

FACT SHEET: INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Communities or individuals can face a number of barriers that make engagement with Government inaccessible or unappealing, particularly young people and the disadvantaged.

Incorrect assumptions made by government agencies about how people best participate in engagement can create significant barriers to engagement. Attitudinal barriers, such as apathy towards the government or a particular issue, a previous negative experience of engagement, and/or consultation fatigue are all factors that affect participation in engagement opportunities.

Other factors that can create barriers or deter individuals and communities from engaging include:

lack of confidence	language barriers
lack of money	age barriers
lack of knowledge of rights	lack of social support
lack of literacy or numeracy skills	lack of transport
mental or physical health issues	time constraints
physical or intellectual disability	homelessness or without a stable physical location
issues related to gender, sexuality, or race	caring responsibilities and /or work commitments

Please refer to the [FACT SHEET: Engaging hard-to-reach groups and individuals](#) for more information about how to make your engagement process inclusive.

The following is a list of some of the things that need to be considered to make your process inclusive:

Timing

What day and time is most likely going to work for the people you need to engage in your process?

Breadth of opportunity to participate

Provide as many options as you can for people to get involved. Relevance can be developed and increased by ensuring that there are multiple engagement platforms. Introducing additional and innovative engagement methods will make it more likely that a participant will find the engagement option that they're most comfortable with or able to participate in.

For some people that will be a small group conversation over coffee in a café, for others it will be online via social media tools. We advocate going to people rather than expecting them to come to us. If you're in a space they're comfortable in, whether that be on Twitter or in their local shopping mall, the quality and honesty of what's provided is likely to be much greater.

Language

English is not everyone's first language. In thinking about your participants reflect on whether you might need some assistance with translating your communication materials or do you need to provide interpreters at your event(s). For further information, please visit <http://www.translate.sa.gov.au/>.

Comfort and access

Make the environment you are engaging in as accessible and comfortable as possible. Think about how people will be able to get to the venue and what transport arrangements they have access to. This is of particular importance in regional areas – how proximate is your venue to where people live, how will they get there, what is involved in them getting there? In terms of the venue make sure that it is as welcoming, warm and friendly as possible and provide refreshments when possible, particularly if your event is during a meal time.

Disability access

Make sure that everyone that needs or wants to participate can by choosing venues that are as accessible as possible no matter what the individuals' needs are. For example, are there transport links available for people with a disability and are there accessible ramps for wheelchairs (and families with prams). You may also need to consider if there are accessible toilets available at the venue.

Tools that are engaging and welcoming

Use facilitation tools that are engaging and welcoming. Note - Traditional Town Hall style meetings – don't fall into this category! Town Hall meetings are confronting. They promote negativity and combative debate. Most importantly they are highly exclusive, as most people don't feel comfortable stating their views to a large combative audience. They also don't get the best outcomes for the engagement process – as by their nature they undermine considered and balanced discussion and divide people in a defensive way. People leave Town Hall Meetings feeling unfulfilled, most often not heard and negative. They are not conducive to building trusting relationships or effective engagement processes.

Cultural considerations

Reflect on whether there are any cultural barriers or challenges in your proposed engagement methodology. If you want to engage with an easily identifiable multicultural community, ask that community where and how they would like to be engaged to ensure that the process works for them.

As part of your engagement planning, you should research the demographics of the affected communities you need to engage so you can tailor your engagement strategy accordingly. If there are significant groups of residents with English as a second language an interpreter may be required and / or communications materials may need to be translated to alternative language(s).

The Department of Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI) provides summary information on the age, cultural, language and religious backgrounds of each Council area based on the most recent Census data. Refer to <http://www.multicultural.sa.gov.au/communities-in-sa>. Talking to your local council will also help develop a profile of the communities you will be engaging.

Age and Learning styles

When choosing facilitation tools and how information is presented think about how accessible they will be to different people – think about diversity of age and learning styles by using a range of visual, tactile and verbal communication tools.

Literacy and numeracy levels of your audience

Your communication materials should be written at the appropriate level of literacy and numeracy for your audience. For example, if you are engaging children or young people, write and speak in a language that is easy to understand for the age group you are engaging with. Test your communication materials with a focus group if you need to.