Engaging Queenslanders:

An introduction to community engagement

Queensland Government
Department of **Communities**

Queensland **the Smart State**

Contents

The purpose of this resource

Engaging Queenslanders: An introduction to community engagement provides Queensland Government public officials with a good understanding of community engagement and effective engagement practices. It defines engagement and levels of engagement, outlines the global trends and drivers for increased community involvement in government planning and decision making, and describes the current state of affairs in Queensland.

The publication is part of a suite of resources produced by the Department of Communities in collaboration with a range of agencies, to support and promote effective community engagement practice across the public sector. The suite of resources was developed in association with government and non-government community engagement practitioners and informed by:

- the Community Engagement Improvement Strategy, developed by a cross-government team of engagement practitioners

- a government-wide survey mapping community engagement activities

- The State of Engagement 2003 and 2004 reports outlining community engagement activities across Queensland Government agencies

- a series of community engagement showcasing events involving community, industry and government representatives

- research into a range of national and international community engagement practices

- a cross-government review of the Community Engagement Improvement Strategy.

Other guides in the suite include:

- *Engaging Queenslanders: community engagement in the business of government*

- *Engaging Queenslanders: a guide to community engagement showcasing events*

- *Engaging Communities: A guide to engagement methods for practitioners*

- *Engaging Queenslanders: a guide to evaluating community engagement.*

Copies of these guides can be downloaded from the Queensland Government community engagement website (www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au).

Further guides being developed in the suite include:

- *Engaging Queenslanders: introduction to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*

- *Engaging Queenslanders: introduction to Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities.*

Setting the context

1.1 Introduction

Involving citizens in government planning and decision making is crucial to the legitimacy and responsiveness of government, the quality of public policies and programs, and the effectiveness of services.

While community engagement is aligned with our system of representative democracy and Queensland Government agencies have been undertaking a range of community engagement activities for some time, the government acknowledges the need for continuous improvement.

In a modern democracy, there is an expectation that public officials will facilitate the contribution of citizens and communities in government planning and decision making processes. There is also an expectation that government agencies will, through their Ministers and chief executive officers, account for the results of their engagement with citizens and communities.

The increasing emphasis on community involvement in government processes in Queensland corresponds with growing citizen expectations for more accessible, responsive and accountable government. It also corresponds with an international trend towards more participatory and deliberative approaches to democratic governance. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development advocates strengthened government–citizen connections and the involvement of citizens in shaping public policies.

The Queensland Government has responded to citizen expectations and international trends with a significant commitment to improving community engagement. The commitment has been demonstrated through:

- innovation and reforms to improve inclusiveness and accessibility at all levels of government
- establishment of the Department of Communities with the vision of 'Safe, valued and empowered communities'
- implementation of a Community Engagement Improvement Strategy to improve engagement practices and capability across the public sector
- inclusion of 'Delivering responsive government' as one of the government's seven key priorities.

1.2 Community engagement drivers and trends

Globally, there are a range of drivers and trends moving governments to improve community engagement in planning and decision making. They include:

1. **Concerns about low levels of trust and confidence in government**
   As communities and governments have grown in diversity and complexity, real or perceived disconnections have increased and levels of trust and confidence in government and public institutions have decreased. The challenge to restore public trust and confidence has therefore driven many governments internationally to develop and implement innovative ways to effectively involve citizens in government processes.

2. **Community expectations for governments to be responsive, accountable and effective**
   Internationally there are community expectations for greater government transparency and accountability, leading to increased outcome measurement. Greater
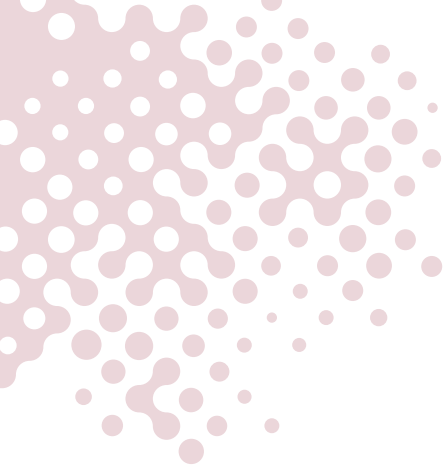
transparency and accountability allows citizens to more easily access information about government and to examine and evaluate government decisions. There is also continuing pressure on governments to deliver increased efficiencies through more tailored and better coordinated policies, programs and services.

3. **Mounting evidence and acknowledgement of increased social exclusion and disadvantage**
There is significant evidence that the increasing complexity of social and economic issues is changing the face of society and the gap between the well-off and the socially and economically disadvantaged is growing. Effective community engagement provides opportunities for governments to work with citizens and communities to close this gap.

4. **The realisation that government does not have the expertise, resources or influence to solve all issues**
Effective community engagement practice enables the government to access the considerable knowledge and expertise residing within Queensland communities.

Several other global trends are contributing to a growing interest in community engagement. They include:

- rising education levels
- increasing interest in seeing more citizen opinions and values reflected in government policies and decisions
- the changing nature of community and non-government organisations
- changes brought about by technology which are providing opportunities for fast and direct communication between citizens and public officials.

In response to these drivers and trends, governments are taking a variety of approaches to enhance government–community connections. The diversity of approaches has led to various descriptors, such as community engagement, community capacity building, community renewal, strengthening communities and place management. However, the common overall objective is to enhance government capacity to understand and respond to the complex and diverse needs of communities, and to assist citizens and communities to build their own capacity to become involved in the processes of government.

Governments internationally are shifting from a top-down model to 'networked' governance — a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the importance of connections, facilitates increased citizen input into government processes, and emphasises collaboration across the public, private and community sectors.

What is community engagement?

2.1 A definition

Community engagement refers to the connections between governments, citizens and communities on a range of policy, program and service issues. It encompasses a wide variety of government–community interactions ranging from information sharing to community consultation and, in some instances, active participation in government decision making processes.

Engagement can be formal or informal, direct or indirect. Effective community engagement allows government to tap into diverse perspectives and potential solutions to improve the quality of its decisions. It enables citizens and communities to better understand the processes of government and to build their capacity to participate in deliberative processes through the acquisition of confidence, skills, knowledge and experience.

The amount of influence citizens can exert on decision making increases in accordance with the level of engagement, with active participation providing maximum opportunities for citizen influence. However, responsibility for the final decision rests with government.

An understanding of community engagement, the levels of engagement and effective engagement principles and practices are essential prerequisites for any public official tasked with planning, approving or implementing community engagement activities or programs.

2.2 Engagement in a representative democracy

There is general acknowledgement that participatory processes and traditional methods of government decision making are complementary and should co-exist in a modern and robust representative democracy. Many elected representatives realise they can govern more effectively when conscious of the needs, opinions and experiences of their constituents.
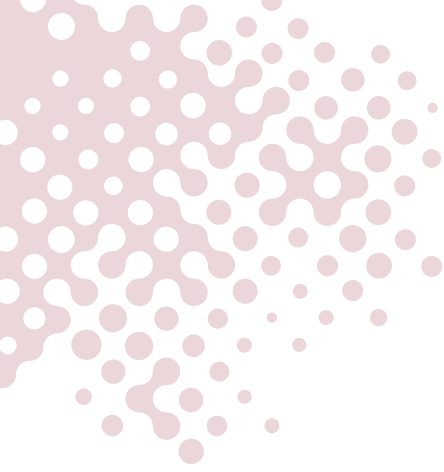
Public involvement in developing and evaluating policies, programs and services is an effective means of reconciling competing political, public sector and community values and perspectives, and is a sound investment for government. However, it is neither practical nor useful to assume that every policy or issue should be subject to citizen involvement.

On some issues, government has little policy room to manoeuvre or has a strong commitment to a particular course of action. This inherent conflict calls for good judgement by public officials. If citizens were given only the illusion that they could influence a government decision, the result would be an increase in public cynicism and a reduction in trust and confidence in government.

2.3 Levels of engagement

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

Working definitions	
Information	A one-way relationship in which government delivers information to citizens Government ➝ Citizen
Consultation	A two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback on issues defined by government Government ⇄ Citizen
Active participation	A collaboration in which citizens actively shape policy options, but where government retains the responsibility for final decisions Government ⟷ Citizen

Information

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

While this is not public involvement, information and communication technologies enable government to move beyond one-way information sharing to information exchange with citizens.

Effective information sharing requires information that:

- is accurate, easy to access and easy to understand
- is relevant and appealing to the intended audience
- is timely and has an appropriate method of delivery
- is tailored, where necessary, in language and style
- directs citizens to where they can access further information.

Information sharing should be evaluated for its effectiveness, with opportunities for citizens to provide feedback.

Consultation

Consultation is a two-way relationship in which government seeks and receives the views of citizens 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 policy development or planning process and can be used to help frame an issue, identify or assess options and 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. Methods of consultation include advisory committees, focus groups, online consultation, public meetings, petitions, polls and surveys.

Active participation

Active participation recognises and acknowledges a role for citizens in shaping policy dialogue and proposing policy, program and service options. Participation is achieved through a range of deliberative processes including steering committees, negotiation tables, policy roundtables, citizens' juries, citizens' panels, search conferences, and formal and informal partnerships.

Active participation processes enable citizens and communities to raise their own issues with government and can also encourage or enable participants to take responsibility for their contribution to solutions. Responsibility for authoritative decisions or policy formulation usually rests with government but may, in some instances, be shared with citizens or institutions.

Active citizen involvement in policy deliberation and program and service planning requires specific tools to facilitate learning, debate and the development of options and proposals.
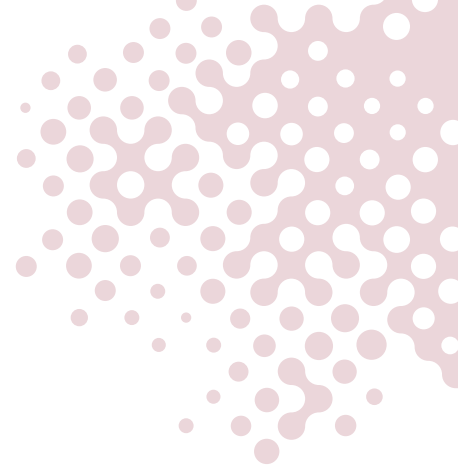
2.4 Choosing the appropriate level of engagement

Information, consultation and active participation are a community engagement continuum with increasing levels of engagement and influence. Careful consideration needs to be given to the appropriateness of the level of engagement and method of engagement in relation to the stakeholders involved, the issue or policy being considered and the objectives of engagement.

Community engagement continuum

Information	Consultation	Active participation
Objective	**Objective**	**Objective**
To ensure citizens/stakeholders have access to information that is accurate, relevant, appropriate, easy to access and easy to understand. While information sharing alone does not constitute public involvement, stakeholders need information in order to contribute to consultation or active participation processes.	To seek and receive the views of citizens/stakeholders on issues that directly affect them or in which they may have a significant interest, and provide feedback on how citizen input contributed to the final outcome.	To develop relationships that enable government and citizens to share in agenda setting, policy dialogue and the development and evaluation of policy, program and service options.
Critical factors	**Critical factors**	**Critical factors**
Citizens must have easy, equitable and timely access to information and the method of delivery must be appropriate for the issue and the intended audience.	There must be clarity about the goals of consultation, the roles and responsibilities of government and citizens/stakeholders, and their level of influence. There should be stated mechanisms for feedback.	There must be clarity about the extent to which the views of citizens will be taken into account in decision making processes. There must be sufficient time and flexibility to allow for the emergence of new ideas by citizens.
Desired outcomes	**Desired outcomes**	**Desired outcomes**
Citizens are better informed about government policies, programs and services and about how to access information and services.	Greater involvement of citizens and communities in the business of government, greater understanding of government policy and decision making processes, and better community outcomes. More effective policies, programs and services that represent the diverse needs of citizens and communities. Heightened trust and confidence in government.	Greater involvement of citizens and communities in the business of government, greater understanding of government policy and decision making processes. Civic capacity strengthened, roles and responsibilities clarified, resources mobilised, and more effective policies, programs and services that represent the diverse needs of citizens and communities. Heightened trust and confidence in government.

Community engagement in Queensland

3.1 Queensland's approach

Queensland is a large state with a diverse population. It has the most decentralised population of Australia's mainland states and the nation's second largest Indigenous population. It has areas of great affluence and areas of entrenched poverty and exclusion, particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The growing social, economic and environmental diversity of Queensland means the government cannot rely on traditional solutions in the development of policies to address increasingly complex issues and in the provision of programs and services. The government is therefore seeking new and more integrated ways to work with communities.

3.2 The government's commitment

The Queensland Government has seven key priorities which are each underpinned by a set of values that clearly articulate the vision for a democratic and prosperous society. One of the priorities, 'Delivering responsive government', represents the government's commitment to improving transparency, accountability and responsiveness in the Queensland public service. This priority requires Queensland public servants to:

- engage communities in government decisions and processes
- ensure service provision is financially sustainable
- strengthen government policy development and implementation to focus on future policy challenges
- support a responsive public service, focused on improving government service delivery.

The Queensland Government has set out a transformative blueprint for the future governance of the Queensland public service in *Realising the vision: Governance for the Smart State* which was tabled in the Queensland Parliament in October 2003 by the Premier. This new framework for conducting government business positions Queensland at the forefront of historic change, shifting the role of government from one of controller to enabler. A key element of this change is working in partnership with communities to ensure that government connects with citizens in the development and implementation of policies, programs and services. Transparency, accountability and responsiveness are central to this change.

In *Realising the vision*, the underpinning principle is the concept of seamless government — agencies working together as a single entity, generating integrated responses to community needs. One of the key priority areas is partnering communities. The active involvement by the community in policy development and decision making is driving significant changes to existing practices within the public service.

The government has also introduced a range of specific initiatives to support the commitment for improved community engagement. They include:

- regional Parliament
- Internet broadcasting of Parliamentary proceedings
- ePetitions
- community Cabinets
- Ministerial regional community forums
- negotiation tables
- Smart Service Queensland
- online engagement through a community engagement website
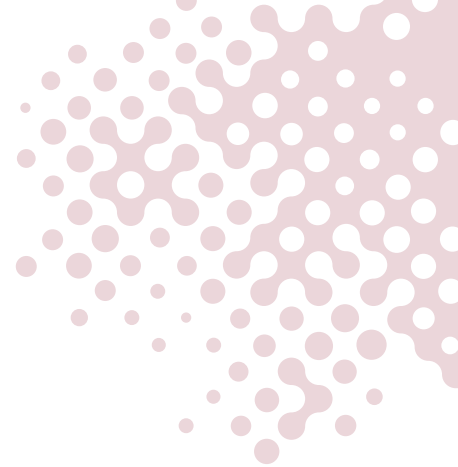
- Community Renewal Program
- implementation of a Community Engagement Improvement Strategy for the public sector.

3.3 Key government initiatives

Queensland Government agencies are developing and implementing a range of initiatives that support effective connections with citizens and communities.

A mapping survey of government agencies in 2002 recorded more than 100 pieces of legislation that mandate some form of engagement; a broad range of engagement strategies, programs and activities; and a trend towards more community participation and partnerships.

All Queensland government agencies contributed to the State of Engagement reports for 2003 and 2004 which record key agency engagement activities and collaborative engagement initiatives across government.

Following is a list of key government initiatives that facilitate improved citizen access to government.

Regional Parliament

In September 2002, the Queensland Parliament assembled outside of Brisbane for the first time in its 142-year history. The sitting of Queensland Parliament in Townsville provided the community with the opportunity to experience democracy in action and witness Parliamentary proceedings from a public gallery. Members of the public were invited to attend Question Time and briefings on Parliamentary processes. There were also public displays on the workings of government and ways for citizens to get involved in government planning and decision making. More than 9000 people visited the Parliament during three days of sittings. In 2005 Central Queensland hosted a sitting of Parliament.

Internet broadcasting of Parliamentary proceedings

The Internet broadcast of Parliament commenced in April 2003 and provides a live audio transmission of the Parliamentary proceedings. The broadcast is available via the Queensland Parliament website (www.parliament.qld.gov.au/broadcast). The Internet broadcast was evaluated during 2004 and endorsed by Government as an ongoing feature of Parliament. The broadcast is helping more people, especially those unable to attend Parliament, including in regional areas, to understand how Parliament works and to assess how their elected representatives are performing.

ePetitions

Petitioning is a method by which citizens can make requests direct to Parliament. A petition is a formal request signed by at least one person and placed before the Parliament with the aim of persuading the Parliament to take a particular action. Currently, Sessional Orders of the Legislative Assembly provide for two types of petitions – Paper Petitions and ePetitions. The online ePetitions system, launched in Queensland in August 2002, provides a mechanism to start, join, locate and follow an electronic petition (called ePetition) via the Queensland Parliament website (www.parliament.qld.gov.au/EPetitions_QLD/HTML). Citizens with access to information technology can also visit the website to monitor whether a Minister has responded to an ePetition and, if a response has been tabled in Parliament, the content of the response. Examples of ePetitions lodged include Legalising Ferret Ownership in Queensland, Child Care Legislation, Community Insurance Crisis, Controlling Land Clearing in Queensland, and Recognising Fortitude Valley as Queensland's First Special Entertainment Precinct.
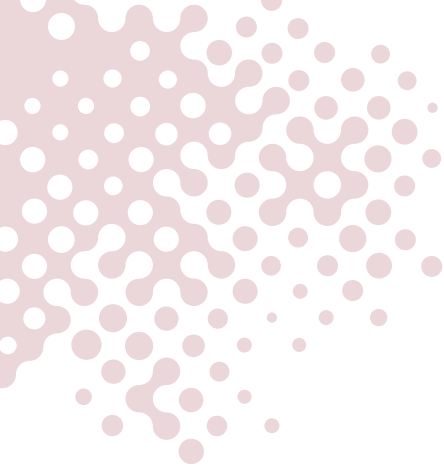
Community Cabinets

Community Cabinets have been held in regional centres across Queensland since 1998.

A number of times each year Ministers and agency chief executive officers travel to a community location. For the first hour of a Community Cabinet, the Premier and his Ministers take questions from the floor and afterwards Ministers meet with community members. The last hour of the Cabinet meeting is dedicated to formal deputations. Agencies provide formal responses to deputations after the Cabinet meeting and a newsletter is distributed which outlines issues raised at the meeting and any subsequent government announcements of consequence to the community.

Ministerial regional community forums

Ministerial regional community forums provide regional communities with a mechanism to identify priority issues, needs and strategies and present them directly to State Government Ministers who ensure that they receive an official response. In a reciprocal arrangement, Cabinet Ministers make use of the forums to ask members for a regional perspective on government policies, programs and services. Forum members are given background documentation on the particular government initiative before the forum so they can consult within the sectors they represent, and provide input and feedback to the Ministers. Four forums are conducted annually in each region and are attended by Cabinet Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries who meet with ten regional forum members. The forums are hosted by a Regional Queensland Council member and chaired by the senior Minister present.

Forum members in each region have strong networks and links within the community and their roles are to:

- raise and progress issues of community concern
- participate in joint planning with Regional Managers' Coordination Network members
- focus on delivery of local outcomes
- ensure broad stakeholder networks are engaged.

A revised forum model was launched in June 2004, expanding the number of forum regions from eight to ten to align with the ten Department of Communities regions. The first of round of the new forums was held in July 2004.

Negotiation tables

Negotiation tables provide a process of engagement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the Queensland Government. They provide the opportunity for partnership arrangements and agreements that support mutual planning and goal setting, shared responsibility and accountability, and shared ownership of agreed outcomes as outlined in Community Action Plans. Negotiation tables can be plenary or issue specific and operate both at the regional and community levels.

Smart Service Queensland

Smart Service Queensland is a whole-of-government service delivery initiative that aims to provide Queenslanders with a 'front door' to government transactions, information and referrals through one government Internet site (www.qld.gov.au), one telephone number (13 13 04) and a range of 'one-stop-shop' delivery counters.

Smart Service Queensland provides quicker, easier and better access for Queenslanders and improves the speed, availability and consistency of Queensland Government services.
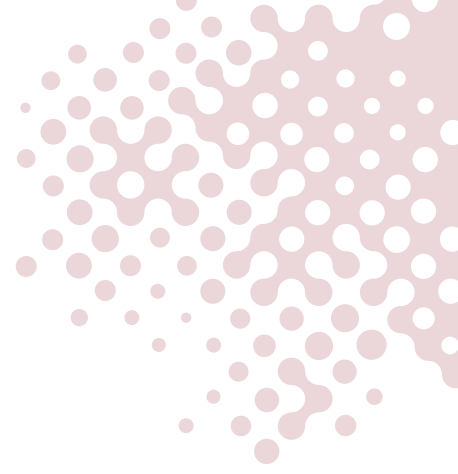
Smart Service Queensland delivers a range of services including vehicle and vessel registration renewals; Seniors Card and Concessions; business names, licences and permits; grants and events information; the Energy Advisory Service; and camping and traverse permits. Smart Service Queensland is also the first stop for generic information about the Queensland Government. More than 400 services have been identified to be delivered through Smart Service Queensland over the next few years.

Community engagement website

The Get Involved website (www.getinvolved. qld.gov.au) was launched in December 2003 and is the government's community engagement website. People visit the site to access information about how government works, how to contact government, how to participate in decision making and other processes. The site also delivers a wide range of community engagement resources such as guides and research, and hosts ConsultQld, the government's online consultation tool. It also provides extensive links to other state, national and international eDemocracy websites.

Online community consultation

The government's online community consultation mechanism, ConsultQld engages the community via the Internet on selected issues and policy matters, and raises awareness of consultation processes. Online consultation increases the community's access to decision makers and provides opportunities for citizen input into policy debate. Reports are posted to the site when the consultation ends, outlining a summary of results and the next steps in the policy development.

Examples of online consultations include;

- Draft South-East Queensland regional plan
- Centenary of women's suffrage
- Seniors and crime
- Review of Queensland's tobacco laws
- Queensland's aquatic emblem
- Your health — whose responsibility?

Community Renewal Program

Community Renewal is a leading whole-of-government engagement program established in 1998 to improve the quality of life of Queensland communities experiencing significant social and economic stress.

The program actively engages residents from 19 targeted communities in local planning to identify and prioritise local issues and to develop strategies that meet community needs. The program facilitates partnerships between residents, business, community groups and local government to undertake collaborative action towards shared renewal priorities.

In the first phase of the program (1998–2004), Community Reference Groups were established in all renewal neighbourhoods as the main engagement mechanism for garnering resident participation. With the extension of the program to 2009, Community Renewal is enhancing its engagement with marginalised sections of the community by using a range of creative and culturally appropriate strategies.

Key outcomes of the program have included citizens feeling valued as active shapers of their future, improved government responsiveness to locally identified issues and the funding of innovative solutions (including over 600 projects) that have resulted from new partnerships formed through renewal activity.
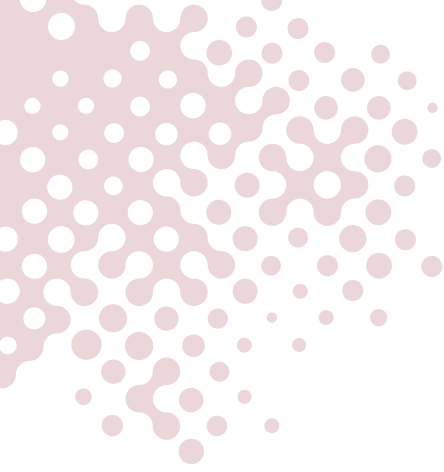
Community Engagement Improvement Strategy

The Government's Community Engagement Improvement Strategy, implemented over 2003–04 improved community engagement across the public sector with a range of initiatives designed to highlight and develop good engagement practices, improve engagement coordination, build leadership capability for more effective engagement and build engagement skills and knowledge into recruitment and selection processes. Under the strategy, agencies reported on community engagement activities in their annual reports and highlighted ways in which improved community engagement has delivered better outcomes for communities aligned with the government's five key priorities of the 2002 term of government.

3.4 The state of engagement in Queensland

Research into citizen knowledge and perceptions of government in Queensland provides a clear message for Queensland Government: Queenslanders want effective, accessible and responsive government. The research findings also indicate that there is considerable room for increased awareness and knowledge among Queenslanders about the workings of government and Parliament, and the role of public officials.

In 2002, the Queensland Office of Economic and Statistical Research (OESR) conducted a series of random household surveys. The findings of the survey indicated that less than one third of the estimated 2,706,106 adult population of Queensland (30.4 per cent) reported that they knew of someone in Queensland Government agencies that they felt comfortable with in regard to contacting them for information or advice.

Only 20 per cent knew of someone in Queensland Parliament that they could contact for advice or information, 37.8 per cent knew of a Member of Parliament that they could contact for advice or information, and 18.2 per cent knew of a Minister that they felt comfortable with for obtaining information or advice.

In 2002, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet commissioned qualitative research to inform its investment in a range of eEngagement initiatives. Seven focus group discussions were conducted in metropolitan and regional Queensland. Participants were asked to consider their relationship with government, particularly in relation to perceptions of government interactions.

Overall, the focus group participants found experiences with government frustrating, confusing and inefficient. The responses reinforced general community expectations for services that were in tune with community aspirations and needs, close to the people, easily accessible and delivered with courtesy and efficiency.

In 2005, research commissioned by Smart State Queensland addressed citizens use of eGovernment and how they would seek to access services from government. When asked whether they had accessed a government service in the past 12 months, 86 per cent of respondents answered positively. More people use the Internet to access government than mail. However, the most common channel to access government is in person (almost half of all contacts reported as part of the study), followed by the telephone.

Benefits and challenges for government

4.1 Benefits of effective community engagement

Genuine and effective community engagement has benefits for both government and citizens. Broadly, engagement allows governments to tap wider sources of information, perspectives and potential solutions, therefore improving the quality of decisions and outcomes for communities. It also provides the basis for productive dialogue and deliberation and, ultimately, better democracy.

Government agencies have a commitment to community engagement and are continually seeking to improve their engagement practices. However, the changing nature of government and communities means that there are new challenges that require new approaches.

In considering the benefits of engagement, it is important to consider some of the reasons for seeking citizen involvement. Agencies may seek to:
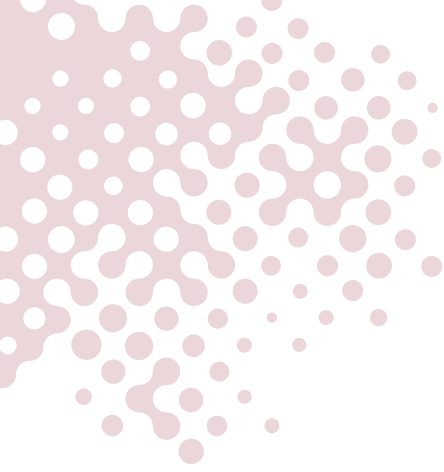
- understand and respond to issues raised by citizens and communities
- raise the awareness of citizens about an issue
- identify challenges and opportunities not previously considered
- propose a range of options
- obtain public opinion about a range of options
- work towards consensus about a recommended option.

Benefits of involving citizens and communities include:

- the opportunity to tap into local knowledge about what is likely to work and what is not
- allowing government to better understand the complex issues in communities, and citizens to better understand the processes of government
- providing opportunities for cooperative, co-learning experiences and critical reflection that builds capacity within both government and community
- increasing effective, open and transparent engagement processes that carry greater legitimacy and credibility in the community
- delivering networking opportunities, access to information and resources, personal recognition, skill enhancement and a sense of contributing to community problem solving for government officials
- achieving effective and sustainable policies, programs and services, efficiencies in coordination and improved community outcomes.

4.2 Working with community expectations

Citizens involved in government consultation and participation activities often have clear expectations about the return they want on the investment of their time and energy. They may also express concern at poor past experiences — of not feeling respected, listened to or given appropriate feedback and that government made its own decision regardless of community input. Others are dissatisfied with traditional consultation methods such as public meetings or are unclear about where to go and how to have a say.

While many citizens feel disengaged, they are increasingly expecting to be involved in the decisions affecting them, or of particular interest to them. Many citizens will become actively involved when they are particularly concerned or passionate about an issue. They expect tangible outcomes, to be informed about the results of engagement and to receive timely and appropriate feedback on how their input was considered in the final decision.

Citizens also expect to contribute to decisions about the process of engagement so the methods and techniques are appropriate to their needs. They expect accurate and complete information on issues they are being asked to consider so they can make informed choices, and sufficient time and flexibility in the engagement process to allow for the emergence of new ideas and proposals.

They expect clarity in relation to their role in the engagement process and any constraints or limitations imposed on them. There is also an expectation that information, consultation or participation activities of government will be inclusive, open and transparent.

Citizens expect agencies and levels of government to be coordinated to avoid duplication and improve pathways through a complex system of government. Many citizens expect governments to work collaboratively with them to address the challenges facing their communities.

4.3 Key challenges for the public sector

Agencies are already improving their engagement practices, increasing public access to information and framing information in ways that are most useful to communities and citizens. However, a commitment to better engagement also requires more coordinated practices by agencies, including aligning engagement effort and the sharing and pooling of information.

Improvements to community engagement present a range of challenges for government and the public sector which include:

- developing a supportive culture
- developing skills, knowledge and capability in community engagement
- developing robust systems and processes
- improving coordination across government
- managing engagement in the context of government commitment, priorities and cycles
- clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the public sector, elected representatives, executive government and the Parliament
- finding ways to reduce barriers to involvement and reaching out to the unengaged and disengaged.

If agencies are to facilitate more deliberative and strategic citizen involvement, public sector officers from chief executive officers to front-line managers, as well as elected representatives, must come to value citizen involvement as a central component of governance.
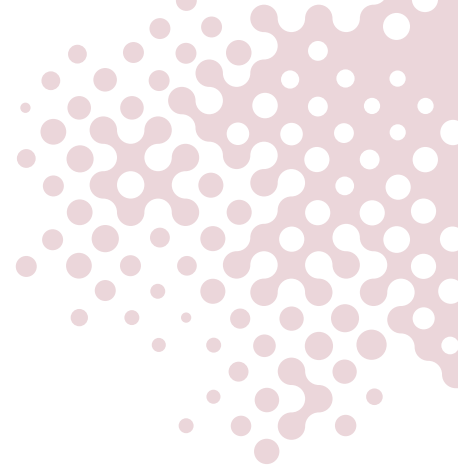
Creating a culture of valuing citizen involvement also requires appropriate resource support and the allocation of adequate time to engagement processes. Culture change needs to be led from the top by Ministers and chief executive officers and embraced by the public sector as a whole. It also requires appropriate budget, planning, human resource and management systems to be put in place to support behavioural change.

There are a range of specific challenges facing public sector officers involved in planning, approving and implementing community engagement. They include making informed decisions about:

- the appropriate level of engagement — information, consultation or participation
- the most suitable method of engagement
- the timing of engagement in policy development and planning processes
- who should lead and facilitate the engagement
- strategies to address risks and manage expectations
- identifying and incorporating political imperatives
- addressing and managing distrust and disinterest
- addressing and managing vested interests
- how the results of engagement will properly inform policy development and decision making.

In addressing these challenges, public officials will contribute to improving community engagement practices in government business.

5

Where to from here?

5.1 Future direction for the public sector

Queensland Government is at the forefront of developing and implementing new mechanisms for connecting with citizens and communities. The challenge for government agencies now is to establish systems across government that support and foster community involvement in government planning and decision making, and to ensure the results of engagement activities genuinely feed into government processes.

Support for current government and agency planning and policy development models is required to achieve a shift towards more participatory and inclusive processes.

It is imperative that there is increased understanding and support of the government's commitment to community engagement at the Parliament, executive government and agency management levels. This will provide a foundation for the organisational development and cultural change necessary to support improved community engagement practices.

The review of the Community Engagement Improvement Strategy, undertaken in 2005, identifies benefits in pursuing:

- a systems approach that continues to embed community engagement across the public sector
- growing and broadening a network of community engagement practitioners and forming partnerships with local government, the tertiary sector, business and non-government sectors
- building the capacity of the broader community.

Queensland Government
Department of **Communities**