is important to remember that the process does not end with the signing of the contract. Contractors/consultants need to be monitored to ensure that milestones and quality outcomes are being achieved on time and within budget. Typical measures to ensure effective management of contractors/consultants include:

- appointing a project manager (or in some cases a steering committee) with a clearly defined responsibility for the management of the consultant
- maintaining adequate records
- clearly defining performance standards expected of consultants

- clearly defining intellectual property agreements
- the department will want to know the range and representation of samples of the community, and the level of community engagement attendance to ensure the quantity and quality of consultation practice
- specifying the requirements for reports and meetings with the consultant and
- assessing the work and performance of the consultant at regular intervals.

Communication between the project manager and contractor consultant needs to be effective and regular to make sure the community engagement activity is on track and that the agency is getting what has been specified. Keep documentation of all communications on file.

### Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the progress at specified regular periods will ensure that clarification and modifications can be sought for optimal project outcomes.

Performance evaluation of consultants and contractors has been examined by the Commonwealth, and an audit indicated that the performance of consultants should be formally reviewed prior to progressive contract payments being made. The details of such an evaluation should be negotiated with the consultant/contractor as part of the initial contract development phase to ensure that both parties are aware of what will be assessed.

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### References and websites:

Information and Procurement Division: Department of Public Works and Housing (1996) *Engaging and using Consultants. Quick Guide.*  
Better Purchasing Guides Index (2003)  
[www.qgm.qld.gov.au](http://www.qgm.qld.gov.au)



## References and further resources

### 10.1 Summary of relevant online resources

#### Queensland Government:

*Directions Statement*, Community Engagement Division, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Queensland (2001) [www.premiers.qld.gov.au](http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au)

Queensland Government community engagement website [www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au)

Engaging Queenslanders: An introduction to community engagement (2003) [www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au)

Engaging Queenslanders: Community engagement in the business of government (2003) [www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au)

Engaging Queenslanders: Improving community engagement across the Queensland Public Sector (2003) [www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au](http://www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au)

Queensland Government Youth Website [www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

Queensland Youth Charter [www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

Queensland Youth Participation Strategy [www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

Two-Way Street: How government departments can engage with young people through consultation [www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

Getting Young People on Board: How government can engage with young people through boards and committees [www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management. [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

#### Other Australian sites:

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System – Prepared for Planning NSW by Elton Consulting (2003) [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

Consulting Citizens: A Resource Guide – Citizens and Civics Unit, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Government of Western Australia (2003) [www.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.dpc.wa.gov.au)

Community Consultation Resource Website – Victorian Local Governance Association [www.vlgaconsultation.org.au](http://www.vlgaconsultation.org.au)

#### International sites:

Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation – Stephen Coleman & John Gøtze (2001) [www.bowlingtogether.net](http://www.bowlingtogether.net)

Community Planning Implementation Group, Scotland [www.scotland.gov.au](http://www.scotland.gov.au)

The Connecting with Communities toolkit – Improvement and Development Agency, UK [www.idea.gov.uk/communications](http://www.idea.gov.uk/communications)

Engaging Citizens in Policymaking: Information, Consultation and Public Participation – OECD Public Management and Governance Policy Brief No. 10 (2001) [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

Engaging People in Active Citizenship – The European Commission [www.pjb.co.uk/npl/bp44.htm](http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/bp44.htm)

Good Practice Guidance Consultation with Equalities Groups – Reid-Howie Associates, Scottish Executive Central Research Unit and Equality Unit (2002) [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)



International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) [www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

National Resource Centre for consumer participation in health  
[www.participateinhealth.org.au](http://www.participateinhealth.org.au)

New Economics Foundation  
[www.neweconomics.org/gen](http://www.neweconomics.org/gen)

Viewfinder: *A policy maker's guide to public involvement – Strategy Unit*, UK Cabinet Office (2002) [www.policyhub.gov.uk](http://www.policyhub.gov.uk)

XPIN, Expertise Bureau for Innovative Policy-making (the Netherlands) – *harnessing IT to develop different ways of involving citizens in policy development*.  
[www.xpin.nl/overxpin/english.php](http://www.xpin.nl/overxpin/english.php)

## 10.2 References for planning and implementation of effective community processes

The following resources provide valuable advice regarding the planning and implementation of effective community processes which is relevant to the implementation of a range of information, consultation and active participation techniques.

Carson L & Gelber K (2001) *Ideas for Community Consultation: A Discussion on Principles and Procedures for Making Consultation Work*. Sydney: New South Wales Department of Urban Affairs and Planning.

Citizen Science Toolbox, Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System – Prepared for Planning NSW by Elton Consulting (2003) [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

Griffith University Online CRC Database (2004) [www.griffith.edu.au](http://www.griffith.edu.au)

Hirst A & Sarkissian W (2002) *Community Participation in Practice: New Directions*. Murdoch: Institute of Sustainability and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.

International Association for Public Participation (2000) IAP2 Public Participation Toolbox  
[www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

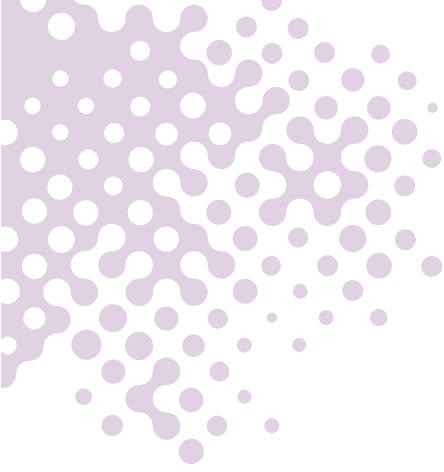
Queensland Health *The Consumer and Community Participation Toolkit*. The State of Queensland. (2003). Adelaide Central Community Health Service.

Sarkissian W, Cook A & Walsh K. (2000) *Community Participation in Practice: Workshop Checklist*. 2nd Edition. Murdoch: Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.

Sarkissian W, Cook A & Walsh K. (1999) *Community Participation in Practice. A Practical Guide*. Murdoch: The Institute for Science and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.

## 10.3 References for specific community groups

Where particular features exist within the community to be targeted eg. large populations of young people or people with low levels of literacy, specific care must be taken to design appropriate and accessible engagement processes. The following resources provide detailed advice to support engagement with particular community groups.



### 10.3.1 Young people

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System – Prepared for Planning NSW by Elton Consulting (2003) [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

Department of local government youth consultation research project [www.dlg.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au)

Driskell D (2002) *Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth*. Unesco: London

*Getting young people on board: How government can engage with young people through boards and committees* [www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

Hart R (1997) *Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care*. London: Earthscan.

PLA notes. Participatory learning and action. (2001) *Children's participation-evaluating effectiveness*. London: International Institute for Environment and Development.

[www.earthprint.com](http://www.earthprint.com)

Queensland Youth Charter  
[www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

Queensland Youth Participation Strategy  
[www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

Two-Way Street: How government departments can engage with young people through consultation [www.generate.qld.gov.au](http://www.generate.qld.gov.au)

### 10.3.2 Children

The Christchurch City Council - The Kids Tool Box  
[www.ccc.govt.nz/ChildrensStrategy/ToolBox](http://www.ccc.govt.nz/ChildrensStrategy/ToolBox)

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System – Prepared for Planning NSW by Elton Consulting (2003) [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

Driskell D (2002) *Creating Better Cities with Children and Youth*. UNESCO: London

Freeman C, Henderson P & Kettle J (1999) *Planning with children for better communities. The challenge for professionals*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Hart R (1982) *Wildlands for Children: Consideration of the Value of Natural Environments in Landscape Planning*. *Childhood City* 9 (2), Summer.

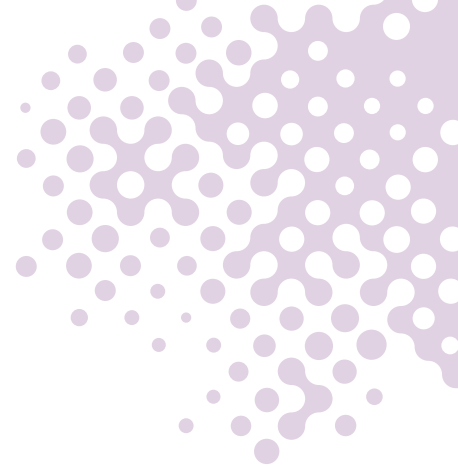
Hart R (1993) *Children on Playgrounds*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

Hart R (1997) *Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care*. London: Earthscan.

NSW Commission for Children and Young People. *Conferences and Events: Children and Young People's participation*. [www.kids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au)

PLA notes. Participatory learning and action. (2001) *Children's participation-evaluating effectiveness*. London: International Institute for Environment and Development.

[www.earthprint.com](http://www.earthprint.com)



### 10.3.3 People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System – Prepared for Planning NSW by Elton Consulting (2003) [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

Hirst A & Sarkissian W (2002) *Community Participation in Practice. New Directions*. Murdoch: The Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy. Murdoch University:

New South Wales Department of Community Services (1994) *Community Consultation: NSW Department of Community Consultation Protocol*. Sydney

Queensland Community Arts Network (2001) *Community Cultural Development. A Guide. A resource for new artists in Queensland*. New Farm: QCAN.

Queensland Government Department of Communities (formerly 'Families') [www.communities.qld.gov.au](http://www.communities.qld.gov.au)

### 10.3.4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

Behrendt L (1997) *Indigenous People and Consultation: Exploring Issues of Equality, Effective Representative Government and Democracy in Open Government Network, Reaching Common Ground: Open Government, Community Consultation and Public Participation*. Proceedings of the Reaching Common Ground Conference, 23-24 October, 1996. Sydney: the Open Government Network: 103-111.

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System – Prepared for Planning NSW by Elton Consulting (2003) [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

Department of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development Information, Planning & Review Branch (1998) *Proper communication with Torres Strait Islander People*. Queensland Government: Brisbane

Department of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development Information, Planning & Review Branch (1998) *Protocols for consultation and negotiation with Aboriginal People*. Queensland Government: Brisbane

Engaging Queenslanders: Introduction to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

Hirst A & Sarkissian W (2002) *Community Participation in Practice. New Directions*. Murdoch: Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.

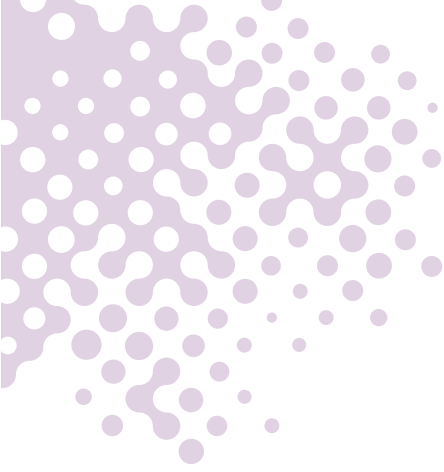
Queensland Community Arts Network (2001) *Community Cultural Development. A Guide. A resource for new artists in Queensland*. New Farm: QCAN.

### 10.3.5 People with limited literacy levels

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System – Prepared for Planning NSW by Elton Consulting (2003) [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

Community Consultation Resource Website – Victorian Local Governance Association [www.vlgaconsultation.org.au](http://www.vlgaconsultation.org.au)

Sarkissian W, Cook A & Walsh K (1999) *Community Participation in Practice. A Practical Guide*. Murdoch: The Institute for Science and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.



### 10.3.6 Seniors

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System – Prepared for Planning NSW by Elton Consulting (2003) [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

Community Consultation Resource Website – Victorian Local Governance Association [www.vlgaconsultation.org.au](http://www.vlgaconsultation.org.au)

*Consulting Citizens: A Resource Guide*, Citizens and Civics Unit, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Government of Western Australia (2003) [www.dpc.wa.gov.au](http://www.dpc.wa.gov.au) Hirst A & Sarkissian W (2002) *Community Participation in Practice. New Directions*. Murdoch: Institute of Sustainability and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.

Queensland Government Department of Communities [www.communities.qld.gov.au](http://www.communities.qld.gov.au)

Sarkissian W, Cook A & Walsh K (1999) *Community Participation in Practice. A Practical Guide*. Murdoch: The Institute for Science and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.

### 10.3.7 People living with a disability

Community Consultation Resource Website – Victorian Local Governance Association [www.vlgaconsultation.org.au](http://www.vlgaconsultation.org.au)

Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System – Prepared for Planning NSW by Elton Consulting (2003) [www.iplan.nsw.gov.au](http://www.iplan.nsw.gov.au)

Disability Services Queensland [www.disability.qld.gov.au](http://www.disability.qld.gov.au)

Hirst A & Sarkissian W (2002) *Community Participation in Practice. New Directions*. Murdoch: Institute of Sustainability and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.

Queensland Community Arts Network (2001) *Community Cultural Development. A Guide. A resource for new artswomen in Queensland*. New Farm: QCAN.

Sarkissian W, Cook A & Walsh K (1999) *Community Participation in Practice. A Practical Guide*. Murdoch: The Institute for Science and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.

### 10.3.8 People living in rural communities

Community Builders NSW – Working together to strengthen communities (2003)

[www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au](http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au)

Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging (2002) [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

Institute for Rural Futures (2004) University of New England [www.ruralfutures.une.edu.au](http://www.ruralfutures.une.edu.au)

Sarkissian W & Perlmut D (1994) *Community Participation in Practice. A Practical Guide*. (2nd edition) Murdoch: The Institute for Science and Technology Policy. Murdoch University.